

# Maybe our university education should cost nothing

The \$20,000 tuition has gotten too high.

Think about \$20,000, next year's approximate tuition rate for those with IBM ThinkPads. Think about paying it every year for four years. It's not much in relation to, say, the federal budget deficit. But for those of average means, we are talking about serious *pecunia* here.

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It is easy to blame the media, parents, the government, whomever and whatever for the supposed consumer mentality among today's students.

But those who do miss a rather simple and obvious point: The fact is that anybody paying \$20,000 four times in four years expects to get benefits that bear some relation to that cost. If that's a "consumer mentality," it's certainly not a new one. All people, including impressionable 18-year-olds and their parents, expect things back in some form when they shell out large amounts of cash. And, if you think that one way or another you will be able to afford \$20,000 tuition bills, it is easy to be impressed by expensive schools like this one. After all, everybody likes the amenities we get for our \$20,000.

Let me reemphasize this: \$20,000 a year for four years is a lot of money. It's two-thirds of median income. It's like buying a new car every year without trading in the old one. And here we are, paying that \$20,000 a year, and not only receiving no new cars at all, but not even getting decent parking.

So, aside from new cars, what do people

expect for \$20,000 a year? Well, education, of course, which is historically the reason for the university's existence. But for that kind of dough, people clearly want more. For one thing, they expect their education delivered the way they want it. Some like to work for it, while others prefer that it be handed to them.

They also want the chance to party on the weekends and consume alcohol. They want extracurricular activities and intramural sports. Tickets to basketball games. A pretty campus. Computers. Fitness machines and a weight room. On-campus job interviews with major corporations, and a good shot at landing a lucrative position that will, throughout their lives, pay them back that \$20,000 a year many times over. You get the idea.

So now a fancy new apartment-style residence hall is being constructed at the north end of campus. I can already hear the sarcastic comments from people about how students want to live in a country

club. Has it ever occurred to these people that, if you charge \$20,000, people expect a country club? Hell, most country clubs don't charge nearly what this university does, and they even let you use the golf course.

It seems to me that we really started rolling in amenities when tuition topped the \$10,000 mark. So maybe an education alone here is worth about that much.

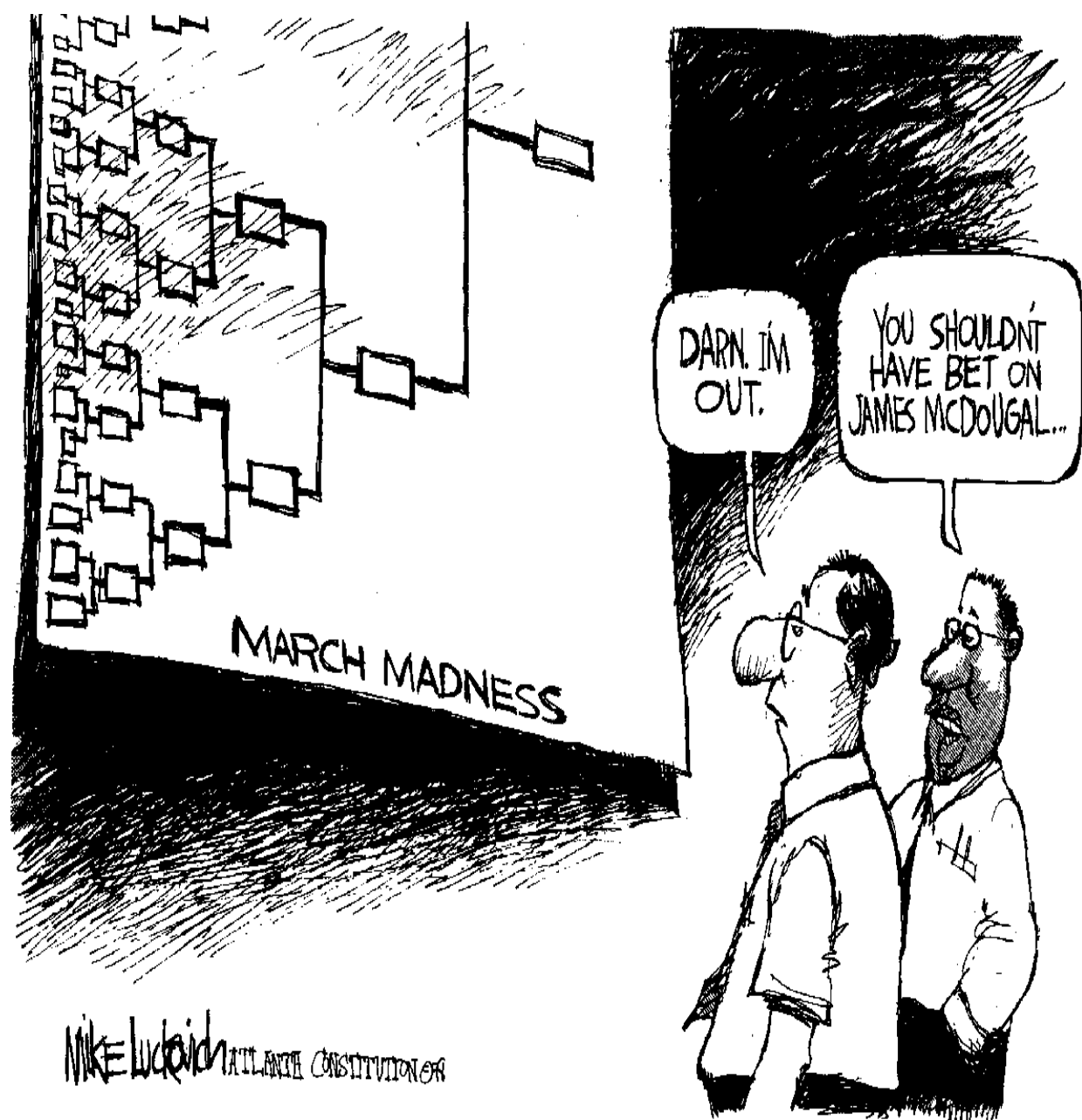
Now, I know this is pure fantasy, but imagine for a moment if tuition were \$0 or close to it. I am certain that students would act differently if virtually all of their bills were paid by alumni and the university's endowment.

