JUNE 20, 2014 – JUNE 26, 2014

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How much is a university president worth?

Where would the University of Alabama football program be had the school not ponied up the cash to hire and keep Nick Saban?

With that in mind, should state universities be willing to sacrifice hiring a top-shelf college executive because it doesn't want to pay the market price? Even if a bad hire might result in bad financial decisions, lower enrollment and general mismanagement?

When a university is hiring an executive, supply and demand are in effect, said UAH faculty senate president Mitch Berrier, and schools risk too much to make a bad hire.

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SUPPLY, DEMAND AND COLLEGE EXECUTIVES

Paul Gattis pgattis@al.com

The state's love of college football helped Mitch Berrier provide a perspective on the bonuses received by top executives at Alabama colleges.

And Berrier has insight as the president of the faculty senate at the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

In an interview last week, Berrier said the pay issue for top executives is far more complicated than it might appear on the surface. He also stressed that it's more of a higher education problem than an Alabama problem.

Al.com last week reported that top executives in the University of Alabama System and Auburn University have received more than $3.5 million in bonuses over the past five years.

To make a point in Alabama, though, sometimes college football is the most common language. Specifically, there is Alabama coach Nick Saban — the winner of three national championships with the Crimson Tide.

And there is Gene Chizik — the winner of one national championship at Auburn who was fired less than two years later as the program collapsed.

Wins and losses

"Just like if you tried to hire Nick Saban, there's limited amount of people out there who have the skills and experience to bring it all together," Berrier said. "It's a supply and demand thing. Once you start demanding universities become more like businesses and do all these things, you're going to find a limited number of people who have the administrative skills and business acumen, the understanding of universities to pull it all together.

"Sometimes you're going to spend a lot of money on a Chizik, and he's going to come in and rest on the prior coach's laurels for a year and then things are going to fall apart, which is what happened to us here with Dave Williams."

Williams served as president at UAH from 2007-2011. His tenure in the Rocket City was, indeed, rocky. In 2009, he proposed requiring freshmen and sophomores to live on campus — which led to censure vote by the faculty senate that Williams narrowly survived. Months later, 58 faculty members signed a letter saying the school was "in peril" over a decline in enrollment.

The next year, Williams abruptly resigned to become engineering dean at Ohio State University.

"Williams just hired a bunch of inexperienced people," Berrier said. "He spent an awfully lot of money. So sometimes, that money is spent terribly. But now we seem to have hired people who have a lot of experience and know-how.

"The fact of the matter is all of the presidents and upper executives and chancellors across the nation, their salaries have been going way up. The nature of the job has become much more demanding, and people with the skills who can bring it all together are harder and harder to find."

Less job security

Berrier said faculty members typically say nothing about the salaries of top executives if the campus is doing well and prospering. When problems emerge, however, Berrier said that chorus of protest isn't far behind.

"The nature of the roles for university executives calls for a focus not only on education but also in the community as well," Berrier said. And as state funding has steadily declined in Alabama, university leaders must seek new avenues of revenue.

What concerned Berrier is the need for dollars to enhance and upgrade the quality of education at a time when competition is growing from online colleges.

"Like coaches, they are also going to be subject to being fired or forced out," Berrier said. "That is part of the world in which they live. We tenured professors don't have to deal with that. They're held to standards, and they are given a certain number of years to produce, just like coaches in a sense. There's a lot more turnover at the upper levels of administration than there used to be. That's in part because people are held to these demanding standards and sometimes it's almost impossible.

"Not everybody can win the championship, obviously."

Expectations of blowback

Even with that perspective, though, Berrier said the payment of salaries exceeding $500,000 to college presidents along with $100,000 bonuses are not exactly pushed into the public spotlight by university leaders.

"They don't go around advertising what the salaries are, they don't go around advertising what the nitty-gritty of the contracts are with the bonuses," he said. "We can find this information out. It's all public information. You can find it if you look. But it's not something they advertise because they don't want the blowback that might come from it."

On the other hand, even as the salaries and bonuses are kept quiet, the demands on trustees to find effective campus leaders can lead to expensive leaders.

"The systems are constrained to find people who can do fundraising and who can somehow control the university to be more efficient and have bigger classes without somehow affecting the quality of education," Berrier said.

"All of those things are issues. And have relationships with the corporate sector as well as understanding of what's going on in the context of the university itself. Those things are more expensive."
PART OF
THE DEAL

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA SYSTEM
The University of Alabama • The University of Alabama at Birmingham • The University of Alabama in Huntsville
Office of the Chancellor
November 20, 2012

PERSONAL & CONFIDENTIAL

Dr. Judy Boucher
2524 Lake Crest Drive
Tuscaloosa, AL 35406

Dear Dr. Boucher,

If you should assume your faculty appointment, it will be at a salary equal to that of the highest paid professor in your department with a nine-month appointment, not including any stipends or compensation for additional administrative duties.

In addition, you will be eligible to participate in The University’s fringe benefit program, which includes comprehensive medical, dental, vision, life, and disability insurance together with a generous vacation and sick leave program.

As a Tyler School of Art faculty member, you will be required to reside in the official residence of University President.

Your annual salary will be $535,000 per year, and you will be eligible for a performance incentive of $105,000 per year, which will be paid at the end of each fiscal year subject to the attainment of mutually agreed upon goals.
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA SYSTEM: POLICIES SET UP HEFTY BONUSES FOR PRESIDENTS AND EX-PRESIDENTS.

By: Charles J. Dean and Melissa Brown

Bonus payments made to high-ranking lead-ers within the University of Alabama system were part of employment agreements made with those individuals or were granted under a board policy, approved in 1998, that provides payments to “retreating” executives.

Reporting by AL.com has shown that top exec-u-tives for the University of Alabama System and Auburn University have received more than $3.5 million in bonuses over the past five years, even as tuition has escalated rapidly in both places.

Such bonus structures are not uncommon nationally, as the competition for top administra-tors grows ever greater.

“The nature of the job has become much more demanding, and people with the skills who can bring it all together are harder and harder to find,” said Mitch Berbrier, president of the faculty senate at the University of Alabama at Huntsville.

Former UA System Chancellor Malcolm Portera and former University of Alabama at Birmingham President Carol Garrison collected a combined $1.14 million in salary and bonuses in the year after they left their jobs, while University of Alabama President Judy Bonner and system Chancellor Robert Witt secured bonuses of $105,000 last year in addition to their regular salaries.

Payments spelled out

The UA System has been providing annual bonuses to its campus presidents and chancellor since 2007, UA System Vice Chancellor Kellee Reinhart has said.

System officials said the payments to Portera and Garrison were made under the system’s “retreating” executives policy, spelled out on page 89 of the board of trustees manual. Reinhart did not immediately have information on which executives other than Portera and Garrison had been paid under the policy.
University of Alabama presidents are not hired under contracts but serve at the will of the board of trustees, as is typical at many higher education institutions. Presidents are presented with "letters of understanding," though, that lay out their responsibilities and compensation packages.

UA President Bonner’s letter of understanding, obtained by a Freedom of Information request in February, states that Bonner’s salary will be set at $535,000 per year and she will be eligible for a “performance incentive” of $105,000 per year, subject to the “attainment of mutually agreed upon goals.” AL.com has requested further details of these goals, including what UA employees are involved in creating the goals and evaluating whether they have been met. The letter states Bonner will be eligible for compensation when she vacates the position, per board rules for “retreating presidents and chancellors.”

Retreating executives

Reinhart said preliminary information shows that Portera worked on economic development issues after leaving his job, and worked with Witt during the transition between chancellors.

Asked to detail the economic development work, Reinhart provided this list:

- Assisted in creating a consortium to secure a national pilot program to link university-based manufacturing/automotive research centers in five Southern states in support of the supply chains of several auto manufacturers.

- Served as the representative of the UA System on a group assisting the president of South Korea in implementing her “Creative Economy” initiative, which involved numerous presentations at conferences.

- Hosted conference participants that included the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, the UAB Center for Biophysical Science and Engineering, and Innovation Depot.

Reinhart said she was still working on the request regarding what work or duties Garrison performed after resigning her post at UAB in August 2012.

The case of Guy Bailey
While Garrison and Portera had been with the system long enough to meet the conditions of the "retreating" executive policy, former UA President Guy Bailey resigned less than two months after he officially took office. Yet Bailey remained an employee at the university and pulled in $45,000 monthly, which was his original employment agreement, despite not meeting the board rules for retreating president compensation.

In November 2012, Witt told Alabama's student newspaper, The Crimson White, that following through with Bailey's original employment agreement was the "honorable" thing to do.

According to university payroll records, the presidential employment agreement was nulled in August 2013, when Bailey began receiving standard professor pay. He taught in the English department while being paid as a professor. He left the university payroll after his May 2014 appointment as head of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley campus.

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**UA SYSTEM'S 'RETREATING EXECUTIVES' POLICY'**

**WHO QUALIFIES**

The policy's terms apply to chancellors and presidents who:

- Have academic tenure at UA
- Are vacating their position by resignation or retirement, not termination
- Have served five years or more

**WHAT THEY GET**

The policy entitles qualifying former executives to:

- Take 12-month sabbatical leave at full pay, without the use of office space and university-provided housing
- Return to active faculty after the sabbatical year
- Receive salary equal to the highest-paid faculty member in the department
Alabama college professors' pay on the rise, especially at UA: Today in state politics
By: Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- Some Alabama universities raised professors' pay significantly in recent years, with the University of Alabama leading the way.

