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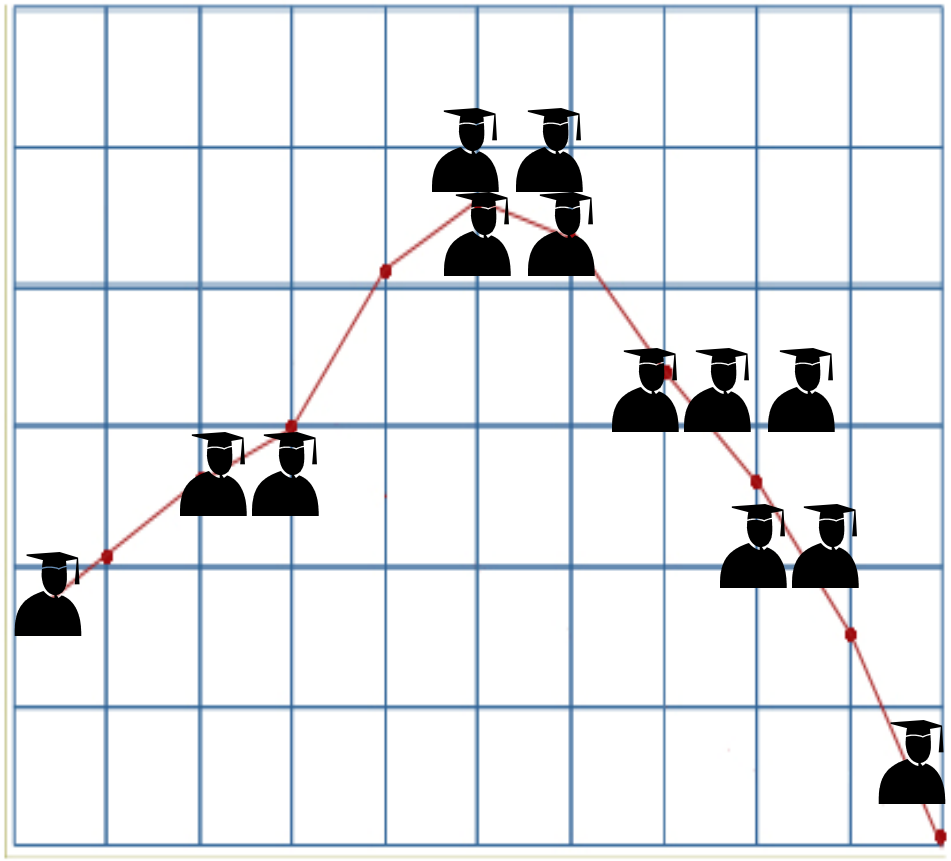
# What's Happened to All Our College Graduates?



*Francis X. Hezel, SJ*

### *The College Boom of Old*


There was a time when US colleges were awash in Micronesian students. Well, perhaps that's a bit of an exaggeration. But we can say that thirty-some years ago the Air Mike flights late each summer carried off hundreds of Micronesian students, many of whom had never left their island before, to their college of choice. Terry Edvalson, the scholarship officer on Saipan at the time, told me once that he estimated there were close to 2,000 young people from the Trust Territory attending college in the US. He wasn't sure exactly how many, because then as now there was no reliable tracking system for those who went off to pursue college studies.

Those were the heady years after Micronesians were made eligible for the Pell Grant (then known as the Basic Education Opportunity Grant). At that time I was in Chuuk serving as director of Xavier High School. I can still recall how astonished I was to hear that Truk High School, our worthy sports rivals but never our equals in academic pursuits, was sending off 189 students from the Class of 1976, fully 60 percent of their graduating class, to attend college. These Chuukese graduates had plenty of company; 260 more from other parts of Micronesia joined them that year. These 450 young men and women were heading for college abroad, most of them to the mainland US. They were a single year's outflow from the islands into the pool of young college students that was expanding by the year.

**In any given year during the late 1960s there were a total of 40 Chuukese attending college, while ten years later there were 600 in college.**

A few years later, in 1978, there were more than 600 Chuukese alone attending college, two-thirds of them studying in the US. This was the height of the Micronesian exodus to college, a time when about 2,000 Micronesians were abroad in college. They attended Suomi, Navarro, Park College, and ended up in towns like LaGrande, Slippery



governments should review the use of their national and state scholarship funds so as to make available adequate resources for study abroad. If anything, these funds should be increased for those applying for college overseas. In addition, the governments might profitably discuss with US Department of Education officials the possible availability of loans or the expansion of other forms of financial aid for promising Micronesian students.

