

A Swiftian Educational Proposal

Nicholas Flamel

No one can doubt that the cost of post-secondary education is high and for the foreseeable future will continue to increase. At many prestigious colleges and universities the cost of a year of educational privilege is well over \$30,000. While the cost of the same privilege at public colleges/universities is less (sometimes much less), it is nonetheless a significant part of a student's or family's budget.

With this in mind it is truly tragic that students should have to accept a grade lower than a **B** after spending their or their family's hard earned money. It is equally tragic that a university president should have to deal with irate parents calling to question the institution's integrity for giving their child such a low grade after all of the money they have spent. More tragic still is the president's subsequent call to the dean who must then call the appropriate department chair who must then explain to the course professor that he or she is not living up to the institution's standards of student self-esteem and retention, not to mention improperly laying the foundation for future alumni donations.

Such problems should not be a part of academic life. I have a modest educational proposal. Not only can all of the above problems can be solved, but a major fund raiser for the college/university can be established.

As in any consumer endeavor, the more luxurious the item, the greater is the cost. (This is not to say something less costly has no value, but that is another venue.) The luxury item of education is an **A** or **B**. Let the institution set the tuition cost for an **A**. Obviously an **A** at Harvard, Princeton, or Yale (or the equivalent institution in the Midwest, Southwest, or on the West coast) would be more costly than an **A** at Everyman Community College, but that is to be expected. Whatever cost is defined for an **A**, there would then be a proportionately lower cost

for a **B**, **C**, etc. I doubt if anyone wants to pay for a **D** or **F**, but those options should be made available for completeness, for student escape from the real world, or the natural consequences of peer pressure. The only conditions students must meet are buying the texts for all of their courses (the auxiliary services must be supported) and maintaining satisfactory attendance. After all, journalists must see students on campus when they report on this new form of education and rate the best colleges for *US News and World Report*.

I now turn to the ordinary consumer, oops, I mean student. This is the student who is self-reliant, but seeks help when it is needed. This is the student who naively expects to be rewarded for achievement. This is also the student who may not be able to afford the luxury item of education, that grade of **B** or better. For this student there will be a special category. The academic institution will set some minimum tuition, perhaps the amount that is in use today. This student will go about his/her task and be given a grade in the traditional sense. This student will then be entitled to receive an **A** or **B** (or what ever grade is earned), but we must have a means of distinguishing this ordinary consumer, oops there I go again, I mean student, from the high-end consumer.

To this end I propose that the grade on this student's transcript be marked with an asterisk. Just as Roger Maris' homerun record was tainted for many years by an asterisk because he had the unfair advantage of eight extra games compared to Babe Ruth, so will the record of the ordinary student be tainted. After all, the ordinary student has the unfair advantage of paying less and working harder to achieve his/her grade—just like in the no-longer-existing-good-old-days.

Nicholas Flamel was a famous alchemist of the 13th century. He most recently made an off-camera appearance in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. How he reached into the future to write this article remains a mystery.