Student aid would fall with lottery shuffle
BY EMERY P. DALESIO - Associated Press
RALEIGH–The proposed state budget that passed the N.C. House last week would eliminate lottery money for needy community college students to help keep counties out of trouble with lenders who made public school construction loans.

The head of the country's third-largest community college system, said Monday that a change made late in the House budget-writing process would eliminate the source of lottery-funded scholarships; that funding helps more than 15,000 students retrain for new jobs or start their college educations.

"I think we were collateral damage," said Scott Ralls, president of North Carolina's 850,000-student community college system. "If this was to hold, community college students [would lose] lottery funding as a source for financial aid. That's what it means."

The change in dividing up $425 million in state lottery revenues for education is one of many decisions confronting state leaders working to close a spending gap estimated at more than $2 billion for the budget year that begins in July. The Senate hasn't yet presented its proposed budget.

On the other side of the tussle over lottery profits are county officials, who warned that they could be forced to raise property taxes to repay school construction loans unless they receive what they'd been promised.

The 2005 law creating the lottery directed that half of the net proceeds go to a fund that pays teacher salaries so that classes would remain small in early grades and in the More at Four preschool program. Forty percent is supposed to go to local school construction and 10 percent to need-based college scholarships.

Changing the formula
But lawmakers have tinkered with the formula since then.

Legislators last year shifted an extra $84 million that Democratic budget-writers said would keep classroom teachers from being laid off. Counties got about 25 percent of the lottery proceeds for school construction, not the 40 percent the law requires, according to a legislative staff report.
Sixty-two of the 100 counties have borrowed millions for school construction under the original formula, counting on a steady flow of gambling profits to repay the loans, according to the N.C. Association of County Commissioners.

**School loans to pay**
Todd McGee, a spokesman for the county commissioners association, said they had already spent it, counting on the full 40 percent.

"They would have no choice but to pay for the debt service out of other means," like raising property taxes, he said.

Rep. Tim Moore, R-Cleveland, who proposed the funding change last week, said Monday the potential harm to community college students didn't become clear until after the budget vote. He expects changes once the Senate produces its version of the state spending plan.

"We're trying to protect the counties and allow for school construction," Moore said. "County governments would really be in a mess" without more funding.

Even with the House budget move last week that eliminates one scholarship fund and cuts another available to University of North Carolina students, local school construction would get just 23 percent of the gambling revenues.

There should be enough lottery money available for needy community college students for the next academic year, even if the Senate and Gov. Beverly Perdue go along with eliminating the scholarship fund, said Steven Brooks, executive director of the N.C. Education Assistance Authority, the state's agency for college student financial aid. Community college students probably will see any change in their financial aid packages about July 2012, Brooks said.

Community college students also can continue to get need-based financial aid from a second state fund made up of unclaimed or forgotten funds, like insurance policies and utility deposits. Students also can qualify for federal grants or loans, and for grants from nonprofit foundations created for most of the state's 58 community college campuses.
Julia Nepper, shown in a lab at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, will earn degrees this month in both chemistry and biology. Photo courtesy of UNCW

16-year-old set to graduate with 2 college degrees
By Emily Jones
Class of 2009, Master's 2010

Like many teens, 16-year-old Julia Nepper enjoys texting with friends, shopping online, reading and ... graduating from college?

Nepper will graduate with honors in May from the University of North Carolina Wilmington with a Bachelor of Arts in chemistry, a Bachelor of Science in biology and a minor in Spanish.

While she doesn't consider herself a child genius, Nepper has completed milestones in her life that most do not reach until well into their 20s.

After starting college at age 11, Nepper received two associate's degrees, one in arts and one in science, from Cape Fear Community College, making her the youngest CFCC graduate ever. After graduation from CFCC, she quickly enrolled at UNCW and started classes while she was still 14.
Nepper, who graduated from CFCC with a 4.0 grade point average and maintained a 3.77 GPA at UNCW, never had an “aha” moment about her intelligence when she was younger. It gradually dawned on her that she was different from her classmates.