That's according to a story in the Decatur Daily, which got the information from the Alabama Commission on Higher Education.

UA paid 252 male professors an average salary of $133,391 in 2011-2012. That's a 34 percent increase from 2005-2006. A UA official said the money is well spent, saying the university must compete with peer universities nationally and the private sector.

In-state, undergraduate tuition rose 94 percent at UA from 2005-2006 to this year, to $9,450.

As for professor salaries, Athens State University had the smallest increase during the same time period, 8 percent.

Read more about the salaries in the Decatur Daily.
Professors see huge increases in salaries: State colleges cite need to recruit, retain talent

By: Mary Sell

Montgomery — Tuition isn’t the only thing that has increased by double-digit percentages at Alabama universities in recent years.

Some universities saw significant average salary increases between the 2005-06 and 2011-12 academic years, according to information from the Alabama Commission on Higher Education. Others were smaller and more in line with Legislature-allocated cost-of-living increases given early in that time frame.

Higher education officials said despite annual rising tuition, higher salaries for professors are necessary to recruit and retain quality personnel.

Here’s what the data shows:

• The largest increase was at the state’s largest university. The University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa paid 252 male professors an average of $133,391 in 2011-12, a 34 percent increase from 2005-06. Alabama also has the highest-paid professors. The data breaks the information down by male and female professors.
• The smallest average salary increase, 8 percent, was at Athens State University. Until 2012, that school was part of the junior college system and didn’t control its raises. But Athens isn’t the university that paid the least — that would be the University of West Alabama.
• With the exception of one university in 2011-12, the average male professor at Alabama universities made more than the average female professor.
• Salary increases for associates and assistants varied significantly. Male associate professors saw their average salary increase between 4 percent (Jacksonville State) and 26 percent (Alabama State). For assistant professors, the numbers were equally widespread. Auburn increased salaries, for men, by 67 percent to an average of about $68,000. West Alabama saw a 6 percent increase, to about $48,000.
• Increases at community colleges also varied.

An Alabama official justified his university’s salary increases.

“To be a nationally recognized institution, you must be able to recruit and retain the highest quality faculty possible,” interim provost Joe Benson said in an emailed response. “To do so, our salaries must be competitive with those of both our peer institutions nationwide and the private sector. For more than a decade, the university has made increasing faculty salaries to competitive levels a top priority.”

Benson said the university also has increased expectations of faculty.

“Their salary increases are well deserved and well worth the investment,” he said.
According to national figures, Alabama pays more than average. The National Center for Education Statistics says in 2011, the average male professor earned $112,068. According to the Chronicle for Higher Education, the average full professor (men and women) at the University of Mississippi made $108,800 in 2011-12. At Mississippi State University, the average was $96,000.

In Georgia, the average professor at the University of Georgia earned $107,800, and at Georgia State University it was $122,100.

"I am surprised to learn of such large increases, but the authority for running our institutions rests with each institution’s board of trustees and the president that they hire," said Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur, who is on the Senate education budget committee. "Costs have exploded across higher education, and it seems that many institutions are in an expensive race in an attempt to stay competitive that neither the state nor many students can afford to support.

"I have to even wonder whether for some students the long-term financial benefits justify the costs."

Between the 2005-06 academic year and this year, in-state undergraduate tuition at the University of Alabama rose from $4,864 to $9,450, about 94 percent.

The data provided by the Alabama Commission on Higher Education shows most universities pay their female professors slightly less than male colleagues. At Alabama A&M University, female professors made slightly more than men in 2011-12: About $400 a year.

Female professors made an average of $2,000 a year less at the University of North Alabama. Like their male counterparts, woman professors at UNA saw a 19 percent increase in the average salary between 2005-06 and 2011-12.

Clinton Carter, UNA vice president of business and financial affairs, said last week he was unsure why women averaged less than men.

"There is no differentiation for males and females here," Carter said. Instructors are hired based on the same pay structure, regardless of sex.

The university is trying to get those instructors more money in the upcoming academic year. If enrollment projections are accurate, the schools should be able to provide a 3 percent COLA, despite not being allocated raise money from the state.

"State funds are a big portion of our total revenue, but they’re not all of it," Carter said. "We will prioritize some expenses over others, and this is one that will be a priority for us."

This year, K-12 educators received a 2 percent COLA. It didn’t apply to higher education faculty. Prior to that, educators on all levels received their last COLA in 2008, and it was 7 percent. In 2007, they received a 5 percent increase, and in 2006, 6 percent.
The only single-digit average salary increase for professors in the four-year system was Athens State’s 8 percent. The average male professor there made $85,522 in 2011-12. After it became autonomous from the state’s junior college system in 2012, it gave instructors a 1 percent increase.

“It was a token amount, but it was an effort to give a little bit,” said Mike McCoy, Athens State’s vice president of financial affairs.

Two-year college officials also attribute salary increases to staff seniority. At Calhoun Community College, the average male faculty member’s pay increased 9.6 percent to $56,928. The average female faculty member earned $52,288 in 2011-12.

Kim Gaines, the human resources coordinator at Calhoun, said the school, like others in the community college system, follows a state-set salary schedule that gives raises based on years served and credentials.

“We’ve had a lot (of faculty) in the nursing program that came in with a master’s degree and got a doctorate,” Gaines said.

Trent Randolph, a spokesman for Northwest Shoals Community College, said he thinks the average salary increases there are largely attributable to Legislature-mandated cost-of-living increases in those years.

In 2011-12, the average male faculty member was earning $56,646, a 12.8 percent increase from six years prior.

Northwest Shoals follows the state’s salary schedule for instructors, Randolph said. Most increases in pay are a result of years served or an improvement in an educator’s own education and credentials, he said. Pay increases also happen when a faculty member becomes a division chair or teaches more courses than required.
10 teams to compete for $300,000 prize

Dawn Kent Azok • dazok@al.com

Ten teams from across the state have been selected to compete in the latest round of the Alabama Launchpad StartUp Competition and could win a share of up to $300,000 in prize money.

The Economic Development Partnership of Alabama Foundation puts on the competition, which promotes, rewards and increases the pipeline of high-growth, innovative ventures in the state.

A five-judge panel reviewed applications and selected the teams that will proceed in the latest round. They will pitch their businesses before the judges on July 18 at 9 a.m. at Evonik Industries in Birmingham.

"We couldn't be more excited about the caliber of the teams and brands selected to advance to our next round of competition," Ernie Cowart, the EDPA's director of business information, said in a prepared statement. "The startups represent the future growth and innovation of Alabama's economy, and they have the potential to be the next big success in the startup world.

The judges are Josh Girvin, vice president of product management, Atlas RFID; Gary York, chairman, Emergency CallWorx; Stephen Kersey, director of business development, Wells Fargo; Gary Tauss, principal at Accelerate; and Andrew Penman, vice president of drug development, Southern Research Institute.

More than $1.3 million has been awarded to winners since the competition started in 2006. In the last round, which ended March 21, five teams won a share of $135,000 in prize money.

THE TEAMS

2B-Electronic: Inexpensive, real-time measurement of muscle activity to aid in reaching health goals. Team leader: Brandt David Hendricks, based in Tuscaloosa and has a University of Alabama affiliation.


Cheerfulistics: Personalized gift boxes, containing magazines and other items. Team leader: Mary Martha Parisher, based in Birmingham.

Expectation Manager: A platform which aligns companies' sales activities and performance directly with customer's results. Team leader: Brad Mintun, based in Birmingham.

Healthfund: Crowd engagement platform for medical research and biotechnology. Team leader: Larry Lawal, based in Birmingham.

hoo-sed.com: Ad-supported website and apps to display text summaries of news. Team leader: Daniel Newton Woo, based in Huntsville and affiliated with the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

QuickTrick: Portable and compact alignment measurement systems. Team leader: Tess Winningham, based in Birmingham.

Smart Party: Tools for nonprofit organizations to increase event revenue and expand donor base. Team leader: Brooke T. Battle, based in Birmingham.

SpectraCyte: High-speed, low-cost spectral imaging solutions for research microscopy and clinical endoscopy. Team leader, Silas Leavesley, based in Mobile and affiliated with the University of South Alabama.

The Clemons Coding Co.: Standalone computer program called 3DaVinci that allows an average person to build a 3-D model and send it to a 3-D printer. Team leader: William Clemons, based in Huntsville.
Alabama labor chief exiting after 10 years

By Phillip Rawls
The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY | Alabama Labor Commissioner Tom Surtees is stepping down after a decade of leading major state agencies for two governors.

Serving in key positions in two administrations is rare in a capital city where department heads normally change with each governor. Surveying the photos of his predecessors at the Department of Labor, Surtees said, "No one ever stayed over from one administration to the next. I consider it a compliment if they couldn't find anybody else."

Surtees was vice president of human resources at the Birmingham-based Citation Corp. when Republican Gov. Bob Riley asked him to take over the state Revenue Department in March 2004.

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SURTEES
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Surtees said he didn’t know Riley, but a mutual friend recommended him for the job.

Surtees had been a Pleasant Grove City Council member for one term and a Jefferson County school board member for one term, but had never had a full-time government job.

“I fell in love with state government because what we do here makes a difference,” he said.