We would do well to utilize those other educational channels–for instance, degrees done partially via internet or degree programs that might be offered to those who have enlisted in the military. These will become more important as time passes. But they should be regarded as complementary to, not substitutes for a normal college education.

**The extension of educational opportunities to as many as possible is laudable, but it should not be permitted to serve as an excuse for compromising standards or denying high end students the chance to excel.**

Generally speaking, the extension of educational opportunities to as many as possible is laudable, but it should not be permitted to serve as an excuse for compromising standards or denying high end students the chance to excel–to "be all they can be", as the US Army slogan puts it. To do otherwise would be to mortgage the future of future generations of young Micronesians and the nations they will one day be called upon to lead.

## Island Music Wanted

Chants? Traditional dance songs? Pop island tunes from the 60's or 70's, or even the 80's? Old church songs (no matter what denomination)? Funny songs composed during Japanese times or during the war? MicSem would like to copy any of this island music onto disk. We are now collecting island music just as we have long gathered old photos on the island. The music, like the photos, will be archived and made available to those who want it (assuming that we have the permission of the donors to do so).

### *Conclusions*

In contrast to the school system in earlier days, which winnowed the less capable students out at each step along the way and allowed a relatively few to complete high school, our education systems today are designed to propel nearly everyone from one level to the next. This is not altogether bad, but there is greater need than ever for checks along the way to ensure that appropriate standards are being met. Remedial work is better done at each stage along the way instead of being deferred until students reach the tertiary level. Otherwise, we may find ourselves attempting to do the impossible: filling cumulative educational gaps too large to be made up.

National educational standards must be carefully drawn up, clearly promulgated, and implemented in the classroom. They need not be the exact equivalent of US standards, or those of any other country, since they are *national*, after all, and ought to take into account adjustment between students' first language and language of instruction. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to let these standards slip too much, since Micronesians will be increasingly entering an economy that has justifiably been termed global. Over 60,000 of them, in fact, have already done so as they have emigrated to the US, and thousands more will surely be following them in the future. By dismissing strict educational standards, we would be putting them at a strong disadvantage and blunting the competitive edge of those who remain in the islands.

**Micronesian leadership will depend in the future, just as surely as it has in the past, on a steady supply of young people who have proven themselves capable of earning a full college degree.**

Micronesian leadership will depend in the future, just as surely as it has in the past, on a steady supply of young people who have proven themselves capable of earning a full college degree. This supply is being threatened today by structural problems that students face in financing the cost of a degree abroad. Our governments, in their eagerness to support the local national colleges they have established, may be tempted to reserve all their college assistance funds for students attending community colleges at home. Although intended to support local institutions, this would be a serious mistake. Instead,



Rock, and Corsicana–places not familiar to ordinary Americans, but household names among that generation of Micronesians.

It's hard to believe that in 1966, just ten years earlier, only 19 graduates from Truk High School went on for post-secondary training, with just seven enrolling in what could truly be called a college. The opportunity for a college degree was rare in those pre-Pell Grant days. Those who went off to college during the 1960s were usually financed by a Trust Territory scholarship, and their numbers were few. In any given year during the late 1960s there were a total of 40 Chuukese attending college, while ten years later there were 600 in college. What is said here of Chuuk applied equally to the other districts–Palau and the Marshalls as well as the other parts of what later became the FSM. Chuuk merely serves as a convenient example because we happened to do a survey of high school graduates from that island group during that period.

We might sum it up this way. Once upon a time, only the very talented were offered the opportunity to go away to college–and most of these few ended up at the College of Guam. In 1966, for instance, only 200 young Micronesians were off island in college (half of them on Guam and another 25 percent in the Philippines). Then came the college boom of the 1970s, when a total of nearly 2,000–ten times the number a decade earlier–were away at college at any given time. No longer content with Guam, or even Hawaii, they flocked to the US mainland where they dispersed to little known colleges to pursue their degree. Perhaps not all these young people should have been in college, and some of them returned to the islands soon afterward, but we can admire their spunk. In those days, more than a generation ago, large numbers of the young at least had a chance to obtain a full college degree if they had the requisite ability and perseverance.

