

## **Youth's Challenges**

Today's young adults face many challenges revolving around education and school-related decisions. Below are just some of the difficult issues students and parents wrestle with during adolescence:

- Getting on a sound academic track
- Choosing the right schools
- Paying for college
- Doing well on standardized tests
- Figuring out suitable career paths
- Settling on a meaningful major or course of study
- Assembling extracurricular activities that can effectively promote life goals

As Tamara Draut describes in "*Strapped: Why America's 20-and 30-Somethings Can't Get Ahead*," students and parents today are indeed presented with significantly greater challenges on these matters than was the case a generation ago. This especially includes the rising cost of education and the record debt that families and their kids seem to be incurring before their child even embarks on an initial career path. This also includes the costs associated with securing a job, gaining a foothold in the workforce, and the corresponding desire for finding affordable housing and establishing a measure of independence.

Draut indicates that costs for higher education continue to rise. In the mid '70s, the average annual cost of attending a *private* college was \$12,837. On the other hand, the current annual average cost of attending a *public* college is \$11,354. In other words, college costs for a public education today parallels the cost of a private college education a generation ago. Annual tuition at four year private colleges today now stands at approximately \$27,000.

What students make of their educational experiences also will likely have important consequences for our country's future competitiveness. For example, Tom Friedman suggests in "The World is Flat" that youth's economic interests may be best served by taking up Mandarin Chinese as a second language in order to compete more favorably in the global marketplace. Let's take a look at some other educational factoids:

Only 63 percent of students entering four-year colleges gain their degree within six years. Various factors influence the pace with which students are able to make their way through school and gain closure on their degree. Changing majors, the need to work to offset expenses and health setbacks can easily delay completion of one's degree. A student may need to "stop out" in order to address pressing non-academic matters. After leaving school, some students sadly never return to finish. Student retention is becoming an increasing concern among many institutions of higher learning.

Again, according to Draut, traditional markers associated with the transition from adolescence to adulthood have customarily included the completion of school, leaving home, becoming financially independent, getting married, setting up a residence, and starting a family. Back in the 1960s, approximately 70 percent of Americans age 30 had completed this transitional cycle. By the year 2000, only 38 percent of Americans age 30 had done so.

For young adults, making good decisions and getting started on the right foot is more important than ever. Studies show that, generally speaking, the more education one obtains, the higher the earning power. Gaining post-secondary schooling and training still represents a smart move. However, families today also need to address career and college selection with considerable care. Counselors at JFVS can help students and parents strategically plan to make effective educational and schooling decisions. These important decisions will help maximize students' career and life potential.

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