As revenue commissioner, he oversaw Alabama raise the threshold at which low-income families were required to pay state income tax. Until then, Alabama required families living below the federal poverty line to pay more state income tax than any other state.

In 2007, Riley moved Surtees to the state Department of Industrial Relations, which handles unemployment compensation claims and runs job centers that help unemployed people find work.

When Gov. Robert Bentley took office in January 2011, he retained Surtees and gave him additional duties in late 2012 when the state departments of Labor and Industrial Relations were merged, with the resulting agency called the Department of Labor.

Along the way, Surtees has temporarily added extra duties whenever Bentley had a key vacancy, including handling legislative relations and serving as education liaison.

“Treat myself as a utility infielder. I don’t get put into the game unless someone gets hurt,” Surtees said.

Bentley said Tuesday that Surtees has been a valuable member of his Cabinet who will be missed. “With each new position, Tom accepted the role with enthusiasm and humility,” the governor said Tuesday.

Surtees said nothing in his career has been as fulfilling as helping people to get unemployment benefits and find work during the recession.

During the worst week of the recession, his agency paid $29 million in unemployment benefits to 115,000 Alabamians. Now it’s down to about $5 million a week for 21,000.

He recounts talking to people who didn’t know what to do because they had never been unemployed before. The calls always had the same desperate theme.

“They’d say, ‘I’ve worked here all my life. What do I do?’” Surtees said, adding that he would reply, “‘Well, we can help you.’”

Surtees had his own tough times as Alabama was coming out of the recession. He battled lymphoma that had progressed to stage four, but all of his recent checkups have been good, he said.

On Monday, Surtees was busy packing the baseball memorabilia that decorated his office across the street from the Capitol. He’s a regular at minor-league baseball games in Montgomery, and the Friends of Rickwood group in Birmingham that keeps the nation’s oldest professional baseball park in shape.

Surtees’ love of baseball stems from being a bat boy for the Birmingham Barons minor-league team at Rickwood when he was 10 and 11 years old. He would ride a Birmingham bus to the ballpark and pay 50 cents a game.

“I’ve told many people that was the best job I ever had. I just couldn’t raise a family on it,” he said.

Surtees, 64, is returning to the Birmingham area to become operating partner at McKinney Capital, but he said he will always cherish his time at the Department of Labor.

“There is no other job like it in the state because you help so many people,” he said
Local jobless rate for May flat

Unemployment rate in Tuscaloosa metro area at 5.9 percent

By Patrick Rupinski
Business Editor

The Tuscaloosa area's unemployment rate remained flat in May staying at 5.9 percent, according to unemployment numbers released by the state on Friday.

That was "despite a slight increase in labor force which generally raises the unemployment rate," said Ahmad Ijaz, director of economic forecasting at UA's Center for Business and Economic Research.

The University of Alabama economist said the latest numbers show the metro area — Tuscaloosa, Hale and Greene counties — added 600 jobs in May and has gained 2,700 jobs during the past 12 months.

"All of the jobs added last month were in the services sector — professional and business services, health services and leisure and hospitality — again low-wage sectors, and as long as we continue to
add jobs in these sectors, consumer demand will continue to remain weak and the economic growth will continue to remain sluggish," he said.

Alabama's May jobless rate was 6.8 percent, down from 6.9 a month earlier. Last May the state rate was 6.4 percent.

The governor's office released a statement saying May's rate represents 147,068 unemployed persons, compared with 147,229 in April and 138,432 in May 2013.

The state "employment numbers released this morning again show a gradually improving economy, albeit at a very modest pace," Ijaz said.

The state has gained about 4,700 jobs since April and about 12,200 jobs during the past 12 months.

Statewide, manufacturers added 1,700 jobs in May while retailers added 900 jobs. Other hirers were employers in administrative support, waste management and remediation services, which added 2,100 jobs; accommodation and food services, 1,200 jobs and social assistance, 1,200 jobs.

"The only problem is, like the national economy, most of the (Alabama) jobs being added are in the segments of the economy that pay relatively low wages and or hire a relatively higher number of temporary workers," Ijaz said.

Tuscaloosa County's unemployment rate was 5.6 percent. Twelve of the state's 67 counties had lower rates.

Wilcox County had the highest unemployment rate at 15.6 percent while Shelby County had the lowest at 4.4 percent.

Of the 10-county area of central West Alabama, Greene and Perry counties continued to have double-digit unemployment rates with Greene at 11.5 percent and Perry at 11.6 percent.
Staff report

A Tuscaloosa startup company, 2B-Electronic, is among 10 companies from across the state that were selected last week to compete for money to get their businesses off the ground.

The teams will now vie to win a share of up to $300,000 in the latest round of the Alabama Launchpad Start-Up Competition.

University of Alabama-affiliated 2B-Electronic proposes to have an inexpensive, real-time measurement of muscle activity to aid in reaching health goals, according to the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama, a nonprofit organization that promotes economic development in the state and sponsors the Alabama Launchpad competition.

The UA researchers behind 2B-Electronic are developing a low-cost EMG, or electromyography, device, according to UA EMGs interpret electrical activity produced by muscles and can check both muscle health and nerve cells while aiding in the diagnoses of diseases. The devices can cost about $2,500.

The UA team is headed by Brandt Hendricks, who recently earned a degree in kinesiology at UA, and includes Patrick LeClair, an associate professor of physics, and others.

The team recently constructed a low-cost, versatile circuit that can detect, amplify and interpret muscles' electrical signals, according to UA. It could become a much less costly EMG. It can also serve as a heart-rate monitor and shows

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CONTEST

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promise as an EKG instrument.

Although still under development, the instrument can, in connection with a microcontroller, take the body's electrical signals and produce an action.

In a proof-of-concept test, the researchers used their design to trigger arm movement in a robot by flexing muscles in the wrist and forearm of a person linked to the devices.

The hope is that one day such technology could later be implemented into a full body suit to give a person with limited mobility the possibility of performing more complex tasks by a quick flex of the arm.

The other nine startups in the Launchpad competition include six companies from Birmingham including one affiliated with the University of Alabama at Birmingham; two from Huntsville, including one affiliated with the University of Alabama in Huntsville; and one affiliated with the University of South Alabama in Mobile.

Ernie Cowart, EDPA's director of business information, said the competition is important to help the state's aspiring entrepreneurs gain access to funding and mentors to take their ideas and concepts to actual high-paying jobs for Alabama residents.

"We couldn't be more excited about the caliber of the teams and brands selected to advance to our next round of competition," he said in a statement. "The startups represent the future growth and innovation of Alabama's economy, and they have the potential to be the next big success in the startup world. We look forward to the upcoming stages of this Alabama Launchpad Start-Up Competition cycle."

The 10 teams will pitch their business concepts before the five-judge panel on July 18 at Evonik Industries in Birmingham.

Alabama Launchpad competition started as a pilot project in 2006 and initially was open to startup companies developed by researchers at the state's public universities. It was opened up to state startup teams that were not affiliated with universities last year.

The Launchpad competition is funded by business, the state and seven universities. Since its inception, more than 30 companies have received startup funds, splitting more than $1.3 million.
THESE PRICES AREN'T TO DIE FOR
MAGIC CITY HOSPITALS CHARGE CONSIDERABLY MORE THAN THEIR SOUTHEASTERN PEERS FOR COMMON PROCEDURES

BY ALAN ALEXANDER
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I f you have a heart attack in Birmingham, it may not cost you your life. But it may well cost the federal government an arm and a leg.

That's because Birmingham hospitals charge significantly more on average for procedures covered by Medicare than hospitals in other similarly sized metros in Alabama and the southeast.

For example, the average charges for Medicare patients treated for a heart attack in Birmingham is $71,749. That's more than twice the $34,309 charged in Mobile hospitals. Similarly, a lower joint replacement procedure averaged $81,264 in Nashville but is $108,683 in Birmingham.

That's according to new data compiled by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Experts say there are several reasons for the widely varying prices -- which differ greatly even among hospitals within the metro Birmingham -- and some say the prices show a health care pricing model in need of a significant overhaul.

Rosemary Blackmon, external vice president and chief operating officer of the Alabama Hospital Association, says a lot has to do with the accumulation of operational costs at individual hospitals.

"Charges are unique by hospital because the hospitals have to cover varying expenses like labor, pharmaceuticals and other capital costs," Blackmon said.

Hospital officials have said the costs often relate heavily to the type of facility. For instance, research hospitals could treat a higher number of complicated cases, which would lead to higher costs.

Health care executives have also noted that the charges don't reflect the actual amount hospitals eventually receive from Medicare for the procedures.

Selwyn Vickers, dean of the University of Alabama at Birmingham's School of Medicine, said the nation needs to look at ways to reduce the cost for medical procedures, which are often $65,000 per patient. And charges often vary tremendously from hospital to hospital. That said, that could be because hospitals are hoping to get one-third of the cost of a procedure paid for and are estimating what to charge to get that back.

"Hospitals are determining a lot of the costs on their own," Vickers said.

The trend of varying costs by hospitals is exceedingly prevalent among some Birmingham facilities, where huge price differences exist for certain procedures. But that trend isn't localized to Birmingham.

"It is not unusual for Medicare charges to have wide variations -- sometimes 15 to 20 times what Medicare typically pays," said Rene McElvonney, associate professor of health administration at Auburn University. "One often cited example is in New York City where two hospitals only miles apart varied by over 100 percent in the prices they charged for the same set of services."

