

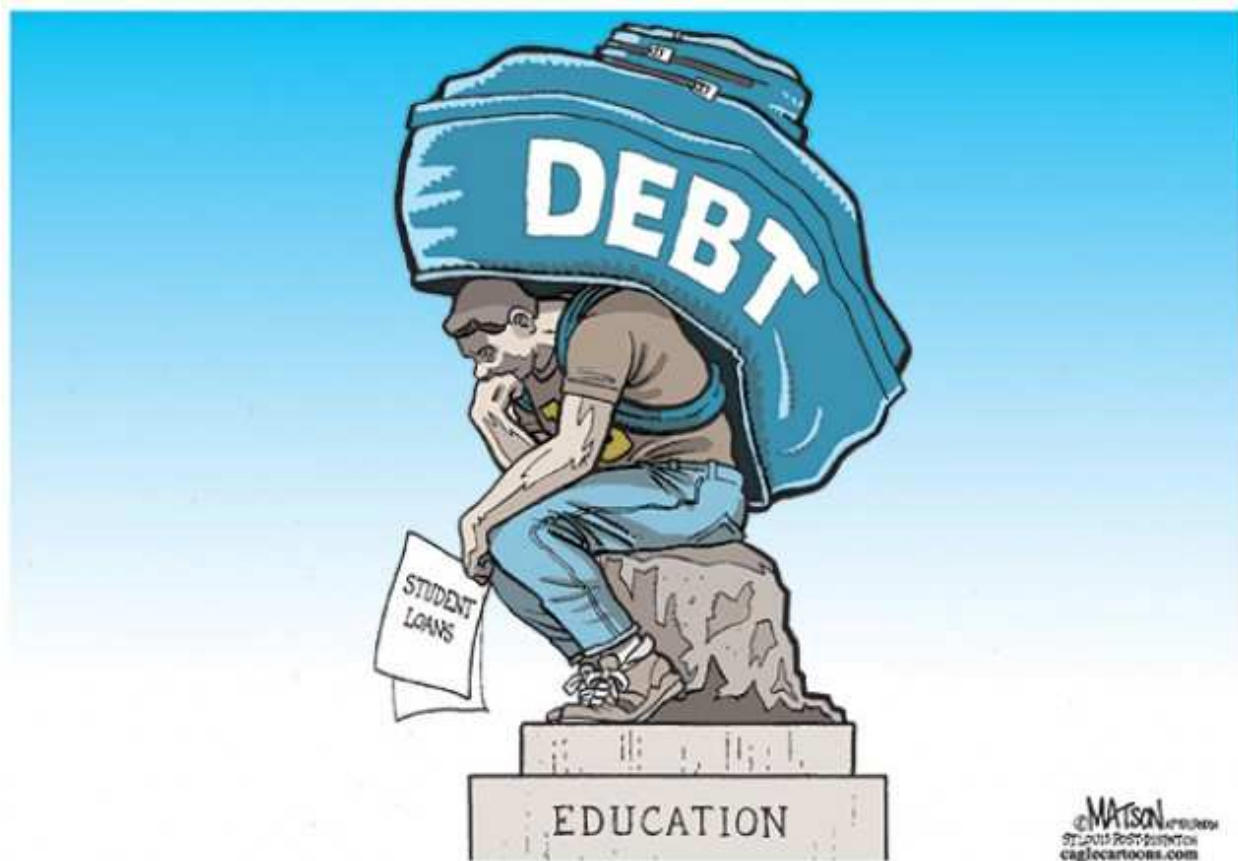
John Darrow

Professor Sallah

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The Burden of Student Debt



For those of us currently progressing through different levels of higher education there is an elephant in the room when discussing our journey. That elephant goes by the name of debt. It's something that we all agree to when we make the choice to better our lives by continuing our education. As soon as you graduate you have only six short months to create a stable life style,

because I assure you, your loans do not forget about you. I chose this specific cartoon because of what it represents in my life and many others. Student loan debt is a continuous problem in this country and is climbing at a rate that almost makes it a concern rather than its intended purpose, a tool. The crisis of student loan debt in our society is outweighing the positive effects that come from receiving higher education. Throughout this paper I intend to argue just that.

