

Beyond The First Finish Line: Preparing For Life After College

AP Research

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Abstract

This project will be comparing what attributes were valuable to a company in 2001 vs. today. Using this data, this project hopes to predict what attributes will most likely be needed when graduating college students in 2031 are faced with applying for jobs after college. Based on existing data on employment, this project predicts that there will be an increase in the value for soft skills for potential employees in 2017.

This project uses two surveys containing identical questions and answer choices. One was taken by 32 of today's professionals in business, while the other was answered using an analysis of 32 articles from 2001. The collective results will be compared to determine how the hiring process has changed over the last 16 years, and what the possible future landscape for employment will be in 2031.

Introduction

Since the start of our education, children have been given several academic goals to achieve in their lifetime. These goals can include graduating high school, going to a good college, graduating from college, and finding a job to support you and your family. However, these goals have become increasingly more difficult to obtain over these past few generations, without a clear reason why. At the same time, the amount of stress to achieve these academic goals has been increasing amongst students. While it is good to set goals in life, stress has become the cause of several health issues in people ranging from middle school to adulthood. The increasing levels of stress students and adults are facing can be the result of these goals becoming more difficult to achieve. NPR's Jacqueline Lee, Meg Anderson, and Kavitha Cardoza have written articles addressing this issue and how it has impacted today's students and

adults. Lee, Anderson, and Cardoza state the seriousness of this issue and that more attention must be brought upon the issue of extreme stress amongst students, otherwise the amount of stress will only continue to increase. These articles contain interviews and statements with high school students who have been proven to be experiencing extreme stress. Existing research has focused on what to do in order to graduate high school, get into college, and graduate from college. In addition, even though there is plenty of research on what is necessary for adults to find a job efficiently, there is still little research on what is necessary for graduating college students to find a job efficiently. This paper is intended to address this issue of extreme stress by providing students with information about what attributes they should have in order get employed with a well paying job over those who already have professional work experience.

Most high school student have noticed their increasing levels of stress. An example of a common bad day amongst students, is when athletes have games early in the school day. This makes it so that students not only have to make up class work but also complete homework from the majority of their classes, making the load twice as much. In addition, students have to teach themselves the lessons learned in class, with only the provided information classmates give in their notes. There are also others in band who must spend long hours practicing and/or participating in concerts, leaving them to start their homework later, resulting in late nights. In addition to being a band member or an athlete, most students participate in honors and AP level classes which increases the amount and complexity of their homework. It also decreases the amount of time students can spend making up work or learning a specific lesson. This however, results in days where their work load is three times more than usual since you need to make up all the school work missed, study for coming up tests, and do their normally strenuous

homework load. The next day, functioning off of few hours of sleep makes it seem like you never even slept at all. This makes you less efficient because you are so exhausted. Every teacher begins to sound more and more like the teacher from The Peanuts Movie and you are relying solely on muscle memory to get through each class. Then after the day of school is over and you finally think “yes I can go home and take a nap,” your conscience then reminds you that “you still have gobs of homework to do, and if you don’t get started soon you will be up later than yesterday”. So once you finally get home you find as much caffeine as you can and get back to work. Once you’ve finally finished, you looked at the clock and it says 1:00am. Then you can finally get some rest and repeat the whole thing over again.

Many high school students like me, have also been experiencing increasing amounts of stress. We know the reason why some students come to school in pajamas or have group chats for each class. It is because the clothes are comfortable, you are already dressed, and with group chat you can share the load, relieve some stress, and can get help without judgment. This level of stress has resulted in several students dropping down to easier classes in order to reduce their levels of stress. However, there are other students who continue to fight with stress, resulting in unhealthy amounts of sleep, large amounts of caffeine intake, and a greater likelihood of having health risks. As fellow high school students and I continue to go through high school, we have come to accept that the stress will only continue to increase. Preparing for college has already revealed more stress that we will be exposed to and even then, there is no guarantee of getting a job after college. Without knowing specifically what employees are looking for, it is hard for graduating college students to be marketable. In the near future, I plan to pursue a career in marketing. As a soon to be business college student, the competitiveness in this field is already

well known. Like others, many of my family members have already pointed out the stress and struggles of having a career in business. That is why my study addresses which of the following skills and experiences are seen as required, valuable, or unnecessary by employers. For instance, the ability to speak more than one language, having a specific degree in your field, success with working in groups, being adaptable, being honest, having work experience, good communication, what college they attended, fitting the culture of the company/organization, your appearance, or attending an Ivy League School. Using this data about today and the past 16 years, I hope to categorize which skills would fall under required, valuable, or necessary in the next 16 years. This project also addresses the increasing stress of students by offering more information about how students pursuing a career in business can become more prepared for life after college. With this information, these students can hopefully find a job that can provide them with a stable career and increase their chances of being employed over already experienced workers, while also providing benefits to schools, colleges, and companies. Based on existing data on employment, this project predicts that there will be an increase in the value for soft skills for potential employees in 2017.

