Rivier modeling accountability

One of the lessons everyone hopes young people learn when they go off to college is how to be more accountable for their actions.

The world is just a better place when people make good choices and take responsibility for their actions.

It's not like the world needs less accountability, after all.

People and the institutions that make up our social fabric have become far too quick to deflect responsibility and assign blame and much too unwilling to look in the mirror for the causes of their problems.

Some of that dynamic can be seen playing out in the field of higher education, where students leave school saddled with thousands of dollars in debt from student loans.

New Hampshire could be the poster child for the student-debt issue. The state's public colleges receive less taxpayer support, per capita, than any other state, while the in-state tuition rate is the highest in the nation. Our students graduate with as much debt load as any state in the country.

Is it any wonder the state is losing many of its young people, who, when they do the math, find there are better tuition deals to be had attending schools out of state?

College tuitions have nearly quadrupled in the past 35 years, and a lot of that money has gone to fund an academic infrastructure that is increasingly heavy on administrators who bemoan the lack of taxpayer support while simultaneously raking in six-figure salaries. It has a rather talking-with-your-mouth-full feel to it.

Perhaps it wouldn't be so bad if today's college graduates were leaving campuses and jumping straight into well-paying jobs that allow them to cover the cost of the debt they incurred, but that's not happening, either.

There's a lot of blame to go around for the mess our higher-education system is in, but at least one local college is willing to look in the mirror and hold itself accountable.

Rivier University in Nashua last month announced a wide-ranging promise to future graduates that they will find a job soon after graduation or the school will pay off some of their student loans.

"We know families and college prep students want values and academic vigor, but they also want a pathway to enter the workforce of the 21st century," Rivier University President Sister Paula Marie Buley said.

The Employment Promise Program guarantees employment for Rivier students within nine months of graduation or the school will either cover federally subsidized students loan payments for up to a year or offer up to six free master's degree courses.

What would qualify as a "job" under the River program? Well, the definition is broad, but to
What would qualify as a "job" under the River program? Well, the definition is broad, but to their credit, officials didn't try to finesse their expectations - either of their graduates or themselves.

"It would be fair to say employment at a baccalaureate level," Buley said.

It's a refreshing approach. By agreeing to a financial stake in the outcome of its graduates, Rivier is modeling an outcome-based accountability that is far too rare in this day and age. The school even has some skin in the game. It would be good if more institutions followed suit.

© 2014, The Telegraph, Nashua, New Hampshire