The picture above depicts a male student sitting down on a rock with his knuckles buried against his mouth. His eyes appear to be closed as to portray a certain level of stress and anxiety. In his left hand he holds two sheets of paper, one of which reads “student loans”. His backpack is gigantic, about the same size as his body. Along the side of his backpack it reads in big, bold letters, “DEBT”. The foundation of the rock of which he is sitting on reads in a smaller font “Education”. This picture is showcasing the state of mind college students encounter when graduation approaches and reality sets in that their fun, enlightening, once in a lifetime experience, was far from cheap. What makes this picture interesting is the different size distributions. I believe the artist did this to display importance when recognizing the terms discussed above. In deciphering this photo, the most efficient way is to identify the rhetorical appeals disguised throughout.

The first rhetorical term I would like to address is pathos, or appeal to emotion. The artist does this by depicting the young man in the picture as unsure or worried. The student is sitting in a worrisome posture indicating that he is currently indecisive about what his future holds; while also figuring out how much money he owes a university or college. In addition, he is using his fist to hold up his head. This is a symbol of exhaustion and severe anxiety pertaining to the thousands of dollars of debt he has accumulated. This relates to the audience through shared values and emotions. As college students, most of us do appreciate and value the college

experience, not only because of the knowledge instilled within us, but also the memories and relationships that transpire from the traditional college experience. However, when it's all over and the bill appears can we justify the amount spent compared with what was earned? This is the question so many students are asking, especially when the world is evolving faster than ever and new opportunities to make money are emerging. Second, the picture portrays intrinsic ethos. It does so by showing good sense of the cartoonist who obviously feels for the students' dilemma between the urgency of the degree to make a living and the high rates of debt the student will incur. Will my first job pay enough? How will I manage my money? What if the monthly payments are too high? How do I earn credit? For those who are fortunate enough to have school paid for, cherish it. For everyone else the questions seemingly never end once concluding the college experience society has labeled "normal" over the last few decades.

In addition to the rhetorical terms already discussed, I would now like to examine the visual rhetoric displayed in this picture. One of the purposes of visual rhetoric is to discuss the specific devices used within the structure of editorial cartoons (81). The primary device used in the cartoon is superimposition, "things by means of word on image, or image on image, create a visual metaphor." (85). The combination of size distribution, structure, and placement are the key contributors to the metaphor illustrated by the artist. First, we start with the entire base of the picture, which is labeled "Education". Higher education is set at the foundation of this caricature because of what I stated in the previous paragraph, it has become a social norm to attend further education after high school. As depicted here, it creates stability for our future endeavors and will provide an exceptional guidance through our adult life (at least that's what society tells us).

Upon further analyzation of the image, we can see the paper labeled "student loans" is rather small even though it's clearly the dominant contributor to the giant debt on this man's

back. This was displayed this way to show how we as students often times fail to consider the overall responsibility that ensues following the completion of our degree. As pawns in the world of education, we generally underestimate the power of those two simple words portrayed because of our commitment to be “normal”. Finally, the “DEBT” backpack of misery, and I believe this cartoon illustrates just that. It is the biggest component in the picture for a reason. It’s hard to describe something that this image already says so well. So after we, as higher education students, complete our college campaign we get to now ponder ways to repay its entirety. Unfortunately, for many people this could mean late payments, a damage to his or her credit rating, negative balances, etc.

In concluding this paper, I would like to say first and foremost that I do not have one regret about my college experience, all debt considered. I’ve made memories and friends that will last a lifetime. I would however like to reiterate the question: How can we justify the amount spent compared with what was earned? An easy way to resolve a social problem like this is to simply create lower costs for education. Another way is to argue that a bachelors or master’s degree provides significant leeway to a life where money plays a small role. Regardless, student loan debt is far too large of a problem for something that is encouraged to every youngster to achieve their dreams. If we want to continue being the greatest country in the world, we must find an answer for this crisis.

Work Cited

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