Existing research is already known to the public about the business world's hiring process over the past years which include: Dr. Gillies's "The 21st Century Career Search System", Ms. Klaus's "Hard Truth About Soft Skills", Mr. Outlaw's "Smart Staffing Rewards Employees Companies", Hartford Business Review's "Colleges Find a New Way to Get Grads Hired", and Weller, Cooper, Basen-Engquist, Kelder, & Tortolero's "SCHOOL-YEAR EMPLOYMENT AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: EFFECTS ON ACADEMIC, SOCIAL, AND PHYSICAL FUNCTIONING". Dr. Gillies is the Assistant Professor of Business; Director,

MBA Online; Director of Organizational Leadership Program at California Lutheran University (CLU). He is considered an expert in Executive Coaching, Team Building, and Sports Leadership. In his book, “The 21st Century Career Search System”, Dr. Gillies addresses those who already have a career and are looking to advance their career position in an environment involved in the 21st century system. His book gives advice on how to find a work environment for you, appear more desirable to your superiors, and stand out against the competition. His book also takes the perspective of a psychologist and Human Resources. Similarly, “Hard Truth About Soft Skills” addresses professionals who are struggling to succeed in the workplace. Ms. Klaus uses her knowledge as a talent coach, lecturer, and board member of The Young Women’s Leadership Network, to provide ways in which professionals and students can master soft skills. She defines soft skills as skills which allow you use your technological abilities and knowledge efficiently. This includes personal, social, communication, and self management behaviors. Ms. Klaus states that “the source of their anxiety and frustration is rarely a shortfall in technical or professional expertise. Instead, it invariably stems from a shortcoming in their soft skill” (Hard Truth About Soft Skills). Ms. Klaus shows her readers how mastering soft skills can be the difference between excelling at their jobs and struggling. Continuing, Mr. Outlaw is a Certified Management Consultant (CMC), Certified Speaking Professional (CSP), and President of Outlaw Group, Inc. In his book, “Smart Staffing Rewards Employees Companies” Mr. Outlaw addresses entrepreneurs on how to grow a good business, hire qualified employees, and manage your existing employees. He states that “If you own a business or assist with hiring, you need to learn the skills of smart staffing. Whether you are getting ready to hire your first employee or have been in business for years with a few hundred employees already. Knowing how to find

and keep top employees is especially important in business for several reasons:” (Smart Staffing Rewards Employees Companies). Mr. Outlaw takes the perspective of a management consultant and speaking professional to give entrepreneurs professional advice on how to create a successful business. Then, “SCHOOL-YEAR EMPLOYMENT AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: EFFECTS ON ACADEMIC, SOCIAL, AND PHYSICAL FUNCTIONING”, written by a Professor in the Division of Epidemiology, a Professor in Spirituality and Healing, and Co-Director of Center for Healthy Living; teaches entrepreneurs about the effects of different weekly work intensity levels on adolescent functioning. Using the perspectives of behaviorist, marketing majors, and public health specialist, this article provides the outcomes of different work environments and how they affect students and employees. Finally, “Colleges Find a New Way to Get Grads Hired”, addresses college graduates about what colleges are doing to help them get hired. Hartford Business Review states that they are using “spiders”, computer spiders which go through search engines and read thousands of online "help wanted" ads to analyze the jobs on the real time job market to find out what employers are looking for. This helps colleges to train their students to have experience that will be beneficial rather than a useless skill. Even though this technology is limited, it is believed that this technology will continue to advance as more colleges and universities use it. This shows us that some colleges are resorting to new techniques to train their students for professional work. However, this is not offered to everyone. In addition, this technology would only provide colleges with information on what specific knowledge their students should possess, such as classes that should be taken or knowledge in specific fields. This means that students would still be lacking in the necessary soft skills needed to be employed over those who are already experienced workers.