McElvonney attributes part of what she calls the problematic pricing of health care services to the fact that hospitals base their prices on each other.

"Once the word is out that one hospital is charging more, there are indications that other facilities in the area often raise their rates," she said.

The cost of procedures could change through the Affordable Care Act. Reform could play a role in reducing costs by changing the payment system from procedure based -- or getting paid for doing multiple procedures to diagnose a condition -- to a system that pays based on how well doctors diagnose a patient, Vickers said.

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PRICES MAY VARY...A LOT

Here is how average charges compared at Birmingham hospitals for four common procedures for Medicare patients in 2012. As hospitals note, those charges aren't necessarily what they receive in actual payments from Medicare. They also don't reflect charges for non-Medicare patients.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Brookwood Medical Center</th>
<th>UAB Hospital</th>
<th>St. Vincent's East</th>
<th>Trinity Medical Center</th>
<th>St. Vincent's Birmingham</th>
<th>Princeton Baptist Medical Center</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heart attack</td>
<td>$118,695</td>
<td>$115,111</td>
<td>$76,789</td>
<td>$80,622</td>
<td>$30,477</td>
<td>$62,191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary/recovery</td>
<td>$117,695</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>$30,545</td>
<td>$34,951</td>
<td>$57,530</td>
<td>$47,181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hip/joint replacement</td>
<td></td>
<td>$107,695</td>
<td>$51,679</td>
<td>$74,227</td>
<td>$30,008</td>
<td>$34,537</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scars</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$46,485</td>
<td>$120,814</td>
<td>$146,720</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>$71,749</td>
<td>$58,123</td>
<td>$44,742</td>
<td>$68,814</td>
<td>$32,180</td>
<td>$65,633</td>
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> THE BIG NUMBER

60%
The average amount charged for four common medical procedures for Medicare patients in Birmingham is 60 percent higher than the national average.

Which procedures are the priciest? Check out our Most Expensive Hospital Procedures List to find out. SEE PAGE 6.
BIRMINGHAM'S CHARGES OUTPACE PEERS

We examined the costs of four common Medicare procedures in Birmingham and four other southeastern metros to see how prices compare. The verdict? Birmingham was the costliest for all four procedures, with the average covered cost sometimes twice as high as in other metros.

> LEGEND
- Heart attack
- Lower joint replacement
- Pulmonary edema/respiratory failure
- Seizure

THE PRICING GAME

Breakdown of the procedures on our Most Expensive Hospital Procedures List by average covered cost:

- 44% $60K to $100K
- 40% Less than $60K
- 16% More than $100K

HOW ALABAMA CHARGES COMPARE

While Birmingham is on the high end of the spectrum, an overall look at Alabama shows the state's hospitals generally charge less for 10 common Medicare procedures than the national average.
Alabama nonprofit doles out $1M for 3 stem cell projects

Mike Oliver  moliver@al.com

Dipping quickly into the gift of $1 million from an anonymous donor, Alabama Institute of Medicine has approved three grants for stem cell research.

The board of directors voted last week to approve the grants to three separate projects at the UAB.

AIM received the $1 million gift in March.

Here are the three projects:

1. Thomas Ryan and his UAB team to extend by four years a study of treatment for sickle cell and Cooley’s anemia. Total: $750,000.

2. Palaniappan Sethu and his lab to further work studying a way to use stem cells to treat diseased hearts. Total: $100,000 for one year with, pending approval, $100,000 in second year.

3. Kejin Hu and his UAB team to study the roles of the human PDX1 gene in human embryonic stem cells. Total: $100,000 for one year, with, pending approval, $100,000 the second year.

“We are delighted to fund three very high quality projects,” said Jason Cosgrove, AIM board member. “These scientists have produced excellent proposals, and we are honored to partner with them and UAB in our first round of research grant funding.”

Tory Williams helped start the organization last year with Roman Reed, her interest influenced at a young age by her sister’s battle with a rare form of cancer and her own struggle with kidney disease.

She has acknowledged the sensitivity surrounding such research.

“Research involving embryos has been controversial,” she previously told AL.com. “But over 500,000 embryos are thrown away every year from fertility clinics. It almost like recycling. Take something that is being thrown away every year and treat people dying of these diseases.”

The institute will seek applications for awards again in the spring of 2015.
UAB choir headed for World Choir Games in Latvia, but first wish them 'bon voyage' at July 3 concert

By: Michael Huebner

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama -- The Interkultur World Choir Games may not draw the attendance and viewer numbers of the World Cup, but they may be the equivalent competition among choral groups.

Among the 450 choirs from 60 countries competing is the UAB Concert Choir, 60 singers who will travel to Riga, Latvia for 11 days. Once the games end, many of those singers will continue on to perform at more European destinations.

But first, Birmingham listeners will get a taste what they're performing at the Alys Stephens Center on Thursday, July 3. The free "Bon Voyage" concert starts at 7 p.m. and will include music by Mendelssohn, Burchard, Hogan, Dawson, Gretchaninoff and Mawby.

DETAILS
What: UAB Concert Choir, Brian Kittredge, director. "Bon Voyage" concert.
When: Thursday, July 3, 7 p.m.
Admission: Free.
Where: Alys Stephens Center, 1200 Tenth Ave. South.
"The UAB Concert Choir was selected by peer review and CD submission to represent the United States," said director Brian Kittredge. "The choir will sing in three distinct categories and join an ensemble of thousands for the closing ceremonies on July 13."

Performance venues also include the St. Nicholas Church in Prague, Czech Republic, and the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in Berlin, Germany. Following the tour, 37 UAB singers will sing at St. Mark's Basilica in Venice, the Duomo di Milano, and in Verona, Munich and Münster, while visiting historic sites, museums and cathedrals.

"The entire trip will span 24 days," said Kittredge. "The students have been preparing for this experience for more than a year, and I can't imagine bringing a better group of students overseas."
TEDxBirmingham will hold next conference at UAB in February, nominations for speakers now open

By: Jesse Chambers

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama – The TEDxBirmingham group announced today that its next large conference in the Magic City, with the theme "Move Mountains," will be held on Sat., Feb 28, 2015.

Like the first TEDxBirmingham conference, which took place in March, TEDx Birmingham 2015 will be held at the Alys Stephens Center at The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB).

The TEDxBirmingham group is a local offshoot of the internationally known non-profit organization TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design), which stages talks and conferences around the world.

The group is dedicated to finding and spreading positive ideas to help make Birmingham better and to create a greater sense of community among area residents.

There will be about 12 speakers at the 2015 conference, according to a news release from the group, and the theme of the event refers to the remaining challenges that the city of Birmingham faces.

"We have some serious mountains to move in this town," TEDxBirmingham co-organizer and UAB anthropology professor Sarah Parcak said Monday at a TEDxBirmingham Salon at Trim Tab Brewing in Lakeview. "We have already moved some serious mountains."

The group will hold live auditions for speakers at a TEDxBirmingham Salon on Mon., Sept. 15. Co-organizer Matthew Hamilton said Monday that about 8-12 speakers will be able to audition at the Salon.

The speakers will give four-minute talks, according to the news release, and some may be invited to give longer talks at the February conference at UAB.
The event Monday at Trim Tab was the first Salon held by TEDxBirmingham since January and was the first to feature live speakers in addition to videotaped "TED talks" from national or international events.

The group hosted 16 local speakers at its first large TEDxBirmingham conference at UAB's Alyss Stephens Center in March.

Applications for auditions and other speaker nominations are open at www.tedxbirmingham.org.
The Edge of Chaos at UAB names 26 scholars to deliver lectures, help attack 'wicked' problems

By: Jesse Chambers

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama – The Edge of Chaos is a unique conference venue and meeting space located in the Lister Hill Library on the UAB campus and funded by the UAB School of Public Health.

It is a place where diverse groups of people -- academics, students, entrepreneurs and area residents -- get together to share ideas, work collaboratively and look for solutions to some of Birmingham's problems.

"This space is designed to capture intellectual capacity, innovation, creativity within the university and do good things with it," said Edge of Chaos director David Hooks earlier this year.

The Edge of Chaos announced last week that it is creating a new Scholars Program to bring together some of the finest minds at UAB to attack what the venue's web site calls the "wicked problems" that "plague communities" and are difficult to solve.

Twenty-six UAB faculty members were invited to become Edge of Chaos Scholars based on their academic standing, accomplishments and innovative perspectives on the development of creativity on campus.

They will present lectures on a range of topics -- with an emphasis on innovation and interdisciplinary thinking -- during the coming academic year.