“I began to notice how quickly I was going through grades in elementary school,” Nepper said. “That's when I realized I had a gift.”

Attending a university at age 14 certainly could have its downsides. Nepper's classmates have always been older, with different interests outside class and different social circles, but she credits them with making her transition smooth and easy.

She enjoys the campus and how friendly the students and professors are to her. She is most thankful for her research mentor, Antje Almeida, associate professor in the chemistry department.

Nepper has spent hundreds of hours on her honors thesis project while at UNCW. She worked in the lab completing research for her project all of last summer and over every school break for the past two semesters.

She recently defended her thesis, titled “Inclusion of menaquinone in lipid membranes decreases susceptibility to antimicrobial peptides.”

After graduating, Nepper plans to attend a one-year biomedical science program at UNC-Chapel Hill and then start a Ph.D. program in biophysics. After completing her doctorate, which she will most likely receive by age 22, Nepper plans to travel the world with a friend.

“I don't have one particular place in mind to visit,” Nepper said. “I want to visit everywhere!”

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**NCSU names Park Scholars**

N.C. State University has named its Park Scholars for 2011. Each of the 45 students selected from around the world receives paid tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies and travel and personal expenses for four years. They were selected from a pool of more than 1,300 applicants based on their accomplishments and potential in scholarship, leadership, service and character.

The Park Scholars from our area are:

Chelsea Marie Gardner of Pittsboro. She is the senior class president at Northwood High School, where she is also a varsity cheerleader and member of the National Honor Society. She volunteers with Habitat for Humanity and is a graduate of the N.C. Governor's School. Chelsea, daughter of Charles and Saundra Gardner, plans to major in communications.

Michael Randolph Harrison of Raleigh. He attends St. David's School, where he is the athletics prefect and editor-in-chief of the school newspaper. He is an Eagle Scout and volunteered with the African Children's Choir. Michael, son of Randy and Susan Harrison, plans to major in textile engineering.

Frankie Olivia Johnson of Garner. At West Johnston High School, she is horn-line captain of the marching band, vice president of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and captain of the Envirothon team. She is a National Merit Scholarship Semifinalist and has volunteered at Basic Needs Ministries and the Johnston County Public Library. Frankie, the daughter of George and Gwyneth Johnson, plans to major in natural resources.

Neel Mandavilli of Cary. He is vice president of student government and has served as president of the Science National Honor Society at Southeast Raleigh High School. He is a tri-speaker for the North Carolina Youth Legislative Assembly and a recipient of the Congressional Award Gold Medal, Hugh O'Brian Youth Leadership World Leadership Congress Student Representative Award and the U.S. Senate Youth Program Award.
Neel, son of Venkat and Lavanya Mandavilli, plans to pursue a career in public policy.

Charan Sai Mohan of Cary. He is president of the tutoring club, captain of the cross country team, and vice president of Health Occupations Students of America at Green Hope High School. He is a volunteer teacher of English as a Second Language for elementary school students and has received the President's Volunteer Service Award. Charan, son of Gopalan and Meena Mohan, plans to major in biomedical engineering.

Gabriela Marie Quinlan of Cary. She is secretary of the senior council, vice president of the Environmental Club and section leader in the marching band at Cary High School. She is a member of National Honor Society and earned the Girl Scout Silver Award. Gabriela, daughter of Shane and Helen Quinlan, plans to major in zoology.

Rasika Rajagopalan of Durham. She is president of the Science Olympiad Club and a National Honor Society and Spanish Honor Society member at Jordan High School. She launched a community service project called Project Spirit Sight and is a soloist with the Duke University Youth Orchestra. Rasika, daughter of Usha Raj and Raj Gopalan, plans to major in psychology.

Andriy Vasylovych Shymonyak of Raleigh. He attends Franklin Academy, where he is president of the Spanish National Honor Society, co-captain of the Franklin Academy Bridge Building Team and vice president of the National History Club. He has been a mentor for elementary and middle school band students and is starting his high school's chapter of Mu Alpha Theta. Andriy, son of Vasyl and Svitlana Shymonyak, plans to major in business administration.