**Then came the college boom of the 1970s, when a total of nearly 2,000–ten times the number a decade earlier–were away at college at any given time. . . Today, however, the college education picture has been radically reversed.**

Today, however, the college education picture has been radically reversed. The extent of this reversal, the factors contributing to it, and

its consequences are the subject of this article.

### *The College Picture Today*

Today, FSM sends off a total of about 150 young people a year, about 8 percent of all its high school graduates, to college abroad. *(See Table 1)*. The Marshalls, which may have sent about 50 students to study abroad in 2004, would have registered about the same percentage. Palau, with a much smaller population, does much better: about 110 students, representing 45 percent of all graduates, leave for college in the US. Altogether, slightly more than 300 young Micronesians a year begin college abroad.

**Thirty years ago, 450 high school graduates a year were bound for college in the US. Now we have slightly more than 300 going abroad from a combined population that is nearly double what it was in 1973.**

**Table 1 Local College Enrollment and Degree Winners**

| | HS grads | College enrollment | AA degree earners | To US college |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **FSM** | 1900 | 1300 | 170 | 150 |
| **RMI** | 600 | 600 | 50 | 50 |
| **Palau** | 230 | 130 | 100 | 110 |

Thirty years ago, 450 high school graduates a year were bound for college in the US. Now we have slightly more than 300 going abroad from a combined population that is nearly double what it was in 1973. Let me spare you the math here and simply state that, with allowance made for population growth, we are now offering a full college education to just one-third as many high school graduates as we did back then.

Hundreds more students are entering our local community colleges



Today, as never before, the great majority of elementary school graduates are admitted into high school. Those who complete their high school are likewise swept along into the local college system, regardless of whether they are prepared to do college work or not. This pattern, which seems to promise 14 years of formal schooling for everyone who wants it, may constitute a barrier to those who are genuinely capable of a full college degree. As they are sucked into the broad stream of high school graduates who attend local colleges by default, they may find their energy and motivation sapped. They may not sink along the way, but they may find themselves less able to compete at a higher level.

Another barrier, of course, is the current structure of college assistance in the US, which makes it much more difficult for Micronesians to put together a financial package that will see them through college. US immigration laws once forbade Micronesians to take outside jobs while attending college in the US. The Compact of FA has fixed that, but in doing so it has offered an attraction–that of being a regular wage-earner–that has diverted many of these students from their main goal.

A further consequence of a system that carries students along, regardless of their achievement level, is the depressing effect it can have on academic standards. If almost anyone can get into college, there will be no pressure from above to improve the quality of high school and elementary education. Inevitably, this sends out a signal that if there are deficiencies at these lower levels, we are prepared to lower the bar to suit whatever product our present education system is producing. It signals our readiness to try to do the impossible—that is, to use college education to remedy the shortcomings of the earlier parts of the educational system instead of challenging it to improve.

There are barriers to producing college graduates that did not exist thirty years ago. They more than anything else may account for the short supply of college students abroad today–a shortage that is especially alarming when contrasted with the abundance of college students during the 1970s. We can only hope that this does not mean that we have resigned ourselves to defeat in the contest for a fair share in an increasingly competitive world economy.

educational benefits as well. Anyone who has served his first three-year tour of duty can qualify for up to $35,000 in educational assistance and can acquire his college degree through the University of Maryland program. Dozens of Micronesians have obtained their BA or BS degree in this fashion.

**The US military, which is recruiting nearly 100 young Micronesians each year, can be another route to a college degree. . . Anyone who has served his first three-year tour of duty can qualify for up to $35,000 in educational assistance**

Finally, there is the option of a degree that is done partially on-line—a hybrid delivery approach, as it is called. In this type of degree program, there is real interaction between the professor and students that is supplemented with on-line work. A number of distinguished education administrators in the region have obtained a doctoral degree in this fashion, while another 47 persons have done their Master's degree work in this way. In addition, a few Micronesians who have retired from the US military and have returned to the islands to take up teaching positions are also working toward their Master's degree on-line. It would be surprising if this form of distance education via internet did not become a more popular route for those seeking bachelor's degrees in years to come.

### *Summing Up the Situation*

If what I have presented above represents an accurate summary of the state of higher education in the islands, then we may have some cause for concern. We may find that we are stifling those who might be capable of doing full four-year college work, while utilizing the local college system to offer the rest, hampered as they are by their deficiencies, what passes in their minds as two years of college.