My specific study addresses those who are pursuing a career in business and provides these students information on how they can prepare for professional work. As shown above, research in this study have already examined the change in the hiring process in business, regarding from the 1920's to 2000's. However, very few cover 2017 and what could be seen in 2031. What my paper hopes to add, is a general list of what young adults graduating in the 2030's should have accomplished in order to find a steady job that can support their life. The reasons I have for choosing this topic is to hopefully lower high school and college student's stress in preparing for their future in business and also discover ways in which they can be employed efficiently after college. Research has already shown that the amount of stress students are withstanding is continuing to grow and even continue after college. With the data my project will collect, I hope to reduce this issue. This presents students with ways they can be more prepared for their future after college; greatly reducing stress. Then, with limiting their stress, not only would they have a health benefit, but their GPA average would also have the possibility to increase. Also, this research can provide companies with a higher chance of finding employees that fit their requirements and needs and also possibly raise credibility of colleges, since more of their students leave prepared and on the right track for "success". In addition, this research can increase the chances the graduating college students being hired over experienced workers. This would not only increase the length of time an individual can work for a company, but also decrease the number of times companies need to find new employees. It may also increase the number of graduating college students accepted for a full time jobs. This research also provides schools with an increase in acceptance and graduation rate, an increase in student health by possibly lowering stress levels, and increasing the rate at which graduate

students find jobs. In addition, giving them a higher probability of being able to balance work, school, and life.

Methods

Originally this project planned to interview current professionals with experience during 2001. Participants would be asked their current opinion on fifteen attributes and how their answer would change if asked the same questions in 2001. However, answers would not be as accurate due to the length of time since 2001 and the reliability of an individual's distant memory. As a result, this project decided to use a different method to collect data.

To collect both data sets, two original surveys were made. Both contained identical questions and answer choices, however one was taken by 32 of today's professionals (approved by the Institutional Review Board) in business while the other was answered using an analysis of 32 articles from 2001. The analysis included annotations of each article, along with noting of different perspectives, views on discussed attributes, external factors, and the cause and effects of certain traits in the workplace. Participants were asked their opinion on the value of various attributes that potential employees could have. These potential employees would be graduating college students who are pursuing a career in business. Participants were also notified that the value of some of the attributes may greatly depend on the position that is being pursued and may not fit into a particular answer. This variance was taken into consideration, and participants were asked to look at these questions from a general perspective.

The first survey's participants included: CEOs', business owners, Human Resources, Presidents', advisors', etc. For the second survey, articles were analyzed from published scholarly articles from 2001, and popular magazines that both businessmen and entrepreneurs

read for professional advice and updates. These magazines included: Entrepreneur, Fast Company, Forbes, Inc., and Time.

After all data was collected, results from each survey were translated into pie graphs. This allowed for the comparison of both data sets, and enabled the extrapolation of what we will see in 2031. In addition, these data sets allow us to see the evolution of attributes needed in graduating college students from 2001 to 2017. Looking at certain trends, we can extrapolate what skills will be desirable to companies in the future. These trends include the price of college, the number of students with masters or doctorate degrees, the rate in economic change (based on use of technology), the increasing rate of information, and increased international involvement.

Results

After participants had answered questions on their opinions on the value of various attributes that potential employees could have, this project was able to extrapolate how these attributes were viewed by employers in 2001 and 2017.

In the first set of data involving professionals in today's businesses, results showed that over half of the participants felt that teamwork skills (87.5%), independent work skills (71.9%), adaptability (75%), interpersonal skills (87.5%), and fitting the culture of the company (65.6%) were required. In addition, results showed that over half of the participants felt that a Doctorate (67.7%), involvement in social media (56.3%), experience in sports (75%), and attending a high level college (56.3%) were unnecessary. Finally, results showed that the majority felt that internship experience (75%), leadership experience (81.3%), a Master's degree (59.4%), good grades (68.8%), balanced life (56.3%), professional appearance (46.9%), connections to those in

the same field (78.1%), and knowing more than one language (75%) were considered valuable attributes (See Appendix A).

In the second set of data involving articles from 2001, results calculated that the majority of the articles supported that teamwork skills (87.5%), independent work skills (90.6%), internship experience (87.5%), leadership experience (90.6%), adaptability (80.6%), interpersonal skills (93.8%), a Master's degree (53.1%), connections to those in the same field (96.9%), professional appearance (40.6%), and fitting the culture of the company (100%) were required attributes. In addition, results calculated that over half of the articles felt that a involvement in social media (50%), experience in sports (96.9%), knowing more than one language (93.8%), good grades (53.8%), and attending a high level college (40.6%) were unnecessary. Finally, results showed that over half of the authors felt that a Doctorate (53.1%), and balanced life (68.8%) were valuable attributes (See Appendix B).