James David Turner of Raleigh. He attends Middle Creek High School, where he is founder and president of the Math Honor Society and president of the National Honor Society. He founded and managed the nonprofit Heartbeats for Kids, which raises money for the N.C. Children's Hospital. Jim is also an Environmental Protection Agency and Shaw University research apprentice. He is a Prudential Spirit of Community Distinguished Finalist and has earned six Presidential Volunteer Service Gold Awards for completing more than 1,700 hours of community service. Jim, son of Mike and Peg Turner, plans to major in mechanical engineering.
In Reversal, City University Trustees Approve Honorary Degree for Tony Kushner
By WINNIE HU

In a hastily convened meeting of their executive committee, City University of New York trustees approved an honorary degree for Tony Kushner on Monday night to try to quell widespread criticism over the board’s decision last week to withhold it because of concerns about the playwright’s views on Israel.

Six of the seven trustees who sit on the committee voted to award Mr. Kushner, who won the Pulitzer Prize for his play “Angels in America,” the degree of doctor of letters during a 20-minute meeting. Benno C. Schmidt, the board chairman, was out of the country and did not vote.

“At the end of the day,” said Kathleen M. Pesile, a trustee, “we are now correcting it because it benefits CUNY and we will not get another chance to remove this blemish.”

Mr. Schmidt, a former president of Yale University, called the meeting at the urging of CUNY’s chancellor, Matthew Goldstein, to rectify what Mr. Schmidt described in a statement Friday as “a mistake of principle, and not
merely of policy,” in withholding the degree for Mr. Kushner from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

The CUNY executive committee has the power to reconsider any decision of the 17-member board that would be detrimental to the university without immediate action.

It was not immediately clear whether Mr. Kushner, who did not attend the meeting, would accept the honorary degree. He said Wednesday that he would not, then indicated Thursday that he might reconsider if it was important to people at John Jay.

Recipients of honorary degrees at John Jay typically address students at commencement. This year’s graduation is June 3.

On Sunday at the Public Theater, where his newest play had its premiere last week, he said he had received an outpouring of support. “We’ll see what happens,” he said, smiling broadly.

Mr. Kushner was removed from a list of 40 candidates for honorary degrees during a May 2 board meeting after a trustee, Jeffrey S. Wiesenfeld, denounced Mr. Kushner’s past statements about Israel and the Palestinians, including a reference to “ethnic cleansing” during the formation of the state in 1948. Mr. Kushner later disputed Mr. Wiesenfeld’s characterization of his views and said he is a strong supporter of Israel’s right to exist.

After the vote to approve the degree, Dr. Goldstein, CUNY’s chancellor, said “the basic misstep was there wasn’t a counterpunch” to Mr. Wiesenfeld’s remarks.

“I’m not sure why the appropriate people didn’t chime in at that time,” Dr. Goldstein said. Dr. Goldstein, who was present at that meeting, said the presidents of the various colleges are generally expected to address specific questions.

Some trustees later said they had been caught off guard by Mr. Wiesenfeld’s last-minute objections. The board fell two votes short of the nine required to approve the full slate of candidates; then, 10 trustees voted to table the matter of Mr. Kushner.
The decision sparked a fierce outcry from Mr. Kushner’s supporters and prompted calls for Mr. Wiesenfeld’s resignation.

Mr. Wiesenfeld did not attend the meeting on Monday, but his spokesman, Hank Sheinkopf, later said: “Jeffrey Wiesenfeld voted to take a principled position on what he considered to be unfair attacks on the State of Israel. He intends to remain on the board until the expiration of his term.”

Appointed in 1999 by Gov. George E. Pataki, Mr. Wiesenfeld has two years left in his term. Some faculty members and others have called for his removal; CUNY trustees can be removed only for official misconduct, neglect of duties, or mental and physical inability to perform duties.

