A Nation of Readers?

By Justin Goldman

The literacy study, along with others by scholars such as David Smailich, suggests that a profound issue is now confronting young adults: the time to read serious news coverage. This is because, with the advent of the Internet, the news is no longer as easily accessible as it once was. The Internet has opened the door to a world of information and profound change in the way we consume it. Yet, it has also, I believe, created a counterpoint to understanding and competency. With all the information and the speed at which it is disseminated, it seems easier for a young person to go through life with little or no awareness of his/her connection to the state or of the responsibility that goes hand-in-hand. Take the case of H.R. 609, which failed to pass in the House of Representatives by a vote of 200-220 last week. This legislation would have cut student loan interest rates from 6.8 percent to 3.4 percent. According to the Kansas City Star, the recent budget gap is expected to raise the cost of education by 1.1 percent of GDP in the fiscal year 2012. Student loan interest rates could go as high as 12 percent, which is a significant increase.

I believe that college students need to make the time to read—like the common good, and their own enlightenment self-interest. The current global system has social justice consequences for people worldwide that need to be fully understood. Also, when today’s college students tackle today’s job market they cannot ignore global trends that impact public, private, and non-profit sectors. As students graduate and the job market changes, they will have to begin to repay those student loans on which the Congress chose not to reduce the interest rates.

When a young American consumer dials up the call center over a difficulty with their phone, it may often be a skilled worker from India on the line troubleshooting the problem from Bangalore. Terence Chea writes in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer that with its numerous call centers and software firms serving foreign clients, Bangalore is the center of the global outsourcing debate. According to The Associated Press, IBM, Dell, Microsoft and Oracle are expanding their Bangalore work force to tap into India’s huge pool of well-trained, relatively inexpensive engineers and other professionals. We live in an uncertain world, a world where volatility from the East Asian Financial Crisis to the late 90s spread to Brazil, Russia, and the United States. A positive trend is the number of faculty members who bring current events into classroom discussion. Professors can encourage good reading habits, but at the end of the day students must take ownership of critical thinking. So, what is the balance? Is it time for us to see a more balanced approach to education? This is a complex issue that requires more discussion and critical thinking.

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