

# Students learn economic realities from new cuts

The picture in the Sunday paper was a perfect yearbook photo for the class of '82. Caption it: The class of economic anxiety.

There they were. Hundreds of students standing together in front of a wide-angle lens on the steps of the Capitol, all posing in a demonstration against cuts in higher education and student loans.

In the front rows, about three dozen of them were holding posterboard letters across an uneven line. Like a card section at halftime, they spelled out: Call or Write Contress. Support Higher Education.

Together they were the very portrait of the year that higher education went the way of the auto industry. The year when

full-time student. College tuition is too high and jobs are too scarce.

In a host of ways, the anxieties of this economy have trickled down to the classroom and the dorm.

The students in need of loans wait, like farmers or small business owners, for the news to delivery their future plans. They fear that without loans there will be no college. But they also fear that the debt that comes more and more often with the degree. At the same time, students who contemplate dropping out know they'll enter an unwelcoming job market, and know that even graduation offers no guarantees.

It isn't just the cost of higher education that makes this an anxious time. It is also wondering about the value of it.

Today there are 12 million students in colleges and universities, twice the number enrolled just 20 years ago. When half the high school graduates go on for another degree, that piece of paper can no longer offer a head start in the marketplace. The income "bonus" for a college graduate in the work world is shrinking, as the price tag is growing.

In the album of uncertainties, the students I have met ponder all of these unknowns and long for some security. Inevitably the class of anxiety talks more about "marketable skills" than about literature, worries more about access to the job market in their future than access to their culture in the past. It comes with the times.

Those lucky enough to have parents who can pay for school still fit in this mass portrait. Highly conscious of the sacrifice of their families, they feel particularly caught between the parents who want them to pursue a skill and the teachers who want them to pursue an idea.

It is rare now to find a college professor without the same sympathetic lament. They describe students who are fearful, in search of answers instead of arguments, credentials instead of quests. At best, these young people regard college as a tricky tunnel to negotiate on their way to life.

Inside the Capitol where the photo was taken, there was a great deal of talk about

education and the economy: interest rates, inflation, unemployment, government support, student loans. There was palpable fear on the part of the college administrators that we would have a two-track, or three-track, education: private schools for the rich, public schools for the middle class, none for the rest.

But there's already a two-track education world. Today only the most privileged can afford what we blushing call the love of learning. This is the real casualty of the times. For the class of '82, the class of anxiety, the pursuit of knowledge has become a luxury.

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**Ellen Goodman**

students on every campus wondered from day to day if they'd get the pink slip from the government. The year when more and more undergraduates began majoring in Economic Realities.

The proposed new slashes in student loans are yet another powerful shot of uncertainty, yet another fix for the anxiety that now courses regularly through the veins of the college community.

Those of us who have been on campuses frequently in the past half-dozen years have watched the stress level go up and up. To this day, I carry snapshots in my mind of dozens of students all shaken with uncertainties about the things they once assumed: an education, a job, a future.

The pressures seem enormous. The bulk of them face the inexorable problem, semester by semester, of raising funds for a rising tuition. Let Treasury Secretary Donald Regan share his memories of student life like in 1940: "... There is such a think called working your way through college. I did it." In 1982, it is virtually impossible to work through college as a

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