Imagine the sense of loyalty to a college felt by a student — not a special, sought-after, scholarship student, but a regular student — who was enabled by that college to go there for far less than what the person felt the education was worth. Imagine the sense of obligation he or she would feel to take the maximum possible

advantage of the college's offerings. Imagine how much money and time the person would give back to the university throughout his or her life.

Maybe it's not total fantasy. That used to happen — right here. In 1940, tuition was something like \$50, and it didn't really begin its journey to the Oort cloud until the 1970s. Look at how loyal our alumni from that era are, and how much they have given back, and how our alumni giving rate is practically the highest in the nation.

But now we insist on charging \$20,000. The former provost said a few years back that he thought tuition, which was then a more modest \$12,000 or so, was lower than it should be. I don't know if it's high enough for him yet — we still trail Duke University by 10 grand. And yes, I know that tuition could not somehow be lowered to nothing. But wow, \$20,000 — let's at least resolve to think a little bit about what that price means.



## When it comes to beauty, the Quad is no Española

The man-made look of the campus is an ugly sight.

I often get into trouble when telling people what I really think. It is a difficult curse, but one I can live with. Recently, a fellow student was rather disturbed at my lack of appreciation for campus beauty. Specifically, he was taken aback when I did not think that the Quad was particularly beautiful. "But the grass is so green!" he protested. Yes, the grass is green, but with respect to natural

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beauty the Quad is ugly. Ugly? Well, for some reason urban areas (such as our campus) seem somewhat repulsive to me. Until recently the reason for my disgust has eluded me. To discover the reason I had to examine my different types of outdoor experiences. Naturally, I will consider extremes here.

The Quad will count as the man-altered extreme, while the Island Española off the coast of Ecuador will serve as the most pristine example. I visited Española on a research trip this summer with David Anderson, an associate professor of biology. In addition to the opportunity for research, I was able to live for two weeks on an island that had never been permanently settled by humans.

In my personal experience, the two greatest extremes on Earth are the island Española and the Quad lawn. The island is virtually untouched by any human hand.

Tens of thousands of seabirds can grow and breed without man-made obstructions. Vegetation is intact

with multiple layers of low-growth ground plants and taller shrubs. There are no sources of chemical contamination or man-made carcinogens on the island. The most notable absence of artificial material is concrete.

