

EDUCATIONAL DEBT AT MLC: A HISTORIC LOOK TO RAISE AWARENESS AND
HELP GUIDE FUTURE DISCUSSIONS

BY

JASON E. THRELKELD

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

PROF. STEPHEN GEIGER, ADVISOR

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

MEQUON, WI

FEBRUARY 19, 2021

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ABSTRACT

Educational debt is now a burden that the majority of students who have graduated from Martin Luther College are going into the ministry burdened with. Students are seeing record-high amounts of educational debt that they will try to pay as they start out their lives. Year after year, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod has recognized this problem. Year after year, the problem has only gotten worse. There does not seem to be an end to the consistent increases in the cost of attending MLC, nor the amount of loans students will need to pay that cost. Increased amounts of debt will have a profound impact on graduates. We need to strive to understand how this problem arose and the many factors that are involved. Then there may be a chance at looking to move in the right direction in the future.

INTRODUCTION

Educational debt has grown into a national problem that affects all students of higher education. A journal submitted to the Auburn Studies stated, “Undergraduate educational debt has become a national problem that affects students in nearly every study.”¹ The journal stated that graduates from all fields of study are graduating with excessive debt. This financial burden is no longer a small or isolated inconvenience only affecting a select few, but rather a widespread burden that is weighing heavily on those striving to better themselves through higher education. Sandy Baum, professor emerita of economics at Skidmore College, wrote in 2017 that an average of seventy percent of high school students went right into college.² Unfortunately, as those same high school students begin to look ahead to college, will the excitement of independence and personal growth quickly be overshadowed by the stress and burden of the insurmountable debt that comes with this new life change?

Whether choosing a public university or a private college, educational debt extends its unbiased, open arms to all enrolled in higher education. This financial weight also pertains to many high school students in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) contemplating their enrollment at Martin Luther College (MLC). The majority of WELS called workers train

1. Sharon L. Miller Kim Maphis Early and Anthony Ruger, “Taming the Tempest: A Team Approach to Reducing and Managing Student Debt” (Auburn Studies 2014), 2.

2. Sandy Baum, “How Students Pay for College.” (Change 50 Taylor & Francis Ltd:135–41 2018), 135.

and graduate on the MLC campus. According to Table 1, the percentage of students who needed to borrow money in order to complete their education and graduate has increased over twenty percent. Seventy-five percent of students training at MLC graduated with educational debt that would need to be paid off during their ministry. Like so many high school students looking excitedly ahead towards college life only to be met with the blunt reality of loans and debt, the majority of WELS called workers, ready and equipped for service, begin their own ministry clouded in years of debt.

Martin Luther College graduates' educational debt will continue to be a stumbling block unless this growing problem is adequately understood and addressed. Taking the time to dissect and clarify the various factors that contribute to this growing issue is critical in order to fully understand how the present situation occurred, especially at MLC. There is no quick fix or perfect solution to this financial change, but perhaps examining the historical data will present an opportunity to learn from the past and open opportunities to improve the future.

Academic Year	Percent of Graduates That Borrowed	% Debt Incr/Decr (Y-to-Y)	Tuition/R&B Cost	% Tuition Increase (Y-to-Y)	% Debt Increase 2012-2020	Tuition Increase 2012-2020
1995-1996	54%					
1996-1997	51%	19%				
1997-1998	56%	8%				
1998-1999	56%	-17%				
1999-2000	49%	-3%				
2000-2001	59%	-11%				
2001-2002	48%	13%				
2002-2003	54%	1%				
2003-2004	60%	17%				
2004-2005	69%	15%				
2005-2006	66%	19%				
2006-2007	69%	4%				
2007-2008	64%	-7%				
2008-2009	76%	19%				
2009-2010	64%	16%				
2010-2011	73%	3%	15250			
2011-2012	80%	-4%	15710	3%		
2012-2013	91%	2%	16340	4%		
2013-2014	69%	-2%	17160	5%		
2014-2015	71%	16%	18020	5%		
2015-2016	74%	-12%	18920	5%		
2016-2017	77%	6%	19490	3%		
2017-2018	75%	14%	20470	5%	23.01%	23.25%
2018-2019	78%	-3%	21490	5%	20.94%	26.90%
2019-2020	75%	-4%	22130	3%	17.89%	29.01%

Table 1. Student Loan Increases/Decreases Statistics of Students Since 1995³

3. Data annually recorded by MLC and collected by BME.

PART 1: THE PROBLEM

Swelling educational debt is a critical issue that a wide spread of WELS professionals have been researching. Paul Prange (Board of Ministerial Education for WELS), Mark Zarling (President Emeritus of MLC), Richard Gurgel (MLC President), Mark Bauer (Director of Financial Aid for MLC), Michael Otterstatter (Vice-President for Mission Advancement Office for MLC), and JoElyn Krohn (Financial Literacy Coordinator for MLC), are among WELS workers who have been studying this growing issue. Each one of these individuals has been interviewed and has expressed deep concern for students attending MLC. Paul Prange believed that this is the number one issue the Board for Ministerial Education (BME) is handling.⁴ To clearly illustrate how educational debt is a growing problem, the following charts and graphs were generated by this group of WELS professionals using the data they gathered throughout their research. To conclude, taking a closer look at the WELS biennials Books of Reports and Memorials (BORAM) will illustrate educational debt's historical concern in the WELS.

