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Author addresses reasons behind rising college costs

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Music's mammoth undertaking: Hector Berlioz's *Requiem*

The grand and glorious history of music at Furman reached a high note on the evening of May 5, when approximately 500 vocalists and instrumentalists gathered in Timmons Arena to perform Hector Berlioz's monumental *Requiem*.

Under the baton of Bingham Vick, Jr., the Furman Singers, Chorale and Symphony Orchestra joined forces with the Greenville Symphony, Greenville Chorale and students from the South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities to present the mammoth work, which was hailed as *the* major arts event of the year in South Carolina.

Because it requires so many performers and such a large performing space, Berlioz's *Requiem* is rarely heard. In this concert, the orchestra was vastly oversized, with 12 horns rather than the usual four, eight bassoons rather than the usual two, and 16 timpani rather than four at the most. The chorus featured more than 300 vocalists to match the sound of the orchestra and the four brass ensembles that accompanied the piece. (A large combined orchestra and chorus typically includes about 250 musicians.)



Berlioz was asked to compose the *Requiem* in 1837 as a memorial to French soldiers killed during the July Revolution of 1830. After bureaucratic delays, it was first performed on December 5, 1837, in Paris. Inspired by the grandeur of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Berlioz envisioned a composition that would musically express

the splendor of Michelangelo's fresco of the Last Judgment.

Berlioz was considered a radical musician during his day. Many of his works reflect his wild emotional swings and often break the standard rules of orchestration. His first public triumph came in 1830 with the dramatic *Symphonie Fantastique*.

Author addresses reasons behind rising college costs

Even though college tuition increased faster than inflation for most of the 20th century, few people seemed concerned because the growth rate in median family income matched the rate at which tuition increased. However, while family income began to level off in the early 1980s, tuition kept increasing, and for the last 20 years the ratio of tuition to median family income has risen sharply.

Why this change? Ronald G. Ehrenberg, an economics professor at Cornell University and author of *Tuition Rising: Why College Costs So Much*, which examines why costs continue to rise at selective private institutions, addressed this issue and others during the Marsh & McLennan American Enterprise Lecture at Furman March 20.

Ehrenberg pointed out that tuition costs are affected by a number of factors, beginning with an "arms race of spending." Research, he said, shows that attending a top-quality school pays off in higher lifetime earnings. People want to buy the best and tend to believe that cost equals quality, so colleges know they can raise prices without losing applicants.

Among the other factors Ehrenberg cited:

■ The nature of university governance makes controlling costs difficult. Faculty won't accept pay cuts, even though their productivity does not rise as fast as that in the manufacturing or service sectors, and trustees are unwilling to push for cost reduction because they are usually selected for their wealth rather than for their devotion to economic efficiency.

■ Pell grants and other federal programs have decreased in real value. Additionally, the decrease in the indirect cost rates of government grants (which means the additional dollars going to the college as "overhead") implies that the lost monies must be made up somewhere, namely tuition.

■ To avoid alienating alumni, who represent every possible interest group, universities are reluctant to scale back programs. The concern, Ehrenberg said, is that disgruntled alumni could convince other alumni not to contribute.

■ The drive for recognition in publications that rank colleges, such as *U.S. News & World Report*, often affects colleges' decisions. For example, spending per student is one of the variables in calculating the rankings. To improve their standing, colleges increase spending, and to finance the extra spending, they raise tuition.

Why should anyone who isn't paying for a student's college education care about these issues? Ehrenberg argues that tax dollars grant private selective colleges an enormous subsidy. He points out that contributions to colleges are tax-deductible; endowment earnings are not taxed; universities do not pay property taxes; and colleges borrow at tax-exempt interest rates. Therefore, to finance any given level of government services, the non-college taxpayers must pay more than they otherwise would. So when tuition rises faster than median family income, the burden doesn't fall solely on families with students in college.

Ehrenberg concluded that trustees could be key players in any effort to hold down costs, because the incentives for faculty and administrators to do so are minimal. He also suggested that colleges share resources, both academic and nonacademic, while also focusing more on diversifying revenue sources through such activities as evening programs, weekend certificate education and distance learning.

— R. David Roe

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