Dr. Goldstein told the trustees on Monday that “from the time the proposal was first sent to me for approval — a proposal I readily endorsed — I have consistently expressed that Mr. Kushner’s extraordinary body of work and enormous artistic contributions should be recognized by this university.”
University of California weighs varying tuitions at its 10 campuses

Proponents say demand should help set price; they cite benefits to all campuses. Critics call the idea elitist and say it would undercut UC's unified system.

By Larry Gordon, Los Angeles Times

Should an education at UC Berkeley cost more than one at UC Santa Cruz? Should a student pay $11,000 in tuition at UC Riverside while his friend is billed $16,000 at UCLA?

Leaders of the 10-campus University of California system are considering such questions as they grapple with state budget reductions that already have led to tuition increases, staff layoffs and cuts in class offerings.

Advocates of allowing undergraduate tuition to vary by campus say that the change would raise funds the schools could share and that consumer demand should play a bigger role in setting tuition. But opponents contend that the idea is inherently elitist and could harm the unified nature of the UC system.

The debate is similar to tensions within large corporations with many divisions, said R. Michael Tanner, chief academic officer and vice president at the Assn. of Public and Land-grant Universities. "Some say, 'Cut us free and let us be our own profit center,' " he said.
Nationally, UC is late to the debate, with many other state university systems long ago having established differential tuitions for their campuses, said Tanner, a former administrator at UC Santa Cruz and the University of Illinois at Chicago.

But, he said, most such systems have a single clearly recognized flagship, such as the University of Texas at Austin or the University of Wisconsin at Madison, which typically are allowed to charge higher tuition than the others.

In contrast, UC has UC Berkeley and UCLA, both often considered flagships, and several other campuses with high national rankings, he and other analysts said. In another difference from many other states, California also has a second public university system, the Cal State system, which traditionally has emphasized its teaching mission more than academic research and charges lower tuition than UC.

Perhaps not surprisingly, officials at UC Berkeley and UCLA have been among the most vocal advocates for some freedom in setting undergraduate tuition rates, which now are established uniformly by UC's Board of Regents. The board has raised basic in-state tuition 8% for next school year, to $11,124. Campuses charge varying other fees for student activities, health, parking, and room and board that can bring total costs to more than $27,000 a year. UC's graduate and professional schools set varying tuitions, with approval from the regents.

UC's Commission on the Future, a panel studying reforms and ways to increase revenues, did not fully endorse differential tuition in its report in December, but it said UC should find ways to implement variable fees if the state's fiscal crisis worsens. Nathan E. Brostrom, UC's executive vice president for business operations, said recently that the university would continue to explore the concept.

UC Berkeley Chancellor Robert J. Birgeneau said he would like the regents to set a midpoint for undergraduate tuition and allow campuses to range up to 25% above or below that. Such a plan would give campuses the flexibility and income they need but maintain a sense of a UC system and provide additional financial aid, he said.

"We can't just completely devolve control to each of the campuses," he said in a recent interview. "That would be chaotic."

Birgeneau said critics incorrectly assume that his campus would jump at the chance to significantly increase its fees. That might not be the case, he said, because UC Berkeley has more research funds and donations than UC Merced, for example, which might have more need of additional tuition revenue.

The Berkeley chancellor's advocacy of the change produced a rare public disagreement at a recent regents meeting in San Francisco. Birgeneau and UC Santa Cruz Chancellor George R. Blumenthal sparred politely in front of reporters during what had been framed as a joint lamentation about state budget cuts.
Blumenthal said in a later interview that even a tuition range would splinter the unity and resources of the UC system. "I think it has been an enormous benefit to the state of California and the taxpayers of California to have a uniform tuition," he said.

If different rates were allowed, he predicted that UC Berkeley would raise tuition the full 25% in "a micro second" and others would quickly follow, not wanting to be left behind in money or reputation. "I think once we go down that road, it could mean that some campuses may not be accessible to large segments of California students," he said.

Another influential critic is Daniel Simmons, a UC Davis law professor who is chairman of UC's systemwide Academic Senate. Varying fees would result in "separate campuses competing with each other and ultimately that competition would be destructive," Simmons said.