The Data

Concern for this issue has escalated over the years due to the increase of loans that the average student is borrowing from year to year. Table 2 helps clearly illustrate that students are borrowing more and more money to get through school over the last couple of decades. For students that borrowed, the average debt at graduation rose from \$7,459 in 1996 to \$26,186 in 2020. That is an increase of over 350 percent in twenty-four years. The stats have significantly

4. Paul Prange (Governing Board Advisory for Ministerial Education) in discussion with the author, September 2020.

increased even when factoring in those students who did not need to borrow from their institution. For all graduates, the average indebtedness soared from \$4,044 to \$19,720. The total debt MLC graduates completed school with swelled to over three million dollars, which is a staggering two million dollar increase. Those are numbers that should cause anybody to be nervous, let alone the average college student just beginning to start out on their own.

Graduating Class AY	Total AY indebtedness	Students with Loans in AY	Total No. Graduates in AY	Current Yr. Avg for All Grads	Current Yr. Avg for Students that Borrowed	Cumulative Total	Cumulative No. of Students	Cumulative Average
1995-1996	\$671,268	90	166	\$4,044	\$7,459	\$671,268	90	\$7,459
1996-1997	\$650,290	71	140	\$ 4,645	\$9,159	\$1,321,558	161	\$8,208
1997-1998	\$745,669	75	133	\$5,607	\$9,942	\$2,067,227	236	\$8,759
1998-1999	\$714,866	84	149	\$4,798	\$8,510	\$2,782,093	320	\$8,694
1999-2000	\$638,817	77	157	\$4,069	\$8,296	\$3,420,910	397	\$8,617
2000-2001	\$743,209	99	168	\$4,424	\$7,507	\$4,164,119	496	\$8,395
2001-2002	\$824,197	95	199	\$4,142	\$8,676	\$4,988,316	591	\$8,440
2002-2003	\$1,027,443	117	216	\$4,757	\$8,782	\$6,015,759	708	\$8,497
2003-2004	\$1,295,643	123	205	\$6,320	\$10,534	\$7,311,402	831	\$8,798
2004-2005	\$1,828,880	148	213	\$8,586	\$12,357	\$ 9,140,282	979	\$9,336
2005-2006	\$2,128,827	139	211	\$10,089	\$15,315	\$11,269,109	1118	\$10,080
2006-2007	\$2,026,145	127	185	\$10,952	\$15,954	\$13,295,254	1245	\$10,679
2007-2008	\$1,407,032	94	148	\$9,507	\$14,968	\$14,702,286	1339	\$10,980
2008-2009	\$1,952,022	106	140	\$13,943	\$18,415	\$16,654,308	1445	\$11,525
2009-2010	\$1,787,538	82	128	\$13,965	\$21,799	\$18,441,846	1527	\$12,077
2010-2011	\$2,621,513	117	161	\$16,283	\$22,406	\$21,063,359	1644	\$12,812
2011-2012	\$2,558,511	119	149	\$17,171	\$21,500	\$23,621,870	1763	\$13,399
2012-2013	\$2,529,712	115	127	\$19,919	\$21,997	\$26,151,582	1878	\$13,925
2013-2014	\$1,974,612	92	133	\$14,847	\$21,463	\$28,126,194	1970	\$14,277
2014-2015	\$2,526,341	99	140	\$18,045	\$25,519	\$30,652,535	2069	\$14,815
2015-2016	\$2,624,507	115	155	\$16,932	\$22,822	\$33,277,042	2184	\$15,237
2016-2017	\$2,536,053	105	137	\$18,511	\$24,153	\$35,813,095	2289	\$15,646
2017-2018	\$3,351,084	120	161	\$20,814	\$27,926	\$39,164,179	2409	\$16,257
2018-2019	\$3,372,280	124	160	\$21,077	\$27,196	\$42,536,459	2533	\$16,793
2019-2020	\$3,194,683	122	162	\$19,720	\$26,186	\$45,731,142	2655	\$17,225

Table 2. Educational Debt Statistics of Students at MLC from 1995⁵

If the numbers continue to increase throughout the upcoming decades as they have historically, the average student will graduate with a debt of almost \$70,000 by 2046. These numbers are accurate if increases continue as they did from 1996 to 2020.