The Scholars are as follows, according to a UAB news release on Tuesday:

Distinguished Professor David Allison, Ph.D., associate dean for Science, Director of the Office of Energetics, School of Public Health;

Jonas Almeida, Ph.D., professor of pathology and director, Division of Informatics;
Thomas Anthony, director of the Big Data Research and Analytics Laboratory, UAB Information Technology;

Distinguished Professor William Cockerham, Ph.D., chair of the Department of Sociology; College of Arts and Sciences;

William Curry, M.D., professor of medicine, associate dean for Primary Care and Rural Health, and senior VP for Population Health for the UAB Health System;

Joel Dobbs, Executive-in-Residence, UAB Collat School of Business;

Michelle Fanucchi, Ph.D., associate professor and chair, Department of Environmental Health Sciences; School of Public Health;

George Howard, DrPH, professor of biostatistics, School of Public Health;

Eric Jack, Ph.D., dean of the Collat School of Business;

Andrew Keitt, Ph.D., associate professor of history and director of the Graduate Program; College of Arts and Sciences;

Meredith Kilgore, Ph.D., professor and chair, Department of Health Care Organization and Policy; School of Public Health;

Josh Klapow, Ph.D., associate professor, Health Care Organization and Policy, School of Public Health;

Nichole Lariscy, Ph.D., assistant professor of English, College of Arts and Sciences;

Dennis Leonard, business development consultant for the Office of Vice President for Research and Economic Development;

Leslie McClure, Ph.D., professor of biostatistics; School of Public Health;
Gerald McGwin, Ph.D., professor and vice chair, Department of Epidemiology, School of Public Health;

Nir Menachemi, Ph.D., professor of health care organization and policy, School of Public Health;

Max Michael, M.D., dean of the School of Public Health;

Paul Muntner, Ph.D., professor and vice chair, Department of Epidemiology, School of Public Health;

Rosie O'Beirne, director of Digital Media and Learning; College of Arts and Sciences;

Gregory Pence, Ph.D., professor and chair, Department of Philosophy, College of Arts and Sciences;

T. Scott Plutchak, associate professor and director of Lister Hill Library of the Health Sciences;

Frank Skidmore, M.D., assistant professor of neurology, School of Medicine;

Diane Tucker, Ph.D., professor of psychology and director of the Science and Technology Honors Program, College of Arts and Sciences;

Timothy Wick, Ph.D., professor and chair of the Department of Biomedical Engineering, Co-Director of BioMatrix Engineering and Regenerative Medicine Center, School of Engineering;

Majd Zayzafoon, M.D., Ph.D., associate professor of pathology, director of UAB Center for Metabolic Bone Disease and director of UAB-International Advanced Clinical Training Program, School of Medicine.

The idea for the Edge of Chaos venue came from author Steven Johnson and his book, "Where Good Ideas Come From."
Johnson explained his ideas during a TED talk in 2010.

Johnson says that collaborative solutions to wicked problems occur in an environment that runs a fine line between order and chaos, according to Hooks.

Johnson’s book "calls for total chaos meets total organization to meet those ideas happen... hence the name the edge of chaos," Hooks said.

The Edge of Chaos is located on the fourth floor of Lister Hill Library. For more information, including a complete events calendar, go to http://theedgeofchaos.org.
Near-Record May Warmth Could Lead to Strong El Niño

May 2014 was calculated to be the third-warmest May in the past 35 years of satellite-measured global temperatures, which could portend massive global weather shifts later this year. It was also the warmest May that didn’t occur during an El Niño ocean warming in the tropical Pacific, according to University of Alabama in Huntsville atmospheric scientist John Christy.

The Earth System Science Center (ESSC), where Christy is director, determined that May was about 0.6 degrees Fahrenheit above seasonal normal for the month.

The warmest May on record was in 1998 and occurred during the warmest and most influential El Niño in the climate record.

The global seasonal average for that month was about 1.0 degree above normal.

Given that this year is already unusually warm, Christy says the potentially emerging El Niño in the Pacific could challenge the 1998 episode’s record.

“With the baseline so much warmer, this upcoming El Niño won’t have very far to go to break that (1.0 degree) record,” Christy said. “That isn’t to say it will, but even an average-sized warming event will have a chance to get close to that level.”

The ESSC uses data gathered by advanced microwave sounding units on NOAA and NASA satellites to get accurate temperature readings for nearly all regions of the world. This includes remote desert, ocean and rain forest areas where surface weather observations are not available.
I LOVE MY TOWN...

Name: Ray Garner
Residence: Huntsville
Occupation: chief of staff, Office of the President at The University of Alabama in Huntsville

I was born and raised in Huntsville after my father moved here to work on the space program in the early 1950s. It was pretty incredible growing up in the '60s knowing that Huntsvillians were among the world's leaders in engineering and science and seeing the groundbreaking work taking place at Redstone Arsenal. Our house was close to Redstone, so I remember vividly glass in our windows rattling on every engine test.

Huntsville is a smart place, and it's great living in a city where there is so much brainpower. The collection of talent at UAH, Redstone Arsenal and Cummings Research Park is a tremendous national asset, and we should thank our lucky stars to have the good fortune to live here.

Gina Reynolds
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA
WHERE THE MONEY GOES:
PRESIDENT WALDROP, OTHER
OFFICIALS TALK TUITION INCREASES.
‘YOU CAN’T GET BLOOD OUT OF A TURNIP’

BY COMPARISON

USA’s tuition for a full-time load of classes for an entire academic year now is $8,610, which is $720 cheaper than Troy, $1,171 cheaper than the University of Alabama, and $1,590 cheaper than Auburn University.

Cassie Fambro cfambro@al.com

The University of South Alabama has raised tuition approximately 40 percent since 2008, a symptom of stark changes in the way higher education is funded, and some are left wondering why the increases keep happening.

USA went from being a state-funded university and receiving the majority of its revenue from the state to being a state-assisted university. Since 2008, USA has lost a total of $262,094,370 in prorated state appropriations.

The university was suddenly forced to make up that revenue and partially compensated with the increase in tuition. Tony Waldrop, the new president of USA, said as soon as the numbers came crashing down in 2008, the school took action.

“If you’ve already cut $94 million out of your budget, as my mother would say, you can’t get blood out of a turnip,” said Waldrop. So USA voted to increase tuition by 3.5 percent earlier in June for the 2014-2015 year.

The university is perpetually examining ways to cut costs, and Waldrop said university officials will continue to do so.

“If we were going to say ‘what are our additional costs?’ PEEHIP increases (insurance for retirees), our own insurance, then the increase would have been higher,” he said.

“I came from a very poor family and I know the pain of having to pay more and we wanted to keep it at a more modest level,” said Waldrop.

Only 14 percent of USA’s revenue comes from tuition, according to audited financial statements. For the fiscal year ending in September 2013, USA received a net of $95.7 million in tuition and fees. The largest source of revenue came from patient service revenues, at $256.2 million.
USA
From Page 1

Where’s the money go?

"Ninety percent of our revenue goes to salaries, supplies, utilities and other operational expenses. Salaries alone are 64 percent of our total expenses," said vice president of financial affairs, Scott Weldon.

With salaries as the largest chunk of the pie, supplies and utilities come in at 26 percent. Scholarships, interest, depreciation and miscellaneous expenses make up the remaining 10 percent.

Utilities do include landscaping, according to Weldon, a source of contention for several students.

Waldrop defended landscaping costs, pointing to the draw and the feel of the campus.

"I think it adds life to the campus," he said. He said that in his university experience, the second largest reason students pick a campus is how it looks and feels.

Over the past several years, USA has been trying to incorporate a solid theme in its appearance. Under the leadership of the late president Gordon Moulton, new buildings were done in a similar brick fashion to bring continuity to USA’s aesthetic design. Murals, gateways and other additions were also added.

Where else is the money going (and not going)?

President’s home: The new home that Waldrop and his wife will live in was purchased by a private donor.

Athletics: As far as football goes, USA is still using Ladd-Peebles Stadium. No plans to build an on-campus stadium are in the works yet. In fact, Waldrop said, the stadium "won’t happen," if private donations don’t come through. Athletics are included in tuition.

Buildings and facilities: In the case of buildings, funding may come partially from tuition or from grants and donations. Shelby Hall, the new engineering and computer science building that can be seen from Old Shell Road, was paid for entirely with federal science grants.

The recently built student recreation center was paid for by raising activity fees, part of tuition. USA students do not pay a monthly charge to use the facility, but graduates do. Weldon said that a state bond issue also helped provide for the center.

Several projects on campus were funded or assisted by bond issues approved years before the recession came into play at all.

If not funded by bond issues or grants, there is likely an element of private donation involved. In a project such as with the Moulton Tower, Projects aside, the majority of alumni donations are for scholarships.

Salaries: The board of trustees is not paid, so no tuition money funds that group. Waldrop’s base salary is $450,000 a year, about $35,000 less than President Moulton’s base salary in 2011.

Auxiliary: The tuition exception lies in the new dining hall and new residence halls. Both are auxiliary enterprises, funded with money that was in place and expected to be in place through their respective services.

For example, residence hall rent goes toward paying for new residence halls.

The funding for dining plans pay for the dining facility on campus, which have also expanded over the last five years. Most recently, a Starbucks coffee shop opened to much fanfare in the university’s main library.

"We’re serving our customers," Waldrop said of residence hall expansions.

Improvements: Public relations director Bob Lowry pointed out that in recent years students have voiced concerns about aging dormitories, and developing new buildings was born out of an intention to allay those concerns.

Student dining: Meal plan costs have also risen each year along with tuition, which can be attributed to not just facilities, but food prices as well. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, beef alone has gone up 50 cents a pound over the last two years.

Maintenance: Costs are also going up at the campus, which celebrated 50 years in 2013.

"You can’t go very far without finding a hole in the ground," said Waldrop.

Multiple power outages in the Humanities and Life Sciences buildings especially have been reported over the past few years as well as elevator breakdowns and other infrastructure struggles as those elements age. Efforts resulting from lagging, a university initiative to improve electrical savings and sustainability, have looked at using energy-efficient lighting and many of the newer buildings are considered "green" facilities.