The future commission's report acknowledged criticism of the idea and potential problems in sharing revenues. The most difficult issue, it said, would be "perceived or actual tiering of campuses" and "potential negative impact on the perceived reputation or academic quality of some campuses."

In many other states, the practice is long established.

For example, the Austin campus of the University of Texas plans to charge nearly $4,900 in tuition and basic student fees in the fall, compared to about $3,500 for the El Paso campus.

"All of it is based on the ability to pay, for the population they serve. It has to do with what the market can bear," said Pedro Reyes, the nine-campus University of Texas system's associate vice chancellor for planning. The Austin campus enrolls a more national and international student body, while El Paso draws students mainly from its region, he said.

UCLA, UC Berkeley and UC San Diego could charge higher fees without harming enrollments, Reyes said. "I know the clientele could meet those pricing structures," he said.

The University of Wisconsin's 26 campuses include just two doctoral-granting institutions, and even those two charge somewhat different basic academic fees: about $9,000 at Madison and $8,100 at Milwaukee. But leaders of the Madison campus are now seeking independence from the system, including the freedom to set tuition rates.
Tools to Help the World
Harvard is opening its doors to veteran leaders—and possibly changing higher education forever

By GLENN RUFFENACH
MAY 8, 2011

Six years ago, three professors at Harvard Business School tackled a far-reaching question: How might the mission of a university change in the 21st century?

Their eventual answer: Throw open the doors to older adults—and give them the tools to help change the world.

Today, that mission is taking shape in Harvard's classrooms. The university's Advanced Leadership Initiative, now in its third year, invites late-career professionals and executives to spend nearly a year on campus. Participants can audit virtually any of the university's hundreds of academic offerings, take part in think tanks and seminars, and meet regularly with faculty and students.

In return, Harvard asks each student, or fellow, to develop a "social purpose project," a plan for addressing significant problems in education, health, the environment and other areas.

'Third Stage'
In short, the program represents a new, "third stage" in higher education, says Rosabeth Moss Kanter, the initiative's co-founder and director, and one of the three Harvard professors who in 2005 first envisioned a wider role for the nation's colleges and universities. Such institutions have long launched young adults into the world from undergraduate and graduate/professional programs. Now, she says, these schools need to do the same for older adults.
"Clearly, we need additional leaders to take on social challenges—and here we have this large population of adults leaving first careers who are going to live for another 20 or 30 years," Prof. Kanter says. Higher education "can be the resource that gives these individuals the skills and direction they need."

For now, the Harvard initiative remains small: About 20 to 30 fellows a year take part. That said, Prof. Kanter expects the program to grow steadily—and, ideally, to be replicated at schools across the country.

Indeed, the initiative is a "sign of things to come," says Marc Freedman, chief executive of Civic Ventures, a San Francisco nonprofit focused on expanding the contributions of older Americans. Already, he notes, a growing number of resources—community colleges, webinars, alumni groups and life coaches, among others—are helping the 50-plus crowd transition into jobs and careers in the social-service and nonprofit arenas.

Eventually, these multiple pathways, Mr. Freedman adds, will "enable individuals in the second half of life to move seamlessly from 'what's last' to 'what's next.'"

The Harvard initiative runs from January through November, with a summer break (primarily for field work and research). Fellows are asked to cover the costs of the program (which the university doesn't disclose publicly), although some financial assistance is available for individuals from public-service careers.

When considering candidates, the faculty looks for "people of accomplishment who have the potential to accomplish more," Prof. Kanter says. (Specific guidelines are at www.advancedleadership.harvard.edu.) Such individuals, she adds, must be motivated to "take on a societal challenge at the local, national or global level."

**Wanted: Self-Starters**

Put another way, the year isn't meant to be a leisurely transition into later life, and hand-holding is all but nonexistent. "It's relatively nonstructured, which means you have to be a self-starter," says Doug Rauch, age 59. Mr. Rauch is the former president (for almost 14 years) of Trader Joe's, a chain of specialty grocery stores, and is now a "senior fellow" at the initiative (back for a second year).