A second concern similar to the first is the extremes being borrowed by students. Every year these numbers are going to fluctuate. There will be years where some students borrow less, and some borrow more. The minimum debt amount, for those that graduated with debt, has not seen a significant change throughout the years. The concern arises from those students many would label as the ‘high borrowers.’ Table 3 highlights those ranges spanning from the low

5. Data annually recorded by MLC.

amounts of money borrowed to the high amounts. In 2010, MLC recorded at least one student having borrowed as much as \$55,696. Not only was that a considerable amount of money in 2010, but the concern deepens when one considers that the average pastor had a starting salary of just over \$31,000.⁶ It is no wonder many graduates are overwhelmed. As time marched on, so have the numbers. In 2020, the highest amount borrowed was \$95,000, with the average pastor salary starting at around \$32,000.⁷ Again, those are concerning numbers for anyone just starting out in their career. It is also valuable to note that many MLC students will marry a fellow MLC student. In that case, these heavy-hitting numbers could, in fact, double.

Student and Parent Loans					
Year	Average		Median	Range	
	Graduates with Loans	All Graduates	Graduates with Loans	Low	High
2009-10	\$ 21,799	\$ 13,965	\$ 19,813	\$ 2,000	\$ 55,695
2010-11	\$ 22,406	\$ 16,283	\$ 20,400	\$ 2,625	\$ 70,717
2011-12	\$ 21,500	\$ 17,171	\$ 23,154	\$ 317	\$ 61,280
2012-13	\$ 21,997	\$ 19,919	\$ 21,239	\$ 1,750	\$ 65,492
2013-14	\$ 21,463	\$ 14,847	\$ 22,700	\$ 1,750	\$ 71,960
2014-15	\$ 25,519	\$ 18,045	\$ 25,500	\$ 2,750	\$ 78,402
2015-16	\$ 22,822	\$ 16,932	\$ 24,250	\$ 1,000	\$ 81,807
2016-17	\$ 24,153	\$ 18,511	\$ 23,000	\$ 1,600	\$ 70,881
2017-18	\$ 27,926	\$ 20,814	\$ 26,090	\$ 1,250	\$ 98,501
2018-19	\$ 27,196	\$ 21,077	\$ 25,250	\$ 2,000	\$ 89,861
2019-20	\$ 26,186	\$ 19,720	\$ 23,463	\$ 1,845	\$ 95,000

Table 3: Ranges of Student Loans Borrowed Since 1996⁸

Concern for educational debt increases when one considers the average number of students who are graduating with student loans. Table 2 shows that of the 166 graduates at MLC in 1996, ninety of the students graduated with debt. That is just over fifty-four percent of the graduating class. Of the 162 graduates in the 1995-96 school year, 122 found themselves saddled with educational debt when they arrived at the end of their schooling. That is just over seventy-five percent in 2020, as also stated earlier in Table 1. There are infrequent years, like 2014, that

6. Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. *Book of Report and Memorials* (Milwaukee 2009). 60
The Author chose to use the wages for first year Pastors because they are the highest option on the pay scale for first year students. First year teachers make 3-4 thousand less on average than pastors.

7. Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. *Book of Report and Memorials* (Milwaukee 2019). 104-106

8. Data annually recorded by MLC

saw the average borrow rate decrease. The highest percentage of students borrowing occurred in 2013, where ninety-one percent of students took out loans to pay for school. Yes, there are some years where students borrow less. Overall the numbers have gone up and have continued to stay up since 1996. MLC could likely see eighty-five to ninety percent of students borrowing consistently year after year if these numbers continue on-trend. That also means the average overall debt will show increased numbers since more students contribute to that average.

A side-by-side comparison of the average graduate's educational debt with the average called worker's salary shows troubling statistics. The average first-year teacher in 1999 could expect to start with a salary of just under \$20,000 and the average starting pastor \$20,000.⁹ Students who borrowed averaged just over \$8,000 of educational debt. The average pastor and teacher would also receive a housing allowance, pension, insurance, and travel mileage. \$8,000 of debt is manageable with the amount of money the students would make upon graduation in 1999. In 2009, teachers' starting salary ranged from about \$28,000 to \$31,000. First-year pastors started with a range of just over \$31,000 to just over \$33,000.¹⁰ In 2009, the average borrower graduated with over \$13,000 in educational debt. Students in 2009 would be starting the ministry with debt that equaled more than 50% of what they would make in a year. Those numbers increased significantly by the time 2019 came. In 2019 the average first-year teachers would make between \$29,000 to almost \$34,000. A first-year pastor would have a starting salary of about \$32,000 to almost \$37,000.¹¹ The average debt by graduate borrowers had risen to just

9. Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. *Book of Report and Memorials* (Milwaukee 1999). 81-82

10. WELS 2009, 59-60.

11. WELS 2019, 104,106

over \$26,000. Most called workers were graduating with more than 70% of what they would be making a year, making their debt a greater challenge to pay off.

