

The Washington Post

By **DANIEL BURNETT** | February 27, 2012

In search of higher education's Best Picture

Who should win the real Academy Awards?

Like the actors of Hollywood, our higher education system isn't perfect. (I'm talking to you, Lindsay Lohan!) Students are graduating with major gaps in their knowledge, the worst job prospects since World War II and an average of more than \$25,000 in debt.

There are still bright spots—and we at the American Council of Trustees and Alumni are pleased to showcase some shining stars and undiscovered talent in our higher education system. No tuxedo required.

Best Director

Michael Crow, president of Arizona State University, exemplifies the modern innovator. With Crow at the helm, ASU cut waste and consolidated redundant courses, all while increasing the number of low income freshmen by nearly tenfold. And on Friday, he announced a proposal to freeze tuition costs next year instead of increasing them. Crow and his able provost, Elizabeth Capaldi, have overseen an academic reorganization that improves teaching and saves \$12 million per year.

Best Actor

It's not always easy to be a trustee—tasked with making tough decisions and forging an academic path amidst the fiscal wilderness. But Karl Turner, a trustee at the University of Maine System, gets the prize. He led the effort to freeze tuition increases that had plagued the state's institutions for decades. Because of his leadership, students at the University of Maine don't have to shoulder another tuition increase for the first time in 25 years. Bravo, Mr. Turner!

Best Value

The University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma offers an exemplary core curriculum while main-

taining low tuition costs. USAO was one of only 19 schools to garner an "A" rating in the What Will They Learn? (www.whatwilltheylearn.com) study, which rates institutions based on the number of core classes they require—composition, literature, foreign language, American government/history, economics, math and science. It's also noteworthy that the school offers a solid education for one of the lowest prices in the nation: well under \$4,000.

Best Cast

Forget the stereotypes—higher education in Georgia is stronger than ever. All public institutions in Georgia require students to take a foundational course in American history or government, a requirement missing in 80 percent of schools nationwide. The University of Georgia is the standout flagship in ACTA's study, and the 29 institutions in the Peach State all require at least three or more core courses of their students, putting them ahead of the pack.

Best Foreign Language Film

Bonjour! Hola! Shalom! Any way you say it, knowing a foreign language is central to multicultural understanding and essential in our globalized society. St. John's College requires students to learn both classical Greek and French up to the intermediate level. C'est si bon!

Best Historical Drama

You've probably never heard of the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain, but just a few miles away sits Kennesaw State University. The school takes historical and civic knowledge seriously, requiring both a course on American history and a course on government in a global perspective. At this institution, students examine the roles of the Georgia state government and the U.S. government. KSU's strong history requirement is

just one aspect that helped the school become one of 19 schools to receive an "A" rating in What Will They Learn?

Highest Box-Office Earnings

When it comes to numbers, Fairfield University in Connecticut is at the top of the class. The school requires all students to take calculus to "develop an appreciation of calculus as a model of analytical thinking and as an object of art, illustrating the abstract beauty of mathematics in general." With that enlightened perspective, this class offers content useful not only in math, but physics, economics, business and the life sciences as well.

Who tripped on the way in?

Blinded by the paparazzi, poor Sarah Lawrence College fell flat on her face on the red carpet. And it's no surprise, given her overall performance: the price for admission is \$43,564 tuition and fees, with the cost of attendance weighing in at \$60,116 per annum when you include room and board. And what do students get in return? Not much. The school doesn't require a single What Will They Learn? course, opting instead to encourage students "to use their own interests as the key to engaged involvement with the subject matter and to choose the course of study most meaningful to them." Thumbs down.

And now, for the moment you've all been waiting for. The envelope please ...

Best Picture

As college costs nationwide trend upward, students are often left to guess the trajectory of the increases in tuition and fees. But several colleges around the country have pledged to freeze—and even reduce—the cost. The University of the South in Sewanee, Tenn., lowered

tuition by 10 percent for this school year and agreed to maintain the lowered rate for next year for returning students. While the small liberal arts university still costs more than \$41,000 a year, it boasts 26 Rhodes Scholars, one of the highest four-year graduation rates in the state—81 percent—and a strong core curriculum that earns it a B in What Will They Learn? In a market of burgeoning costs, Sewanee may have set the stage for future trends.

There you have it, folks! I hope you've enjoyed our look at some of the year's academic highlights.

Too many in the audience are graduating with risky amounts of debt and with fewer job prospects than in years past. But by graduating on time and taking courses that build a strong educational foundation—rich in composition, literature, foreign language, American government/history, economics, math and science—graduates can reduce the likelihood that they'll end up on the cutting-room floor.

And that's a wrap.