

# Welcome Students, members of the Class of ... of ... well, we aren't really sure.



Written by Victor Brown

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Now we find ourselves in the beautiful month of May – and colleges everywhere are toting up the paid deposits that were due by May 1st. These deposits confirm the members of the incoming freshman...I mean “first year”... class this fall. Deans and Presidents across the country are sending out welcoming letters to these members of the Class of 2021.

But there's a problem. National statistics tell us that many, if not most, of these students will never graduate by 2021. In fact, almost half of them will fail to graduate by spring 2023, a full six years from now.

If college presidents were really honest about things, this is the letter they would send out:

Dear Students:

Welcome to our college! We look forward to welcoming you to campus in August, as you begin your exciting collegiate lives. Traditionally, this is the time when we warn you that the next four years will absolutely fly by, and you members of the Class of 2021 will be donning caps and gowns that spring to begin your post-collegiate careers.

Frankly, though, for many of you that will not happen. Although we of course feel that our college is a cut well above the average, I cannot hide some troubling national statistics from you, and feel obliged to share them with you now.

According to the latest statistics from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 30% of all first year students will not return for their sophomore year, mainly because of academic problems. Even among pricey private colleges, 25% of first year students will not return.

I'm afraid the longer term facts are even more dismal, but here they are. The latest study by the National Center for Education Statistics reports that only 59% of all students will graduate in six years, and that probably less than half will manage to graduate in that quaint four year schedule that your parents followed back in the day.

Private schools do better on this metric than public colleges, but not by much – their 63% six year graduation rate compares to 62% for public colleges. The much maligned “for profit” colleges report a six-year graduation rate of 51%, so you can see that all of us are pretty much in the same range, despite what we might say about each other.

To sum up, some 25-30% of you will not make it to your sophomore year at this college, and approximately 40% of you will not earn a degree in the next six years, let alone four.

As you know, your tuition charges are per semester, so if you need a couple of extra years to finish up, that will increase your total tuition payments accordingly. That's certainly not a problem for us, although it might be for you.

Although the federal government has been doing its best to offer long-term forgiveness on the student loans they are issuing to most of you, there is a lot of fine print to read and understand on those programs, and many of you will not qualify. Unfortunately for you (and for your parents, grandparents or anybody else who may have co-signed your loans), these debts are not dischargeable in bankruptcy, so you (and they) are on the hook. Remember, this applies whether or not you receive a degree, or even return for a second year.

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We don't want to overly alarm you, though. Those of you who do manage to earn a degree will be able to launch yourselves into a good career and earn more than your peers who earned only a high school diploma. Of course that presumes you major in something that society values economically, like engineering, chemistry, or math. Those of you who major in art appreciation, linguistics and medieval studies may have a bit of a harder time earning much more than you would have with just a high school diploma – and without the cost of that college degree. But these subjects are fun to learn, help you in all manner of classroom discussions and allow you to sample some of the many curriculum delights that we offer here.

Finally, let me warn you about the plague of alcohol abuse that infects campuses all across our country. We would be naive to think that it isn't a problem here. We certainly do not encourage underage drinking but we know that it happens and our policies are aimed to keep things from getting too far out of hand. Unfortunately, alcohol-fueled injuries and deaths occur every year on college campuses, and we can only hope that none of you are included in that particular statistic.

You will absolutely love our high achieving tenured faculty, although 50% of all college courses nationally are taught by part- time adjunct faculty members. We pay the adjuncts about \$3,000 per course, with no benefits. This may strike you as a tad low, particularly in light of the tuition we charge for a course - whether it is taught by a full professor or a brand new adjunct. But there seem to be enough adjuncts willing to work for those wages, and some of them are really good. Of course, some of them are clunkers but we jettison the clunkers after one semester, so this should not be a problem - unless you happen to have been in the clunker's course. In which case, we apologize in advance. The tuition is still payable.

OK, now that we have covered the basics, welcome again, Members of the Class of 2021, or 2023, or of no particular graduating class at all. Thank you for your deposits and for the initial tuition payments that you (or somebody on your behalf) will be sending to us this summer. After all, we have food courts to expand, rock climbing walls to build, state of the art fitness centers to upgrade, and many other creature comforts that our students have come to expect, and which do cost money.

The next few months will be exciting – picnics and concerts during orientation and move-in day, and a host of other get acquainted activities that will help you meet your fellow classmates. Try to get to know as many of them as you can, since a good portion of them will not be on campus for your second year.

Sincerely,

Your College President

[For more about the author, visit VictorBrown.net](http://VictorBrown.net)