Declining financial support drives students away.

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Recommended Citation
https://academicworks.cuny.edu/bb_pubs/71
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Letters from Academia

Cutting taxes in order to spur economic development is an idea still making its way across the political landscape. It doesn’t seem to matter how many times “trickle down” economics has been debunked not only by economists, but also by history, it seems to linger. Yet it is part of an ideology that is considered as gospel by many politicians.

Of course the idea has one superficial appeal and one superficial appeal only. It promises to reduce tax cuts, even if the ones who benefit most from such policies are the ones who need them the least.

But beyond this populist appeal, people tend to forget many things. Less tax revenue means fewer dollars for basic infrastructure, such as transportation (highways and bridges, for example) and basic services including everything from health to education.

As most economists believe, an educated population is essential for economic development and sustaining the tax base. Yet public schools and universities need public support and better state funding. Also, Illinois needs more college graduates to support the economy.

Recent figures released by the U.S. Department of Education show a serious level of migration out of Illinois. The loss of students that have critical financial support for higher education has translated into decreased productivity and in economic imperilment.

Because of significant cuts in financial support for higher education in Illinois, public colleges and universities have been forced to charge fees that are significantly higher than ever before. Because of this, students from these states are going to study elsewhere. Although there have always been students who go out of their home states to attend private colleges, it has been far more rare for students to attend out-of-state public institutions because of the lack of government funding in their home states. For the most part, public colleges and universities serve a privilege- ized population.

As a result, in 1986 the number of out-of-state freshmen has nearly doubled according to data from the Department of Education. In 1984-85, the state of Illinois had only seen many of their students leave for states like New York and Ohio.

There are a total of 12 Illinois community colleges and over 200 public and private universities in the state. A combination of decreasing numbers of local students and budget cuts means less economic support not only because there are fewer people paying, but because the people who are paying are paying less.

The economic impact of a university is huge. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign alone contributes nearly $1 billion to the state economy. The fewer students they have and the less money that they bring, the less economic support they will receive from the community and the continued improvement of the commun- ity’s economic well-being.

The University of Illinois at Chicago has a 94 percent incidence of class attendance. The UIC community has one of the areas’ most active and civic-minded student institutions. It has close to shuttering down in the last few years. The less students that are in the classroom, the less economic support will we receive from the community.

But that is not all. Many of the students who move to other states never come back. They often move away due to high child care costs and need to seek new opportunities. They may also never come back to their native state for college.

In Illinois, the students who attend and pay tuition and fees in Illinois public colleges and universities, further reduce the income for those institutions whose budgets have already been slashed.

But why should we care?

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For the American theologian James Freeman Clark, a university is “an ideology that is considered as gospel by many politicians.”

In the case of the University of Illinois, the university is a way to bring the past and present together in one place. They may have a different take on the past and present, but the overall goal is similar.

For the Intelligencer