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each year. While this is a positive development, the local colleges offer only two-year degree programs and the vast majority of these students do not pursue a Bachelor's degree program abroad afterwards. Indeed, the numbers cited above include those who leave for college abroad after completing local college programs as well as those who leave directly out of high school.

**A good education can be the difference between stocking shelves in a warehouse or cleaning tables in a fast food place at entry level wages and winning an office job with a chance to move up the ladder.**

Yet, this is the touted age of globalization–the era when young Micronesians are expected to compete with people from all over the world for a share in the economic harvest. With more than 60,000 emigrants from Palau, FSM and the Marshalls now living in the US, it is very easy to put a real face on this competition. A good education can be the difference between stocking shelves in a warehouse or cleaning tables in a fast food place at entry level wages and winning an office job with a chance to move up the ladder. You would think that the educational engine in the islands would be in high gear, but instead it is in reverse. We are galloping backwards toward the 1960s, an era of limited opportunity for those who sought college degrees, at the very time we need those degrees more than ever.

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What's happening? To understand this, we will have to step back a bit and survey what is happening in the secondary school systems.

### *Tracking the Student Flow into High School*

A glance at the statistics in *Table 2* is, at first sight, encouraging. When we compare the number graduating from 8$^{th}$ grade throughout the region with those being accepted into 9$^{th}$ grade, it appears that there is a close to seamless transition from elementary school to high school everywhere but in the Marshalls. A greater percentage of

elementary graduates are attending high school than ever before.

**Table 2. Numbers of Students and Retention Rate (2004)**

| | 8th Grade | | 9th Grade | | 12th Grade | | Local College | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| **RMI** | 1300 | *100* | 1000 | *77* | 600 | *100* | 600 | *100* |
| **FSM** | 2550 | *100* | 2400 | *94* | 1900 | *100* | 1400 | *74* |
| **Palau** | 350 | *100* | 345 | *98.5* | 230 | *100* | 130 | *57* |
| **Total** | 4200 | *100* | 3745 | *89* | 2730 | *100* | 2130 | *78* |

Palau's retention rate between 8th and 9th grades was always high, thanks to its small population and the several church-sponsored high schools that complement the efforts of the public high school there. Ten years ago, 90% of elementary school graduates were continuing their education in high school; now the figure approaches 100%, as *Table 2* shows. Nearly all of the 350 8th grade students in Palau are admitted into high school.

**In FSM, 94% of those who graduate from elementary school are accepted into high school . . . Overall, Micronesia has never been closer to universal high school enrollment than it is at the present.**

In FSM, 94% of those who graduate from elementary school are accepted into high school. This seems to represent a significant advance for the nation, inasmuch as ten years ago Kosrae, the smallest of the states, was the only one that registered an acceptance rate into high school that exceeded 90%. Yap's retention rate between 8th and 9th grades was just over 80%, Pohnpei's was a bit more than 60%, and Chuuk's was only 52%. But the last three states have seen the expansion of their high school systems: Chuuk's five junior high schools



The heart of the problem, however, is the funding gap due to the restructuring of US college aid programs. It not only discourages those who could leave for US colleges immediately after high school from doing so, as we have seen, but it impedes the progress of those who do go to college by delaying their completion of studies and distracting them from ever doing so.

How many of those who attend college abroad actually obtain their degree? The fact of the matter is that we have no way of knowing. For all the fixation on degrees that we have in Micronesia, you would think that there would be a decent tracking system to help us determine how many degree earners we produce each year. But, unfortunately, this is not the case. Consequently, we send off those select young students who have chosen the fast track with the fervent hope that they will avoid the lure of the regular paycheck long enough to pursue their degree program to the end and obtain the college degree that was their original goal.

### *Alternative Routes to a Degree*

Boarding a plane to a US college is not the only way of obtaining a college degree. Before concluding this article, we probably should consider a few of the other options that young Micronesians have for completing a degree program.

A handful of other nations–notably Australia, New Zealand, China and Japan–have been offering college scholarships to Pacific Islanders. Australia and New Zealand grants permit students to attend institutions in the South Pacific as well. Although the number of slots for Micronesia are limited, the scholarships are generous in that they provide for tuition, board and all living expenses abroad. One problem, of course, is that the scholarships offered in China and Japan would require learning another language. Even so, perhaps these are being underutilized.