According to both data sets, the major differences were that in 2017, more professionals felt that internship experience was valuable (75%), while in 2001, the majority considered it required (87.5%). In 2017 more professionals felt good grades were valuable (68.8%), while in 2001 over half felt it was required (53.8%). Also in 2001, doctorates (53.1% valuable) were seen as more necessary than today (32.3% valuable). In addition, in 2001 Master's degrees were viewed by majority as required (53.1%), while today the majority viewed it as valuable (59.4%) instead of as required (0%). Results also showed that knowing more than one language (75% valuable) is seen as more necessary today than it was in 2001 (6.2% valuable) (See Appendix A and B).

In addition, according to both data sets, the major similarities we see are that both teamwork (87.5% and 87.5%) and independent work skills (90.6% and 71.9%) were viewed by the majority as required in both 2001 and 2017. However, we do see that there is a slight decrease in the number of participants who selected this attribute as unnecessary and an increase in those who chose this attribute as valuable in 2017. Also, the majority in both 2001 and 2017 viewed interpersonal skills (93.8% and 87.5%) and adaptability (80.6% and 75%) as a required attribute. However, again we see that there is a slight decrease in the number of participants who selected this attribute as unnecessary in 2001 and an increase in those who chose this attribute as valuable in 2017. For work/life balance (68.8% and 56.3%) we see that the majority viewed this attribute as valuable, though we do see an increase in the number of participants who selected this trait as unnecessary in 2017. Results also showed that the majority viewed social media/network (50% and 56.3%) involvement as an unnecessary attribute. We do see that out of those who chose this attribute as required or valuable, the number of those who selected valuable has increased since 2001 (See Appendix A and B).

Based on the evolution of these attributes, graduating college students of 2031 should focus on soft skills such as teamwork skills and interpersonal skills, along with a broader knowledge and experience in both their major and related majors. In addition, having high level degrees and going to Ivy league colleges will continue to be seen as less necessary.

Discussion

Limitations that this project faced, include the limited number of participants and survey answers that were given with a general perspective on business employment versus specific jobs. Due to the time constraint and specific participants needed for each survey, the number of

participants did not reach the desired amount. Also, surveys could not be created for most popular business jobs, due to the time constraint and the number of professionals reachable in each field who were willing to take the survey. However, this allowed the results to be applicable to the majority of business students rather than just those who are pursuing a career in the most popular business fields.

To return to the subject, much has changed in today's economy and the hiring process compared to that of 2001. Compared to 2001, today employers are not just looking for graduates with specific knowledge and experience in their desired major. Instead, employers are seeking those who have a broader knowledge, making them “flexible”, “reliable”, and “adaptable to several different jobs. This means that that the original hypothesis proposed by this project was partially correct. While it is true that soft skills have grown in importance since 2001, there has also been a shift in the type of experience and skill set employers are looking for in their employees. In addition, this means that results from existing research about how professionals can improve their work status are not too different from the results for graduating college students. However, graduating college students still need to advance their adaptability, interactive skills, and knowledge in order for employers to see them as of equal value to those who already have professional work experience. Much research has already shown that employers prefer employees with professional work experience over graduating college students. Reasons for this have been the difference in the amount of experience, training, and knowledge experienced workers have compared to graduating college students. This leaves many employers feeling that hiring experienced workers would result in less mistakes and smoother transition into the workplace. However, students with the desired attributes found in this study's

survey results, can avoid this issue. Employers admit that having graduating college students can be more beneficial for businesses because they offer more open mindsets, broader skills, a more global mindset, flexibility over position, and a fresh perspective. This means that graduating college students can increase their chances of being hired over already experienced workers by advancing their soft skills and broadening their knowledge and abilities. This has become increasingly more important as the rate of information produced and viewed has greatly increased, causing faster change and requires businesses and employees to react and adapt much faster. However, there are many other factors for the trends we see in the hiring process.

With today's constantly changing economy, employees must now have several different skills in order to be considered a valuable employee. This is because employees with a wide variety of skills can be moved to several different jobs within the same company or apply outside knowledge to their job. However, in 2001, business and the economy took a dramatic change. The increasing development of new technology had begun to replace jobs once owned by employees. As a result, jobs were replaced by technology and those positions no longer needed employees in the majority of U.S. businesses, leading to a great struggle for work. However, those who were able to adapt to other jobs and were able to gain new knowledge, beneficial toward other roles, were able to survive and become more valuable.

