

Peggy Baker: Navigating Higher Education Buyer beware adage applies to colleges



PEGGY BAKER

In our zeal to find a college that is affordable, we often overlook the most important question: What are we paying for?

There are basically three types of post-secondary institutions: the liberal arts college, the national university, and the career oriented college. It makes sense to know the differences among the three before you make a substantial investment of time and money.

The national universities and liberal arts colleges offer a broad spectrum of disciplines and majors. Most of the majors do not prepare students for a particular job. A student in a career oriented college spends two to four years immersed in preparation for a specific vocation.

The U.S. News and World edition of America's Best Colleges magazine devotes considerable time ranking the liberal arts colleges and national universities. Generally speaking, national universities emphasize graduate teaching, research, publishing, and consulting. For faculty at those institutions, the rewards are not in teaching undergraduates. Liberal arts colleges, on the other hand, emphasize undergraduate education; consequently, classes tend to be smaller and faculty more accessible.

The rankings, unfortunately, however are skewed because of the heavy weight given to the vote by biased presidents of competing col-

leges. A family would gain more salient information by noting two key items: the SAT range of students and the alumni giving rate, which is, unfortunately, relegated to the last column of the college ranking chart.

The alumni giving rate is really "the happy camper" measurement — when the college years are memories, the money that alumni give is directly proportional to the perceived quality of education.

Note that the liberal arts colleges have the highest alumni giving rates. In fact, only two national universities, Dartmouth and Princeton, have alumni giving rates over 50 percent, while many liberal arts colleges surpass the 50 percent

rate. To be sure, there are some national universities that cater to the undergraduate, and that fact is evident by their written mission statements as well as the ratio of graduate students to undergraduate students. In top-heavy graduate schools, the professors spend more time publishing and doing research, and the graduate students do the teaching.

For the most part, the U.S. News and World Report gives short shrift to the career oriented colleges. But they do exist within national and public universities. For example,

Penn State is divided into several colleges. Within its agricultural college, it offers majors such as turf-grass science and landscape contracting. In addition, numerous private colleges devote their curriculums to "learning by doing." Paul Smith College, for example, offers programs that include forestry and culinary arts.

Getting your best bang for your buck is dependent upon knowing precisely what you are paying for. Choosing the right college is just as important as purchasing any other big ticket item; after all, you wouldn't buy a flat screen televi-

sion unless it fit all your criteria. *Peggy Baker is an educational consultant who lives and works in Bethlehem.*

Studies have shown that students often limit their college choices to institutions that their friends attend or those with nationally recognized sports teams. Based on her experience in college admissions, financial aid, and career counseling, Peggy Baker encourages students to consider colleges that have appropriate campus cultures, academics and affordability.

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"Read the World" takes on Latin American theme

New Hope-Solebury High School, in partnership with the NH-S Education Fund and the Free Library of New Hope and Solebury, has announced Latin America as the 2010 theme for the community "Read the World" program.

Cuban American novelist and poet, Margarita Engle, will be visiting the school and community on Oct. 13. Her visit is being sponsored by the NH-S Education Fund, from which high school librarian, Mary Schwander, won a grant for an author visit.

In addition to Engle's visit, the program will consist of community and school events throughout October focused on Latin American cultures. Some of the activities will feature Latin

American dance, food, music and art.

This year's program features five books which specifically focus on the Cuban culture: "The Poet Slave of Cuba: A Biography of Juan Francisco Manzano" and "The Surrender Tree," both by Margarita Engle; "Havana Fever" by Leonardo Padura, "Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy" by Carlos Eire; and, for younger readers, "My Havana: Memories of a Cuban Boyhood" by Rosemary Wells and Secundino Fernandez and Illustrated by Peter Ferguson.

There is also a list of recommended reading on other Latin America cultures which can be found on the program's web site, nhs-read-the-world.com.

"Read the World" began last year when Kay Reiss of the Education Fund, Caroline Dechert of the public library and Schwander joined forces to help the community learn about a country's culture through the richness of books.

The mission of their program became: "One community exploring cultural diversity one book at a time."

Last year Allan Stratton's "Chanda's Secrets" and the Sub-Saharan Africa culture was explored through community presentations.

The committee is hopeful that it can continue to provide this program of activities each year, and welcomes donations from the community.

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2010 Harley the prize at Cyclefest benefit

More than 400 motorcycle enthusiasts will heed the call for the 4th Annual St. Mary Cyclefest, a special event to raise funds for the Pediatric Emergency Department expansion at St. Mary Medical Center.

"Cyclefest combines fun with fund-raising," said Charlene Schwartz, Newtown resident and event co-chair. "For only \$25 prior to the event or \$30 at the door, we offer the adventure and camaraderie of the rally plus a barbecue lunch, live entertainment, auction, vendor booths, bike show, and a 2010 Harley-



Bikers gathered last year at the start of the Cyclefest for the benefit of St. Mary Medical Center Pediatric Emergency Department. Raffle tickets for a 2010 Harley Davidson will be sold this weekend in New Hope.

Davidson motorcycle raffle for riders, friends and family."

Riders and passengers will assemble at Brian's Harley Davidson, 600 South Flowers Road, Langhorne for a rolling start beginning at 9 a.m. Following the picturesque 60-plus mile ride throughout Bucks County, participants will gather at Core Creek Park to enjoy the festival-like atmosphere for a few hours before gathering in front of the bandstand for the event highlight — the live raffle drawing for a 2010 Harley-Davidson 1200 Nightster or \$7,500 in cash.

"The bike is the main attraction. But bikers like the fact that the funds are being directed toward helping children, and that is one of the main reasons why Cyclefest is growing as successfully as it is," says Schwartz.

Prior to July 18 the bike will be on display in the hospital lobby and at Bucks County locations including La Stalla, Bowman's Tavern, and Fran's Pub. The bike has been on display on South Main Street in New Hope.

Raffle tickets are \$10 each and can be at the Bee Hive Gift Shop in the St. Mary lobby, at Brian's Harley-Davidson in Langhorne, or at local events and area restaurants.

For a complete listing of raffle events, to purchase event tickets, or to download sponsorship or vendor forms, stmaryfoundation.org and click on the Cyclefest banner. Or call Lisa Juris, event coordinator, at 215-710-2644.

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