Sustainability, streamlining is key

Waldrop said that he frequently hears requests for more sustainability on campus, but that would also be expensive.

"I don’t want to do anything that diminishes the quality of education," he said. Waldrop said that he values sustainability and has enacted policy changes, such as the use of iPads at board meetings, which would save $1,000 sheets of paper as well as thousands of dollars in ink.

One area he said he hopes to not allocate any future funding toward is parking. "I hope we don’t get more parking," he said. "There’s parking on campus, it’s just not where they’d prefer it to be," said Waldrop of USA students.

Regardless of what the university has done and will continue to do, Waldrop and Lowry emphasized that dealing with less funding is here to stay.

Asked if he expected state funding to ever increase to pre-2008 levels, Waldrop said, "We can certainly be bothered but it’s not going to come back," said Waldrop of state funding.

Decreases in travel and equipment as well as a streamlining of processes all remain focuses of the current administration to help cut costs.

"Some things require six signatures and extra steps that don’t make sense," Waldrop said. "These things cost time, and time is valuable."

Student government president Danielle Watson said that she is aware of student concerns regarding tuition increases and recognized the need for open communication. "We do everything we can to express our thoughts to the administration about concerns that the students may have," Watson said.
Auburn University ranked in bottom 5 percent of nation for admitting low-income students

A new report from The Education Trust ranks Auburn University among the bottom 5 percent of colleges and universities nationally when it comes providing access to lower-income students.

The report, dubbed "Tough Love" by the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit, is part of an ongoing campaign to close achievement and opportunity gaps nationwide.

It does so by calling out institutions doing the worst jobs (1) providing access to low-income students, (2) ensuring students actually graduate, and (3) ensuring those who do graduate leave with a degree that pays off in the long run.

The Education Trust points out that roughly $180 billion in federal student aid and tax benefits are provided annually to colleges and universities with virtually no performance requirements attached.

According to the report, just 14 percent of Auburn's 2011 freshmen class were Pell grant recipients and just 13 percent were in 2012, the latest year available from the U.S. Department of Education.

In a statement, Auburn acknowledged it is working to improve the numbers through its ongoing strategic plan.

"We are just now wrapping up the first year of our plan implementation and should know numbers this fall, but preliminary information suggests that the number of Auburn students receiving Pell grants will increase by more than 250 in 2014-15," said university spokesman Mike Clardy.

Many of those making the list with Auburn have one thing in common. They are high performing institutions.

With enrollment capped at 25,000, Auburn's freshman class had the highest average ACT score in the state for a public college in the fall of 2013 with 50 percent of incoming students scoring between a 24 and a 30, according to the USDE.

Other colleges ranked among the bottom 5 percent for accepting Pell grant students included elites like Stanford University, Yale University, Georgetown University, Johns Hopkins University, Duke University, Dartmouth College, Princeton University and Cornell University.

While Auburn officials made no mention of it, The Education Trust report comes as the state struggles to address funding disparities between wealthy and poor school districts in its K-12 system.

See next page
A report presented to the Alabama State Board of Education this month noted a significant disparity between wealthy and poor school districts when it comes to per-pupil funding in the state's K-12 system.

That means children living in poorer school districts, who are more likely to come from low-income families, are also likely to have less money available for their educations.

Additionally, a 2012 report by the Alabama Commission on Higher Education showed nearly 5,000 Alabama college students lost their Pell grants that year due to changes in the federal program that provides college funding for low-income students.

Auburn was not the only Alabama school to make one The Education Trust's worst-performers lists.

Concordia College-Selma and ITT Technical Institute-Bessemer were both ranked among the bottom 5 percent in the nation when it comes to ensuring students graduate.

In 2011, CCS, which offers a Christian-based curriculum, had an overall graduation rate, on a four-year weighted average, of just 3.4 percent. In 2012, its graduation rate was 5.5 percent.

Likewise, ITT-Bessemer's overall graduation rate was 9.3 percent in 2011 and 14 percent in 2012, according to the report.

Both of those schools were also among the bottom 5 percent in the nation when it comes to student-loan default rates, which typically mean graduates did not earn enough money to repay their debts, as was Talladega College.

Talladega College's three-year cohort default rate in fiscal 2010, the latest year available, was 36.7 percent, according to the report. That was followed by CCS at 33 percent and ITT-Bessemer at 29.2 percent.

Officials at those schools did not return requests for comment before publication time.
Stillman program helps with transition to college

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Yazmine Green and Connor Eggleton came to the Stillman College campus this summer looking for a head start to college.

"I thought it would be good to prepare me mentally for college," Eggleton said.

The two are part of an inaugural class of students in Stillman's Accelerated Scholars program, a summer bridge program launched this year to help students transition from high school to the college classroom.

The first year of the program has 20 students participating in the summer session, said Mary Jane Krotzer, dean of Arts and Science.

Krotzer said the program was prepared to take about 30 but that some did not show up.

"It's a jump start for a student who needs a little help," Krotzer said.

The students who have been admitted to Stillman must be Pell eligible and apply for the program. They must write essays on how they think the bridge program will help them in college. A student's ACT score and grades are a consideration but not a key factor.

"We are looking for the fact that they know what the program is about," Krotzer said. "We did want to see a genuine interest to be here."

The summer program launched this year to help students make the transition from high school to college. "It's a jump start for a student who needs a little help," said professor Mary Jane Krotzer.

Eggleton, an 18-year-old from Dothan, learned about the program from his school counselor.

Green, 19, of Alabaster took a year off between college and high school and was looking for a way to prepare for classes in the fall.

"It's a lot of one-on-one," Green said.

Green, who plans to major in biology and theology, wants to use the degree as preparation for medical school and a career as a pediatrician.

Eggleton said he wants to major in microbiology.

The students have a range of ACT scores, those who traditionally would struggle with college curriculum and those who would likely be successful, Krotzer said.

The program was originally planned to focus on students who needed help adjusting to college but was broadened to include stronger students, she said. Krotzer said she

See STILLMAN | 3B
STILLMAN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

believes the mix of students will be beneficial to the group, raising the possibility that the stronger students would be able to help the ones who struggle.

The students are taking seven hours of courses, including math, English and a college experience orientation class required of all Stillman students. The classes are concentrated into a six-week summer semester that began May 26. The courses are about 90 minutes.

The courses are similar to what the students will experience in the fall, but the smaller class sizes offer more one-on-one attention.

The students also have weekly group sessions to discuss their experience and seminars on Wednesdays to discuss skills such as time management and goal-setting that will help them be successful.

"If they know what they want to do, then they are more likely to put forth the effort to be successful," Krotzer said.

The summer program aims to get the fledgling students thinking about their college and professional careers. Students will create posters mapping their plans through college to their careers, Krotzer said. The posters will be displayed as part of a ceremony marking the end of the summer program.

Stillman hopes to use data gathered from the upcoming year on the first bunch of students though the program to measure success and use the information to apply for grant funding to support and expand the program.

"The goal is now to see if it's successful, to see if the students do better," Krotzer said.

Reach Ed Enoch at ed.enoch@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0209.
First lady Michelle Obama speaks with, from left, Megan Parker, Ashley Lovett and Autumnn Logan at the 11th Annual National Summer Learning Day event at the Education Department in Washington on Friday. Organized by the National Summer Learning Association, the program encourages youth to participate in learning opportunities to continue their education during summer. The three are part of the Upward Bound program at the Fayette campus of Bevill State Community College.
COLLEGE FOOTBALL:
MID-MAJORS LIKE SOUTH ALABAMA AND UA&B SEE AUTONOMY COMING AND DON'T WANT TO BE LEFT ON THE SIDELINE.

Mike Herndon  mherndon@al.com
The NCAA’s biggest conferences — dubbed the Power 5 — have made no secret they want more autonomy in crafting and streamlining rules.

What might be surprising is how many of those outside the Power 5 believe they should get it.

"I think all of us agree that the top-five conference teams ought to have autonomy in decision-making," said Akron football coach Terry Bowden.

"I can’t imagine schools that don’t play football or don’t have a commitment to football having an equal vote as teams that do."

Mike Slive can’t either. The SEC commissioner has advocated for the last several years for such things as cost-of-attendance stipends and easing of rules on contact with agents. If the five major conferences — SEC, Big 12, Big Ten, ACC, Pac-12 — are not given Division I autonomy to create these things for itself, Slive has proposed they break off into a separate division within the NCAA, a Division IV.

Mid-major coaches and athletics directors like Bowden and South Alabama Athletics Director Joel Erdmann want to keep that split from happening.

"I don’t think anybody wants the model to change," Erdmann said. "But there is a select number of schools and conferences that with their revenue streams want to do things a little differently. Maybe they should be allowed to do that. Would it be unfair to not allow them to do that? You can look at it from that point of view."

It is not a viewpoint that all those at mid-majors share. After presidents of the Pac-12 schools released a letter pushing their peers to support autonomy in matters such as stipends, ongoing medical coverage, toughened APR requirements and relaxed rules on transfers and contact with agents, Boise State president Bob Kustra vowed to fight any push for autonomy.

"We’re fighting those reforms, and the Mountain West is fighting those reforms, because we think they’re excessive," Kustra told the Idaho Statesman last month. "I have no doubt that the Big Ten and the SEC are designing these reforms to try to leave some people behind. This is about leaving the Boise States behind and making sure the Alabamas and Tenenneses and whoever they are can march right along."