The increasing value of employees with broad experience has been a continuing trend since 2001. Not only is the development of technology a critical factor, but also the increasing cost of colleges, the amount of students with degrees higher than a Bachelor's degree, and increasing international assets, play a major role as well (See Appendix C). Similar to the results from both sets of data and as we get closer to present day, the increasing price of college,

the decrease in students with degrees higher than a Bachelor's degree, and a decrease in the benefits of going to an Ivy League college, all share similar trends (See Appendix A, B, and C). The results of this project show that an increasing number of employees and graduating college students are realizing the value of broader skills than specific skills, resulting in a continuing decrease in the number of employees and graduate students with Master's or Doctorate degrees. This would eventually cause colleges to raise the cost of college tuition, in order to keep profits and funding constant. Past research also shows that colleges have had to increase the price of college tuition because colleges have needed to attract more key educators by increasing pay since there have become a limited amount of educators for colleges (professors, advisors, assistants, etc.). However, this could also result in less students paying for higher level degrees, since the cost is too high.

Conclusion

The hiring process has continued to change. In 2001, graduating college students needed connections, high levels of education, and social skills. Now in 2017, graduating college students will need broader skills and experience, soft skills, and knowledge in their major and related majors and a global view. This means that that the original hypothesis proposed by this project was partially correct. While it is true that soft skills are growing in importance since 2001, there has also been a shift in the type of experience and skill set employers are desiring in their employees. As a result, we can expect to see that employers in 2031 will be looking for graduating college students with soft skills for both national and international use and knowledge and experience in their general field of study. However, it is still a question whether the value of

higher level education will continue to decrease in 2031 or if we will begin to see the price of college tuition lower and the number of students with higher levels of education increase.

With the data this project has collected, I hope to provide colleges with information on how they can attract more students and also provide their students with a higher chance of employment. This project also intends to assist businesses, by providing information to graduating college students on what attributes companies desire and need and thus giving companies more valuable employees.

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Appendix A

Table 1: Results from 2017 Survey Data

Attribute	Required	Valuable	Unnecessary
Teamwork Skills	26	6	0
Independent Work Skills	23	9	0
Internship Experience	2	24	6
Good Grades	3	22	7
Good Work/Life Balance	8	18	6
Adaptability	24	8	0
Leadership Experience	3	26	3
Doctorate	0	10	22
Master's Degree	0	19	13
Experience in Sports	0	8	24
Know More Than One Language	0	24	8
Interpersonal Skills	28	4	0
Involved in Social Media	2	12	18
Professional Appearance	14	15	3
Connections to Those in The Same Field	1	25	6
Fit The Culture of The Company	21	11	0
College You Attend	0	14	18

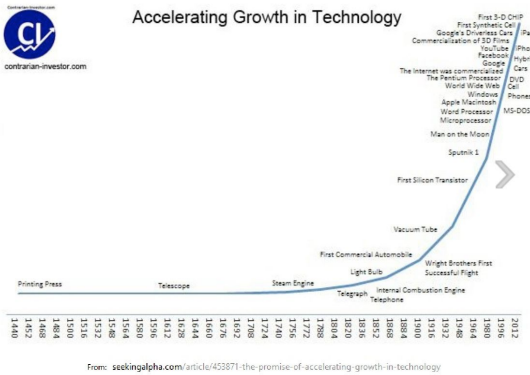
Appendix B

Table 2: Results from 2001 Survey Data

Attribute	Required	Valuable	Unnecessary
Teamwork Skills	28	3	1
Independent Work Skills	29	2	1
Internship Experience	28	4	0
Good Grades	13	5	14
Good Work/Life Balance	9	22	1
Adaptability	25	5	1
Leadership Experience	29	3	0
Doctorate	1	17	14
Master's Degree	17	11	4
Experience in Sports	0	1	31
Know More Than One Language	0	2	30
Interpersonal Skills	30	1	1
Involved in Social Media	8	8	16
Professional Appearance	13	7	12
Connections to Those in The Same Field	31	1	0
Fit The Culture of The Company	32	0	0
College You Attend	7	12	13