Mr. Rauch had a general idea of the problem he planned to tackle before he joined Harvard's initiative—the tons of perfectly good food that end up in landfills each day in the U.S. (from restaurants, grocers and others), even though hunger is on the rise. Still, he wasn't sure where to start.

Working closely with faculty, graduate students and his colleagues in the program quickly changed all that. "You can't imagine the wealth of experience," Mr. Rauch says. He attended courses in agribusiness, recruited students to help survey existing efforts in
the field, enlisted a law professor to examine regulatory barriers, and shared his ideas with other fellows—who, in turn, pointed him to additional resources.

The result: Mr. Rauch will soon start an operation in a "retail environment" that will redistribute so-called excess food in inner cities.

Junko Yoda, 54, also a senior fellow this year, says the fact that the Harvard initiative is a university-wide program makes all the difference. "I can go to [the] public health [school], or the law school, or the business school, and find help," says Ms. Yoda, a former Deutsche Bank managing director in Singapore and Goldman Sachs vice president in Japan. "That's a very powerful platform." Her project: creating programs to assist victims of human trafficking in Thailand and Indonesia.

Of course, returning to school in later life isn't always easy—especially if an "accomplished" individual (again, Harvard's preference) is accustomed to working at the highest levels of business or government.

Susan Leal, 61, a fellow in 2009 and former head of the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, says the transition can be "humbling." "You're going from the corner office, where someone kept your calendar for you, to a cubicle, and you're sitting there with your little BlackBerry," she says. "That can really take some people out of their comfort zone." She recalls a day when she asked to speak with a professor and was squeezed into a 15-minute time slot—"just like any other graduate student."

What's more, participants are challenged at every turn, Ms. Leal says—by faculty, students and one another. The questioning is polite but persistent, she says: What is your project? Where does it stand? What comes next? "They push you to delve deeper." Ms. Leal knew she wanted to focus on shrinking water supplies in the U.S. and overseas. Eventually, she partnered with a Harvard professor and wrote a book: "Running Out of Water: The Looming Crisis and Solutions to Conserve Our Most Precious Resource."

**Speaking Out**

Today, Ms. Leal is asked to participate in, or serve as the keynote speaker for, conferences around the world where water "sustainability" is the focus. The Harvard initiative, she says, "gave me a platform that has allowed me to contribute in ways I never could have before."

That platform could soon be adopted elsewhere. A meeting in Miami in June will give other schools a chance to learn about Harvard's model for educating advanced leaders, Prof. Kanter says. She likens the effort to the growth of the nation's business schools, which began to appear at the turn of the 20th century and are now a familiar part of the academic landscape.

"We think someday this will be a stage of higher education that many colleges and universities will want to have," Prof. Kanter says. "We want to make this a movement."
Mr. Ruffenach is a reporter and editor in the Atlanta bureau of The Wall Street Journal and the editor of Next. He can be reached at next@wsj.com.

How Would You Help?
Individuals interested in pursuing an “encore career”—a job in the second half of life that combines social impact with personal meaning—said the type of work that most appeals to them is:

- Advocate for group or issue I care about: 36%
- Working with children and youth: 32%
- Working to preserve the environment: 31%
- Teaching at any level: 31%
- Working to protect the safety of communities: 24%
- Working on poverty: 23%
- Working with religious/spiritual organization: 23%
- Working with the elderly: 17%
- Working in health care: 17%

Source: MetLife Foundation/Civic Ventures Encore Career Survey
Five Biggest Myths About College Admissions

By Andrew J. Rotherham Thursday, May 05, 2011

Now that all the college-admissions acceptance and rejection letters have been mailed, students and parents are taking stock of their lot. Some are happy, but a great many more probably feel disappointed. An enormous amount of energy and anxiety is expended in trying to get into college, but the truth is that the admissions process is much more haphazard than people like to think. The good news? In the long run, it's generally less important too. Here are the five biggest myths about this annual angst-a-thon:

**Myth No. 1:** Getting rejected means you're just not [insert school name] material.
Given the scale of applications these days, getting into selective schools has as much to do with luck as it does with merit. Although admissions officers really do try to give careful consideration to the applications, the sheer numbers are daunting. Harvard, for instance, saw 34,950 applications this year; that means each admissions officer has to comb through hundreds of them in a few short months. Of those, only 2,158 students got in — but most who didn't would do well there too. In other words, most students who apply to Harvard are "Harvard material." Of course, as the nation's most selective school, Harvard is an extreme example, but the same is true at a variety of schools: scarcity rather than pure merit drives the process. There are only so many seats. Bottom line: admissions experts say most applicants are admissible. (See how students are paying for college.)