Both Bowden, who coached at Auburn from 1993 to 1998, and Erdmann, USA’s AD since July 2009, said the gap between major-conference schools and mid-major programs is already so wide that any further distancing is largely irrelevant.

Erdmann noted that most mid-majors aren’t consistently competing for prospects with SEC and other Power 5 schools anyway, and added that a bigger issue for autonomy may be the divide between the big programs and those that produce less revenue within the Power 5 conferences.

Bowden said the more important consideration for the mid-majors is maintaining a place on Power 5 schedules.

"Our bigger concern is let’s make sure they have the autonomy they need so we’re still a part of their equation, that we’re a part of their schedules, that we’re a part of the top level of football," Bowden said. "You don’t want autonomy to get to the point where they have to separate and now we’re not playing each other, because we benefit."

"We play one game in a stadium that’s going to be over 100,000 and get $1 million every year from somebody. We play Penn State this year, we played Michigan last year, Ohio State the year before. So there is a vested interest to all of us at the mid-major level in making sure that other smaller universities don’t unwisely put handcuffs on those five conferences and conference schools that need to look at what’s best for their student-athletes."

Erdmann noted a split wouldn’t necessarily prohibit Power 5 schools from playing mid-majors, much like separate divisions don’t keep them from playing FCS schools now, although some schools such as Florida have decided to stop scheduling FCS opponents.

And there are certain issues among the laundry list of items raised by the Power 5 and the Pac-12 presidents that do cause concern to the mid-majors. UAB football coach Bill Clark said any change to the 85-scholarship limit in football would negatively affect the balance in the sport, and he does have reservations about further inequity between the richer programs and those on the lower end of the scale.

"It’s going to come down to dollars and cents," he said. "I think every one of those schools have so much TV revenue, it’s going to really make a huge difference between us and them. And I don’t know that we’re competing against all the top-tier programs in every league, but those teams that fall in the lower tier, we sure are."
Erdmann said he's concerned about the relaxing of transfer rules and whether it would apply only to transfers within the Power 5 conferences or all transfers. "I understand the intent of allowing student-athletes to transfer at will without penalty, but I think there needs to be a lot of discussion about that," Erdmann said. "What is the reason for this and what are the possible implications and consequences?"

"It's something that still goes back to how are we going to define that? Is it purely: Tommy and Sally can be at Institution A on May 15 and on August 1 they can walk on to another campus regardless and be immediately eligible, immediately on scholarship? And on January 1, they can leave again and go to a third institution? I think until all those proposed areas of autonomy are really better defined, it's hard to judge them."

Troy football coach Larry Blakeney said he's concerned about competitive imbalance in general. A split would not be "healthy for college football," he said, adding that such a scenario could force the other FBS schools to look at some sort of alliance on their own. But he said autonomy may not be much better.

"You've got them and everybody else would be sort of a bottom-feeder," Blakeney said of the Power 5. "I don't think we can stop them from doing whatever they want. ... What I really hope is that we can continue to operate in the same fashion that we've been operating."

From Erdmann's point of view, that may wishful thinking. Some measure of autonomy for the Power 5, he said, is inevitable. With more specific proposals expected by August or September to potentially be reviewed at the NCAA convention in January, the key for mid-majors may be finding some middle ground with which they can live.

"There is going to be a point in time in the not-too-distant future where that degree of autonomy is going to exist," Erdmann said. "I'm not speaking on behalf of anyone but myself here, but I think we're at a point where anything but compromise is not going to be acceptable."

"I think in any situation at any given time, moderation is the best measure. Wherever that pendulum lands, it's generally best if it's not too far one direction or the other. It's going to be interesting."
What's the priciest ticket for 2014?

Mike Herndon  mherndon@al.com

The annual Iron Bowl grudge match between Alabama and Auburn may be the top rivalry in college athletics, but it won't be the priciest ticket this fall, according to an NBC Sports review of average ticket prices on TiqIQ.

In fact, it's not even the priciest ticket to a game involving either Alabama or Auburn.

The most expensive college football ticket in the country, according to the report, is for the Sept. 13 game between Texas and UCLA at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, which is going for an average of $744.

Second is the Ohio State–Michigan game in Columbus ($727) and third is the Alabama–LSU game in Baton Rouge ($639).

The most expensive matchup involving Auburn on the list is the Georgia game in Athens, which is ninth ($468). Just behind it at No. 10 is the Iron Bowl in Tuscaloosa, with an average ticket price of $454.

TOP TEN TICKET PRICES:

With average price listed first and cheapest ticket second

1. Texas–UCLA (Arlington, Texas): $770/$144
2. Ohio State–Michigan (Columbus, Ohio): $727/$372
3. LSU–Alabama (Baton Rouge, La.): $639/$317
4. Texas–Oklahoma (Dallas, Texas): $597/$251
5. Texas A&M–Arkansas (Arlington, Texas): $586/$159
6. Notre Dame–Michigan (South Bend, Ind.): $536/$286
7. Oklahoma State–Florida State (Arlington, Texas): $496/31
8. Georgia–Clemson (Athen, Ga.): $472/$248
9. Georgia–Auburn (Athen, Ga.): $468/$203
10. Alabama–Auburn (Tuscaloosa, Ala.): $454/$298

Note: Three other Alabama games landed in the top 20: the West Virginia game in Atlanta ($371 average), the Tennessee game in Knoxville ($362) and the Florida game in Tuscaloosa ($343). Prices, of course, will likely rise or fall depending on the success of the respective teams and whether they remain in the hunt for the College Football Playoff.

Bottom line: If you're looking for tickets for any of these games, hopefully you've already started saving up.
SYLVESTER CROOM: TITANS RB COACH REFLECTS ON TIME AT MSU AND ALABAMA.

Mark Helm mhelm@al.com

Sylvester Croom is excited about the upcoming season as running backs coach with the Tennessee Titans, has no regrets about his time at Mississippi State and remains loyal to his alma mater in Tuscaloosa.

"Croom, who was a guest on a Mobile talk show Thursday, was promoting Saturday's RiP the Runway Fashion & Hair Show at the USA Mitchell Center in Mobile. The conversation with Croom quickly turned to football.

"Croom is my head coach for the last time, I was a head coach and he's a head coach," Croom explained. "I feel like I would get one shot, and I got my one shot. I'm enjoying what I am doing right now."

The one chance was in 2004, when Croom became the first African-American head coach in the SEC.

"Croom compiled a 21-38 record in five years at Mississippi State, earning upsets over Florida, Alabama and Auburn during his career. He was named SEC Coach of the Year in 2007. However, a day after the Bulldogs lost to Ole Miss 45-0, he was asked to resign."

"I really enjoyed it," Croom said of his time in Starkville. "We were on schedule, in my mind, and what I planned to do when I got there and the way we went about doing things."

"The last class was the one we felt was going to put us over the hump. We were on track, we felt, to do some things. We regret that we didn't get a chance to finish that."

He emphasized he had no regrets, and understood the significance of his hiring in Starkville.

"I didn't feel like anybody else was putting pressure on me," Croom said of being the first black coach in the league. "There was some I put on myself. As much as anything it was how we conducted everything, how I conducted everything because, again, whether it was fair or not, I felt like we were the same."

"I did it every day, everything we did could possibly affect opportunities for other African-American coaches."

But when it comes to SEC football, its dear Croom's heart is still in Tuscaloosa. It was under coach Paul 'Bear' Bryant, Croom was a part of three SEC titles from 1972 to 1974 and a national title in 1973."

"SEC football means a great deal to me," Croom explained. "Having played at Alabama is a big part of my life. When you play at Alabama, that's one of the great things about playing there, you do feel you are a part of a family, like you are a part of something special."

As far as the upcoming season, quite simply, no one does it better than Alabama coach Nick Saban, according to Croom.

"I think coach Saban, it's very obvious what he's done there, is going to stand the test of time as doing one of the greatest jobs and he's one of the greatest coaches in the history of college football."

"I don't think there's any question about that. He sets a very high standard there for the University of Alabama. I think that standard will always be there for years to come."

Croom, 59, says there is only one thing missing from his career: a Super Bowl ring.

"That's what I am chasing," Croom said. "I want that ring. When I get that, I'm done."

Sylvester Croom
U.S. Supreme Court rules for whistleblower in Alabama case

Sam Hananel • Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The First Amendment protects public employees from job retaliation when they are called to testify in court about official corruption, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled Thursday in a case that arose from Alabama's community college scandal.

The justices decided unanimously in favor of Edward Lane, a former Alabama community college official who says he was fired after testifying at the criminal fraud trial of former state Rep. Sue Schmitz. Lower courts had ruled against Lane, finding that he was testifying as a college employee, not as a citizen.

Thursday’s 9-0 decision cheered whistleblower advocates, who said it could encourage more government workers to cooperate with prosecutors in public fraud cases without fear of losing their livelihoods.

For Lane, it was only a partial victory. The high court also ruled that Central Alabama Community College’s former president, Steve Franks, is immune from damages under laws shielding public officials from lawsuits in their official capacity.

Writing for the court, Justice Sonia Sotomayor said Lane’s testimony was constitutionally protected because he was speaking as a citizen on a matter of public concern, even if it covered facts he learned at work.