Appendix C

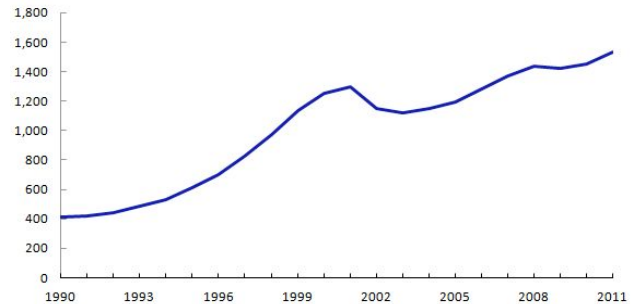
Figure 1:



1.(Left) [https://seekingalpha.com/article/453871-the-promise-of-accelerating-growth-in-technology](http://seekingalpha.com/article/453871-the-promise-of-accelerating-growth-in-technology)

Figure 2:

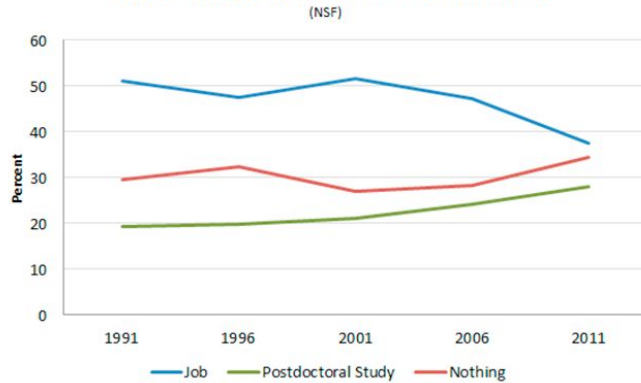
Employment in the computer systems and design related services industry, in thousands, 1990-2011



2.(Right) <https://www.bls.gov/opub/btn/volume-2/careers-in-growing-field-of-information-technology-services.htm>

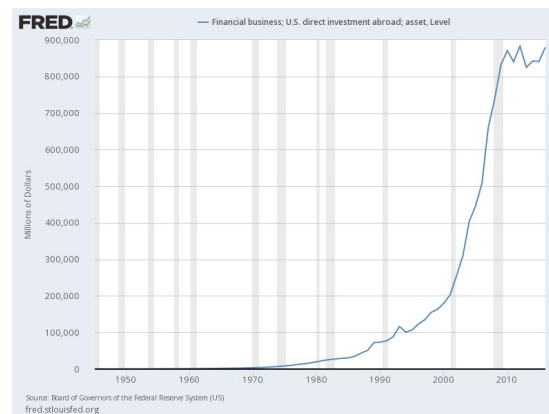
Figure 3:

Ph.D. Employment at Graduation (NSF)



3.(Left) <https://prepadviser.com/choose-masters-degree-want-get-phd-later/>

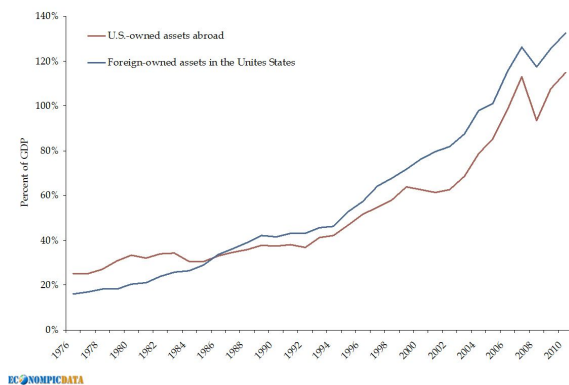
Figure 4:



4.(Right) <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/FBDIAEQ027S>

Figure 5:

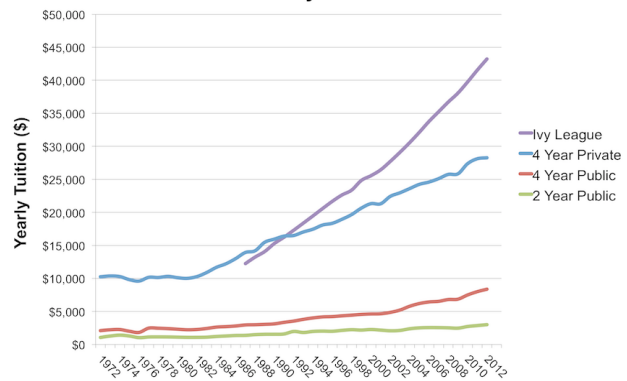
International Investment Positions of the United States



5.(Left) http://economicspicdata.blogspot.com/2011_09_01_archive.html

Figure 6:

Yearly Tuition



6.(Right) <https://priceconomics.com/the-supersizing-of-american-colleges/>