On the other hand, the Quad lawn represents the ultimate domination of man over nature. The lawn is essentially a monotaxonic culture enclosed within concrete walkways and foundations. This single-species cultivation is maintained by mechanical (mowing) and chemical means.

There is a famous statement in physics that "Nature abhors a vacuum." A similar statement can be made for biology: "Nature abhors monotony." If human controls of the lawn ceased, natural processes would quickly reestablish a diversity of grasses and perhaps in time tree species. Of course, there are trees in lawns, but those too are there in geometric order as per man's will.

And so everywhere outdoors I see a continuum of natural beauty from the golf course to areas like Española in which the only designing is by the ever personified Nature.

The final reason for my disdain for the lawn is that it invokes a feeling of resentment for the destruction of natural places in the world. The more evidence of human alteration, the less natural a place seems.

As a place loses its natural character, it naturally (!) loses its potential for natural beauty.

Earlier in this column it might have seemed that I find the campus ugly. This is true only with respect to my assessment of the campus lacking natural beauty. The campus no doubt contains architectural beauty, but this is not the kind of beauty which I personally desire.

If you are of a similar persuasion (preferring natural areas over the other), then you might want to consider how you look at our urban surroundings. Every square foot of concrete and grass used to be something with natural beauty.

## Student body's hands are tied in judicial reform vote

A no vote shows apathy, a yes vote shuts out further input.

The Student Government referendum on judicial reform deceptively appears to be a fairly straightforward issue. We, the students of this university, believe that the current judicial system needs to be reformed; this has been the resounding cry from

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every corner of campus. We have been bombarded by stories of Honor Council and Judicial Board members who carry multiple honor and judicial violations. We have bitterly complained that the current system is inconsistent, some days too lenient, other days too harsh. We have demanded judicial reform and broad, sweeping change of the system, and SG has answered with the March 24 referendum.

SG is offering us the chance to vote on a broad outline for a new judicial branch. I can find no flaws in the referendum itself. Rather, I am bitterly complaining about what is not in it. The great school-wide debate over judicial reform is not over the broad outline on which we shall vote, but rather in the details of the grand scheme.

Monday, on WAKE TV's *Voice of the Deacons*, numerous callers voiced their disdain over "details"

of judicial reform such as those which remove a student's right to choose his "lawyer" in a judicial hearing and "details" that allow a small board of appointed students and unknown faculty to deny students the right to run for office in a reformed judicial system.

These details are not minor issues that should be brushed aside quickly and quietly; they are what is most important. They are the real issues of contention — the subtle nuances of reform which affect every student at the university — but they are not on the ballot March 24.

Should we hand over our right to select our judges to an invisible censoring board? Should we give up our right to choose a "lawyer" to represent us? These are the questions that we should be voting about, but they will never be on any ballot. If we vote yes to this referendum, the issues that really matter will be decided as SG "statutes," adopted in a some one-hour meeting on some other Tuesday without the student body's consent.

The only campus-wide consensus that exists about judicial reform is that there is no true consensus. While our elected legislature is best suited to decide the majority of the mundane aspects of SG, an issue as important as this judicial reform needs to be considered before the entire student body. The referendum before us is of almost no importance compared to the final, fully "detailed" version which will be approved without most of having the chance to vote on it. We cannot allow this! I asked to see SG's fully "detailed" version of

judicial reform, only to be told that it is "confidential." This is ridiculous! The most important changes at the university in the last 50 years are occurring, and we are not only forbidden to vote on them, we are forbidden to see them?

The great irony is that our hands are tied. SG insists that if we don't all vote yes, the administration will not allow us to contribute to future important issues. For if we don't all vote, we will be branded apathetic, and if we vote no, then we will be seen as irrelevant obstructionists. So, my friends, we must vote yes?

The mystery is how we came to be so trapped. This referendum is our first chance in years to meaningfully voice our opinion, but our voice, our vote, is irrelevant. The truth is that this vote has been reduced to a political game.

Some time ago, someone in SG decided that our opinion wasn't quite as valuable as those of advisers and administration, that we could not be educated well enough to be worth bothering. Someone decided that our vote was just a gimmick, to be manipulated and used as needed. Someone traded their idealism for efficiency, and now our "voice" speaks without the minds that supposedly guide it. The cynicism that pervades the world has seeped into the university. So, March 24 I will vote no, conceding the "details" to someone else with the tentative hope that I have chosen the lesser of three evils.

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