The US military, which is recruiting nearly 100 young Micronesians each year, can be another route to a college degree. Although the major attraction of the military service is the starting salary ($17,000 a year), with the added inducement of the opportunity to "get off the island and see the world," as one young Pohnpeian put it, there are

Not everyone is as fortunate. Many of those who go off to college in the US seem to take jobs to make up the widening difference between the full cost of their education and what their grants and scholarships provide. Often enough it seems that the job initially taken as a means to achieving an educational goal becomes an end of its own.

**Many of those who go off to college in the US seem to take jobs to make up the widening difference between the full cost of their education and what their grants and scholarships provide.**

I've heard one story after another of young students who take part-time jobs to support themselves in college, only to find that their cash-earning power becomes highly addictive. As they realize their comparatively high earning power (by island standards, of course) when they start making $6-8 per hour, interest in studies can lag. From 20 hours a week, they may find themselves working 35 or 40, with college courses taking a second place to work. Some soon drop out of college altogether, halfheartedly promising themselves and their parents that they will return. Others take a minimum course load and frequent breaks from studies with the result that it may take them as long as eight or ten years to graduate.

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An earlier generation of Micronesian college students may have faced their own temptations, but the seductive lure of the paycheck was not among them. The immigration restrictions imposed on Micronesians at the time shielded them from the enticement of the US minimum wage (they were not allowed to work) and from withdrawing from college (their visa was given only for education purposes). No one, I'm sure, is eager to return to the days of restricted entry into the US for Micronesian citizens. Yet, we must acknowledge that the concessions of the Compact have made it easier for young college students to drift away from the educational program that brought them to the US in the first place.



were turned into full four-year high schools; two new high schools were added to PICS to handle the enrollment crunch in Pohnpei; and a new high school was opened on Woleai in Yap.

The Marshall Islands has always had a relatively low retention rate between 8th and 9th grades because of the limited desk space in its main high school on Majuro. The addition of additional high schools on other atolls and the expansion of its high school on Majuro have boosted that rate only slightly, from 71% to 77%.

Overall, Micronesia has never been closer to universal high school enrollment than it is at the present. We may well have reservations about the quality of some of the high schools–and the value of having the low-end students sit through four years of instruction that they may be unable to absorb–but the fact is that nearly everyone who wants a high school education these days can have it. If this is one of the goals of our education systems today, we can take comfort in having nearly reached it.

Before we begin congratulating ourselves, we should note that the four-year haul of high school weeds out many of the students who probably should not have been there in the first place. The dropout rate between 9th and 12th grades in FSM is 20%–much higher than the 6% "force out" rate of those who do not make it into high school at all. In the Marshalls, 40% of those who start high school drop out before the completion of 12th grade, higher than the 23% "force out" rate between elementary school and high school. In Palau, where nearly all students make it into high school, the high school drop out rate appears to be 33%. Let me add, however, that the Palau drop out rate—and perhaps that of other places as well—may well be inflated by students who transfer to other schools off-island or leave for a time before returning to get a GED diploma.

Thus, the de-selection process occurs not during the gap between elementary school and high school so much as during the high school years. The conclusion one is forced to make is that, although the road into high school is broad and smooth, the high school years do

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what entrance exams will not do–eliminate from the enrollment lists those who either can not do the work or who might not have wanted to be there in the first place. The lesson here for education administrators is that despite their best efforts to deny a seat in high school to no one, a significant percentage of the young will finish their education without a high school degree.

### *The Easy Slide into College*

**Just as most elementary graduates go into high school, so the great majority of high school graduates slip into college–local community college, that is.**

Just as most elementary graduates go into high school, so the great majority of high school graduates slip into college–local community college, that is. Here again let us track the numbers summarized in *Table 2*–this time, of those who graduate from high school (the column labeled 12th grade) and of those entering local college.

The Marshalls is the clearest example of what has become a regional trend. Just about all those who graduate from high school there end up in local college. A handful–about 30 or so a year–go on to US colleges directly out of high school, but just about all the remainder of the 600 high school graduates a year enroll in the College of the Marshall Islands.