In past cases, the court has said that public employees generally do not have free-speech rights when they discuss matters learned at their jobs. But Sotomayor said sworn testimony in judicial proceedings “is a quintessential example of speech as a citizen for a simple reason: Anyone who testifies in court bears an obligation, to the court and society at large, to tell the truth.”

Sotomayor said the court was not addressing whether the ruling would apply to public workers, such as police officers or crime investigators, who routinely testify in court.

“This ruling gives a green light to all public employees who have information concerning official corruption and fraud and want to expose these crimes,” said Stephen Kohn, executive director of the National Whistleblower Center. He predicted the decision would have a “wide impact” on investigations of securities, banking and tax fraud.

Lane’s claim

Lane was director of a college youth program at Central Alabama Community College in 2006 when he discovered that Schmitz, then a state lawmaker, was on the payroll but not showing up for work. Lane fired Schmitz despite warnings that doing so could jeopardize his own job.

Federal prosecutors began investigating Schmitz, and Lane was later called to testify before a federal grand jury and under subpoena at Schmitz’s two criminal fraud trials. Lane claimed he was fired in retaliation and sued Franks, the former college president, as well as the college’s current president, Susan Burrow.

Andrew Brasher, solicitor general in Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange’s office, said the case now returns to a lower court for review of Lane’s request to be reinstated.

Brasher said the state will argue that Lane can’t win his claim because the position no longer exists and that Lane was fired because his program ran out of money, not because of his testimony in the public corruption trial.
U.S. high court: Whistleblower’s testimony is protected

Ruling in case of Alabama two-year college official favors public employees

By Sam Hananel
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON | The First Amendment protects public employees from job retaliation when they are called to testify in court about official corruption, the Supreme Court ruled Thursday.

The unanimous decision cheered whistleblower advocates, who said it could encourage more government workers to cooperate with prosecutors in public fraud cases without fear of losing their livelihoods.

The justices decided in favor of Edward Lane, a former Alabama community college official who says he was fired after testifying at the criminal fraud trial of a state lawmaker. Lower courts had ruled against Lane, finding that he was testifying as a college employee, not as a citizen.

But Lane won only a partial victory.
RULING
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In past cases, the court has said that public employees generally do not have free-speech rights when they discuss matters learned at their jobs. But Sotomayor said sworn testimony in judicial proceedings "is a quintessential example of speech as a citizen for a simple reason: Anyone who testifies in court bears an obligation, to the court and society at large, to tell the truth."

Sotomayor was careful to note that Lane's job responsibilities did not include testifying in court proceedings. She said the court was not addressing whether the ruling would apply to other public workers, such as police officers or crime investigators, who routinely testify in court.

"This ruling gives a green light to all public employees who have information concerning official corruption and fraud and want to expose these crimes," said Stephen Kohn, Executive Director of the National Whistleblower Center. He predicted the decision would have a "wide impact" on investigations of securities, banking and tax fraud.

One of Lane's attorneys, John Saxon of Birmingham, Ala., said, "This is a landmark First Amendment case. We rarely see a unanimous Supreme Court decision, and we saw one here." Lane was director of a college youth program at Central Alabama Community College in 2006 when he discovered that a state lawmaker, Sue Schmitz, was on the payroll but not showing up for work. Lane fired Schmitz despite warnings that doing so could jeopardize his own job.

Federal prosecutors began investigating Schmitz, and Lane was later called to testify before a federal grand jury and under subpoena at Schmitz's two criminal fraud trials. Lane claimed he was fired in retaliation and sued Steve Franks, the former college president, as well as the college's current president, Susan Burrow.

Lane lost at the trial court and before the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. The appeals court also found that Franks was shielded from liability because he was acting as a public official.

The Supreme Court agreed that Franks was entitled to immunity because, under the 11th Circuit's opinions at the time Lane was fired, it wasn't yet clear that public employees who testified in court had First Amendment protection. The court remanded the case for further consideration of the claims against Burrow.

Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange, who argued the case before the Supreme Court, said, "The court's decision properly recognizes that a public employee has the right to testify in a public corruption case but that the supervisor who fired this particular employee should not be held personally liable for damages."

Andrew Brasher, solicitor general in the attorney general's office, said the state will argue Lane can't win his claim against Burrow because state employees have immunity, the position no longer exists and he was fired because his program ran out of money, not because of his testimony in the public corruption trial.

The case is Lane v. Franks, 13-483.
The Reality of Student Debt Is Different From the Clichés

The deeply indebted college graduate has become a stock character in the national conversation: the art history major with $50,000 in debt, the underemployed barista with $75,000, the struggling poet with $100,000.

The anecdotes have created the impression that such high levels of student debt are typical. But they’re not. They are outliers, and they’re warping our understanding of bigger economic problems.

In fact, the share of income that young adults are devoting to loan repayment has remained fairly steady over the last two decades, according to data the Brookings Institutions is releasing on Tuesday. Only 7 percent of young-adult households with education debt have $50,000 or more of it. By contrast, 58 percent of such households have less than $10,000 in debt, and an additional 18 percent have between $10,000 and $20,000.

“We are certainly not arguing that the state of the American economy and the higher education system is just great,” Matthew Chingos, a Brookings fellow and one of the authors of the new analysis, told me. “But we do think that the data undermine the prevailing sky-is-falling-type narrative around student debt.”

The misperceptions matter because they distract us from the real trouble with our higher education system. It’s not the graduates of expensive colleges who are struggling to get started on a career. Such graduates make for good stories (and they tend to involve the peer group of journalists), but history suggests that most of them will do just fine.

The vastly bigger problem is the hundreds of thousands of people who emerge from college with a modest amount of debt yet no degree. For them, college is akin to a house that they had to make the down payment on but can’t live in. In a cost-benefit calculation, they get only the cost. And they are far, far more numerous than bachelor’s degree holders with huge debt burdens. The solutions to the dropout crisis have some overlap with the solutions to the so-called student-debt crisis: more accountability for colleges. For the most part, though, the two issues are different — and require different answers. Lifting the nation’s college graduation rate depends on better, more cost-effective education, rather than merely cheaper education.

I realize that the stories of student debt are so common and visceral that many readers will view the Brookings argument with some skepticism. So let me walk through it.

The first thing to acknowledge is that student debt has risen over the last two decades. In 2010, 36 percent of households with people between the ages of 20 and 40 had education debt, up from 14 percent in 1989. The median amount of debt — among those with debt — more than doubled, to $8,500 from $3,517, after adjusting for inflation.

Some of the increase stems from the encouraging fact that more people are going to college. Contrary to popular belief, average tuition at private (nonprofit) colleges has not increased any faster than overall inflation over the last decade, once financial aid is taken into account,

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according to College Board data. Well-off students are paying more, but many middle- and low-income students are not.

At public colleges, however, tuition really has increased. Average net tuition and fees have risen more than 50 percent over the last decade, to $3,120 for in-state students. The recent cuts to higher-education budgets in some states, like Pennsylvania, play a role.

But even with tuition rising, several other factors have helped hold down debt burdens. The incomes of college graduates have grown since the early 1990s. And the repayment time for many loans has become longer. This combination creates perhaps the most surprising fact from the Brookings data:

The share of income that a typical student debtor has to devote to loan payments is only marginally higher than it was in the early 1990s — and somewhat lower than it was in late 1990s. It was 3.5 percent in 1992, 4.3 percent in 1998 and 4 percent in 2010. Maybe even more surprisingly, the burden for the people with the most debt is significantly lower today than two decades ago. Someone at the 90th percentile of debt had to devote 15 percent of her income to repayment in 2010, down from 20 percent in 1992.

All of which is to say that student debt is indeed a problem for some young people today, but that it’s not a new phenomenon. For most, the returns on a college education have more than kept pace with the cost.

What explains the widely held notion to the contrary? I think it stems in large part from the fact that Americans are legitimately frustrated about the economy’s performance over the last 15 years. But when you start looking at the evidence that blames student debt, it can be flimsy.

For example, recent research from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York suggested that student loans were keeping some young adults from buying homes. But Beth Akers, one of the authors of the Brookings analysis, notes that the Fed’s data stretches back only to 2003. The pattern may well be real — and have existed for decades.

“The evidence,” Ms. Akers says, “doesn’t support the notion that student loan debt is creating a drag on the economy.”

She carefully notes that more research might ultimately turn up such evidence, given that student debt has risen. For now, though, the anxiety about student debt has a lot in common with the scare stories that have historically accompanied an expansion of credit to the masses. The reality is that debt allows the middle class and poor to afford many staples of a good life, be it a house, a car or an education. Unlike houses or cars, education at least brings a healthy financial return.

With all this being said, the Brookings paper does contain a true cause for concern: “Among households with some college but no bachelor’s degree, the incidence of debt increased from 11 to 41 percent.” The average amount of debt among this group also more than doubled over the last two decades. Some members of the group are thriving community-college graduates, but more are college dropouts.

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Those dropouts point to some of the big flaws that our higher-education system does have. Many colleges graduate fewer than half of the students they enroll — and resist policy makers’ attempts to hold them accountable for their results. Some public universities devote much of their financial aid to students who do not need it most, creating hardship for others. And recent state budget cuts have caused painful tuition increases on many campuses.

If you want to argue that American universities charge too much money for too little education, you can make a pretty good case. But the people paying the real price for those failings aren’t the ones who fit the clichés.