**Myth No. 2:** You're going to earn based on where you learn.
Economic insecurity is understandable, especially these days, and getting a college degree is generally a ticket to a more financially stable life. But where you go to college matters less than you might think. When Alan Krueger of Princeton University and Stacy Dale of Mathematica Policy Research looked at earnings of college graduates, they found
that individual characteristics, like aptitude, mattered more than the school. What may be
the most important predictor? The type of schools you applied to, rather than where you
got in, because that speaks to your ambition. One big exception: minority students and
students from families with less education overall. For these people, elite schools pay a
dividend probably because of the social capital they confer. In addition, as colleges have
become more competitive, more schools offer semesters abroad and access to coveted
internships than in the past. The best advice? Bloom where you're planted. In the long
run, it's hard to go wrong by working hard and taking on leadership roles on campus.

Myth No. 3: Affirmative action rigs the process.
These days, other factors tilt the scales more than race-based affirmative action, which
the Supreme Court has ruled cannot be an overriding factor for admissions at public
universities or used in formulaic ways. State schools, for instance, need to make sure
their classes represent all parts of a state. Being an athlete obviously helps. An Atlanta
Journal-Constitution analysis of schools with strong athletics programs found that their
athletes had substantially lower SAT scores than other students. It's not just an issue at
Football U, though — a 2004 study by researchers at Princeton University found that
athletes got a preference even at the most elite colleges in the country. Having a family
member who attended the school you want to go to gives you a leg up as well — think of
it as affirmative action for the privileged. Bottom line: don't get hung up on grievances,
because you have no way of knowing why an admissions decision was made. (See the 10
best college presidents.)

Myth No. 4: The wait list never moves.
There is a feeling that being put on a waiting list is the same as not getting in. In fact,
today students now apply to many more schools, and the upside to the greater competition is that more offers of admission won't be accepted. In other words, waiting lists have become a safety net for schools rather than
students. Today colleges accept far fewer students than in the past with a clear intention
of going to the waiting list, says Erin Meissner, a former college admissions official who
is now the director of college counseling at St. Anne's-Belfield's, a private school in
Virginia. Colleges want a big yield from their waiting lists, she says, so don't just respond
to a waiting-list offer; make sure the school knows just how much you want to attend. If
you're wait-listed and comfortable saying you absolutely will attend should you get an
offer, then do it, she says. The bad news: by the time colleges get to their waiting lists,
financial aid is often used up.

Myth No. 5: Once you choose a school, you're stuck for four years.
When you stop and think about it, a system that encourages 17-to-18-year-olds to make
high-stakes life decisions is insane. Thankfully, in addition to changing majors, students
can change schools. Admissions counselors suggest that students give their new school a
chance rather than start with a mind-set that is focused on transferring, but if it doesn't
work out, they can leave. In fact, about 1 in 3 students transfer during their collegiate
career, according to the National Association for College Admission Counseling. While
it's slightly harder to get in as a transfer student (on average, 64% of transfers are
accepted, while 69% of first-year admissions are), some states have formalized their
procedures for transferring among public colleges and universities and from community colleges to flagship state schools. Officials say college grades are the most important factor in transfer admissions, so hopefuls can wipe their high school slate clean and start afresh. Who says there are no second chances?

Andrew J. Rotherham, who writes the blog Eduwonk, is a co-founder and partner at Bellwether Education, a nonprofit working to improve educational outcomes for low-income students. School of Thought, his education column for TIME.com, appears every Thursday.