In FSM, about 1,400 of the 1,900 high school graduates continue on at local colleges; most go the national or state campuses of the College of Micronesia, but another 100 or so attend Palau Community College. Altogether, 74% of the nation's high school graduates slide into the local two-year colleges, with another 8% from each year going to college overseas.

In Palau, too, virtually all high school graduates go on to college, but there the picture is a bit different. Somewhere in the neighborhood of 60% remain on island to attend Palau Community College, leaving a significant number–about 100, or 40% of the total–who go abroad for their college education. Palau, as usual, is leading the pack in its investment in full four-year college education.



of education. By and large, the dollar amount of the typical scholarship grant is roughly the same as it was 30 years ago, and so it covers a much smaller fraction of the total college costs.

**Since the 1980s, when US assistance to lower income families for college education was restructured, there has been a shift from outright grant assistance to loans. But many Micronesians . . . find that they are not eligible to apply for such loans.**

Take, for example, a Chuukese woman and her daughter who went to college 30 years apart. The mother, who attended a small college in northern Michigan around 1974, faced a total yearly cost of $9,000 for tuition, room and board, and incidentals. She managed most of the expense through her Pell Grant ($2,000) and her Trust Territory scholarship ($5,000). Unable to work off-campus because of immigration restrictions in effect during those days, she used a Supplementary Education Opportunity Grant and Work-Study to provide the $2,000 she needed for the remainder of her bill.

Her daughter, who graduated from the University of Hawaii in 2004, had a yearly bill of $16,000. It would have been considerably higher except for the fact that she was accorded in-state tuition rates–a concession to Micronesians that the university later rescinded. Her Pell Grant ($4,000) and her two FSM state scholarships (one from Chuuk and another from Pohnpei totaling $8,500) provided two-thirds of what she needed to support herself. Ineligible for a US college loan and with no supplementary grants she could apply for, she did what her mother was banned from doing by law and would not have needed to do in any case. She took a job off campus, working six hours a day at an ABC Store to make the rest of the money she needed to pay college expenses.

### *The Seductive Lure of the Paycheck*

The daughter who took the job in the ABC Store was somehow able to resist the temptation to work ever longer hours; she graduated with her degree after five years.

Why don't they simply dive into the deep end of the pool right away and start swimming with strong practiced strokes? Why not head off to a US college immediately after high school graduation, as earlier generations of Micronesians did? There may be a number of explanations given, especially young people's reluctance to leave their friends and familiar surroundings and unwillingness of their families to let them go off, but the main reason is undoubtedly financial. The cost of a college education in the US is prohibitive for many young people today in a way that it was not 30 years ago.

**As standards are lowered to accommodate middle- and lower-level students, those better students who are capable of diving into serious studies abroad may find themselves wading amid a sea of bodies at the shallow end of the pool.**

US college costs today run in the neighborhood of $25,000 a year for tuition, boarding fees and incidentals. This is about double the cost 30 years ago when Micronesia was sending hundreds every year off to US colleges during the height of the education boom. The cost increase in itself is no surprise, considering the inflation index as reflected in the increased prices of nearly everything we buy. A far bigger issue for Micronesian students is the drastic reduction of US government-sponsored aid packages for college education. Pell Grants are still available for Micronesian students today as they were for the previous generation, but they only provide about $4,000 a year–enough to cover barely one-fifth of all expenses. There are no longer Supplementary Education Opportunity Grants, as there were in the past. Work Study assistance is harder to obtain than it was before. Since the 1980s, when US assistance to lower income families for college education was restructured, there has been a shift from outright grant assistance to loans. But many Micronesians, those whose permanent home is outside the US, find that they are not eligible to apply for such loans.

Some additional financial help can be sought from the island governments. State or national scholarship funds offer assistance to those who qualify, usually providing $5,000 a year for undergraduates abroad. But scholarship funds, at least in FSM and the Marshalls, are limited and the grant awards are not keeping pace with the higher costs



**Overall, 78% of the high school graduates in Micronesia, or nearly four out of every five, continue their education in local colleges . . . About 2,100 young men and women each year enroll in these local colleges, while a grand total of only about 300 go on for college education abroad**.

Overall, 78% of the high school graduates in Micronesia, or nearly four out of every five, continue their education in local colleges: the College of Micronesia, the College of the Marshall Islands, and Palau Community College. About 2,100 young men and women each year enroll in these local colleges, while a grand total of only about 300 go on for college education abroad.

