

Universities have done little until recently to improve the courses they offer. University spending is driven by the need to compete in university league tables that tend to rank almost everything about a university except the (hard-to-measure) quality of the graduates it produces. Roger Geiger of Pennsylvania State University and Donald Heller of Michigan State University say that since 1990, in both public and private colleges, expenditures on instruction have risen more slowly than in any other category of spending, even as student numbers have risen. Universities are, however, spending plenty more on administration and support services. Universities cannot look to government to come to the rescue. States have already cut back dramatically on the amount of financial aid they give universities. Barack Obama has made it clear that he is unhappy about rising tuition fees, and threatens universities with aid cuts if they rise any further. Roger Brinner from the Parthenon Group, a consultancy, predicts that enrolment rates will stay flat for the next five to seven years even as the economy picks up. A federal survey showed that the literacy of college-educated citizens declined between 1992 and 2003. Only a quarter were deemed proficient, defined as “using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals and to develop one’s knowledge and potential”. Almost a third of students these days do not take any courses that involve more than 40 pages of reading over an entire term. Moreover, students are spending measurably less time studying and more on recreation. Universities may counter that the value of a degree cannot be reduced to a simple economic number. That, though, sounds increasingly cynical, when the main reason universities have been able to increase their revenue so much is because of loans given to students on the basis of what they are told they will one day earn. [Link](#) all’articolo completo.

(Fonte: The Economist 01-12-2012)