Our View: Harvard cheaper than a Cal State?

Any student knows that a fuzzy concept is easier to grasp with the help of a vivid illustration. Last week, every student in California’s state universities - and everyone else worried about the higher price of higher education here - got such a vivid illustration in the form of a newspaper headline.

"Believe it: Harvard cheaper than Cal State," our sister paper the San Jose Mercury News reported.

Unfortunately, readers had no trouble believing that attending a California public university is less and less affordable for the average young person. They’d just never viewed it in quite such an eye-catching way before.

If the news that attending, say, Cal State Los Angeles now costs more than attending Harvard comes at a shock, well, good. Maybe the state needs to be jolted into considering new ways to deliver affordable education.

For years, kids with good grades and solid aptitude-test scores knew they could go to UC and CSU institutions unaffected by the shrinking tax base and blessed with lush endowments.

But already, if the CSU-vs.-Harvard price check is any indication, something of that spirit is already crumbling.

Is there some version of this strategy that public universities can employ? Should California weigh ideas such as varying tuition at CSU and UC campuses - allowing, say, UC Berkeley and San Diego State to charge more as varying tuition at CSU and UC campuses - allowing, say, UC Berkeley and San Diego State to charge more than less in-demand locations? Opponents of the proposal say it would ruin the reputations of the "cheaper" university.

The reason is that Harvard charges higher tuition to richer families so that it can offer game-changing financial aid to middle-class and poor students. That’s a judgment call Harvard can afford to make, being a private institution unaffected by the shrinking tax base and blessed with lush endowments.

Although Harvard’s advertised annual tuition is $36,305, the family described above would actually end up paying $17,000 to send an ultra-high-achieving son or daughter to the United States’ most prestigious university.

The recession's impact on the tax base has forced the state to cut back on its support for the universities. In one result, tuitions have had to rise, pushing the system over the tipping point where it is funded more by students’ fees than by state money. In another, campuses have been forced to cut back on class offerings, faculties and upkeep.

The cutbacks mean it’s harder for students to get the classes they need to graduate in four years, so they’re not only paying higher fees but paying them for longer.

Those fees? According to the Bay Area News Group, which figured out the California-vs.-Harvard comparison, a family of four with an income of $130,000 a year should expect to pay nearly $24,000 for a Cal State freshman’s tuition, on-campus room and board, supplies and other expenses.

end up paying $17,000 to send an ultra-high-achieving son or daughter to the United States' most prestigious university.
support taxing millionaires to pay for higher education. They'll have to get in line behind those who favor taxing millionaires to pay for K-12 education.

It's easy to say the state's universities must eliminate overspending such as exorbitant salaries for top administrators. Reining in all of those salaries, though, won't solve the problem.

Last year, a study determined that in the next decade and a half, California will produce 1 million fewer college graduates than the economy demands, portending a further spiral for the tax base and state education funding.

Something has to change, and here's hoping that Harvard headline will be the impetus.

Meanwhile, more of California's brightest kids presumably will be going to Harvard. Maybe they'll learn the answers there.

RECOMMENDED FOR YOU

- LAX air quality study enters final phase
- Local school districts issue layoff notices to...
- Fight over Indian rail ticket prices turns nasty
- Beasley might be on his way to Lakers
- Palms area woman reportedly uses chainsaw to...
- Diamond Bar liquor store sold winning Lottery...

--- SPONSORED LINK ---

Iowa takes a step toward legalizing some online poker | Reuters

(From DailyMe.com)