The path into college is easier today than it ever has been before because of the strong network of community colleges that span the region. These colleges have grown into a solid institutional force, staffed and administered by dedicated and competent personnel who have channeled their time and energies into the education of the young, often at considerable personal sacrifice. Their achievement needs no defense from me; their accomplishment speaks for itself. But we should be careful not to expect from these colleges what they are not equipped to do. As community colleges, they were originally founded to serve the educational needs of the local communities that were not being met by the four-year colleges and universities; this they might do by offering specialized training programs, for instance, and otherwise equipping students for employment. Their main mission was not to prepare students to move up and out to other higher institutions of learning. The purpose of this article is not intended to belittle our own community colleges. It is to ask whether we have been lulled into thinking that these local colleges, overtaxed as they are with their own mission, can provide an adequate answer to the problem of diminishing college graduates today.

### *Degree Completion Rates in Local Colleges*

The path into college may be easy, as we have seen, but where does it bring students by the time they are ready to exit? What becomes of the hundreds of young men and women who enroll in the local colleges?

Throughout the region, most enter non-degree programs to take "developmental" courses throughout their two-year college stay. It is probably fair to say that most high school graduates simply go with the flow, just as they have been doing since elementary school. At the completion of high school, the "flow" leads them into local college where they have the opportunity to continue in school even if they have not scored high enough to qualify for a degree-granting program.

**Of the 450 who start college at the national campus of COM—FSM, only about 170 earn AA degrees.**

At COM-FSM, only those who score high enough on the entrance exam to be admitted to the National Campus have a chance of obtaining an Associates of Arts degree or the equivalent at the end of their two or three years there. The 850 a year who enroll at the state campuses of the college take remedial courses, paid for by their Pell Grants, until they qualify for admission to the national campus–and very few do. Most conclude their college education with a certificate indicating little more than they have been faithful in class attendance. Meanwhile, the 450 or so who are admitted into the degree program at the national campus each year experience a high rate of attrition from the programs in which they enroll. Of the 450 who start college there, only about 170 earn AA degrees or the equivalent. *(See Table 1)*

At the College of the Marshall Islands, the pass rate for students is reported to be about 9%. Thus, we must assume that of the 600 who enter the college each year, only about 50 will complete the two-year college program with a degree. The University of the South Pacific, which has a satellite campus on Majuro, enrolls another 40 students, but we have no numbers on their completion rate.

Again, Palau shows a much higher completion rate in its degree programs. Of each entering class of 120-140 at Palau Community College, 75% reportedly complete the degree program. Many of these graduates, we might add, either join the military or continue their college education in the US after finishing at PCC.

If success is marked solely by the completion of a degree program, then COM-FSM and CMI, despite everything else they accomplish,



would not receive very high grades. Of the combined inflow of 1900 students into these two colleges, only 220 earn degrees at the end of their academic program. In other words, one out of every eight students entering these colleges comes out with an AA degree or the equivalent. A fair number of these go on to other tertiary schools. As for the rest, they have taken their developmental courses, as they are called, without much hope of being admitted into a genuine degree program.

**If success is marked solely by the completion of a degree program, then COM-FSM and CMI would not receive very high grades…. Only one out of every eight students entering these colleges comes out with an AA degree or the equivalent.**

But what are young high school graduates without strong academic potential expected to do? With very few jobs available, they naturally drift into local college with their more talented peers, learn what they can while they are there, and perhaps repair some of the inadequacies of their earlier education. They know that the vocational education programs that are becoming a staple of the curriculum probably won't land them jobs at the end of their non-degree program, but the courses offered as part of these programs are preferable to other options that might make intellectual demands they can not meet. All in all, they have few other attractive choices.

### *The Financial Aid Crunch in US Colleges*

Local colleges are often perceived as a springboard for entry into college abroad, even though they are mandated to provide education for a mass enrollment that includes many students ill-equipped to handle academic work at the college level. We have all heard stories of those admitted as freshmen whose reading level is tested at the 4$^{th}$ or 5$^{th}$ grade level and whose math skills are even more rudimentary. As standards are lowered to accommodate middle- and lower-level students, those better students who are capable of diving into serious studies abroad may find themselves wading amid a sea of bodies at the shallow end of the pool. The danger, of course, is that their ability may go unchallenged as they bounce around pretending to swim while waiting to complete their AA degree.