Synod Concern

WELS Biennial meetings have voiced concern for the cost of attendance¹² that students would be required to pay to train at MLC. The WELS leaders meet every other year to vote on essential matters of budget and mandatory expenses throughout the synod. These crucial meetings always include a comprehensive look at MLC. Year after year, the cost that students are required to pay out-of-pocket has gone up and continues to grow. Though leaders attempt to optimistically address educational costs and debt every year, it seems that the issue continues to remain out of control, leaving graduates in a strenuous position.

Before and immediately preceding our synodical schools' amalgamation and the establishment of MLC, the Wisconsin Synod showed concern for growing educational debt. The amalgamation was an immense transition. The WELS decided to take the two college-level ministry training schools – Northwestern College, located in Watertown, Wisconsin, and Dr. Martin Luther College (DMLC), located in New Ulm, Minnesota – and combine both campuses into one student body on the DMLC campus. Synod leaders stated in their 1995 meeting, “The Amalgamation will bring a more cost-effective system of ministerial education. On an ongoing basis, the Synod will benefit financially from operating one less campus and a most tightly organized system sized to the needs for candidates.”¹³ The BME’s goal was to lower total

12. Cost of attendance consists of the tuition cost and the cost for room and board.

13. Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. *Book of Report and Memorials* (Milwaukee 1995). 8

operating costs. The hope was that this drop in operational costs would help lower cost of education for students preparing for the ministry.

The Synod expressed concern about the rate at which expenses were increasing compared to inflation and aid. In 1995, the year before Martin Luther College would begin, there was unease across the Synod. It was estimated that students would need assistance above what WELS could offer. This need was due to the fact that educational expenses were increasing faster than the rate of inflation.¹⁴ Parents and students would not have increased salaries to match the increases in the cost of attendance. This would make it difficult for students to pay for their education without debt. Table 1 shows that some students in MLC's opening year already needed loans to get through school.

Synod's concern was and still is for the future of WELS called workers. Educational debt continues to increase at steady levels and continues to be a significant issue for MLC.¹⁵ The BME concluded both the 2013 and 2015 Biennial meetings by stating, "The largest project continues to be reducing the educational debt of MLC grads."¹⁶ There is no issue that the BME considers more impactful to our future called workers than finding new ways to help eliminate and manage educational debt. Over time this issue has statistically worsened, and the WELS knows that the current statistics cannot continue if they want to continue to supply churches and schools with educated, well-equipped called workers. The Synod's outlook is clear that this is a situation that needs to be addressed with urgency.

14. WELS 1995, 8.

15. Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. *Book of Report and Memorials* (Milwaukee 2003). 28

16. Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. *Book of Report and Memorials* (Milwaukee 2013). 151

Secular Data

There have been studies conducted outside of the WELS that offer valuable data and statistics on educational debt. Secular data shows that educational debt is not an isolated issue within WELS training schools, but rather it is an issue that “has become a national problem that affects students in nearly every field of study.”¹⁷ The growing severity of educational debt has led to more research and studies over the last couple of decades. One study conducted in 2008 found that two-thirds of graduates were taking on loans with a median debt that had risen to \$15,123.¹⁸ The total amount of federal loans borrowed for postsecondary education increased from 7 billion in 1971 to 95 billion in 2017.¹⁹ Another study recorded, “The U.S. Department of Education estimated that nearly 66 percent of all 2011 bachelor’s degree graduates had educational debt and those with loans owed on average \$26,000. *CNN Money* reported that 2013 graduates averaged \$35,200 in college-related debt.”²⁰ All this data shows that the burden of educational debt is a nationwide dilemma. MLC seems to have lower averages but still similarly increased rates.

The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data, IPED, highlights the universal need for students to take out loans to cover school costs.²¹ Three loan categories are used in the IPED data collected: “other loans,” which are any non-federal loans taken out, “federal loans,” which are

17. Memphis, Miller, and Rogers, 3. The “Taming the Tempest” article is a study done on a group of theological higher education facilities by Auburn Seminary. They have collected data for the past 20 years to get the figures they use in their study.

18. Laura McCloud, Rachel E. Dwyer, , and Randy Hodson. 2012. “Debt and Graduation from American Universities.” (Social Forces 90. Social Forces:1133–55.) 1137

19. Baum 139.

20. Memphis, Miller, and Rogers, 3.

21. The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System has compiled the data from various colleges, universities, technical and vocational institutions that receives federal aid. They have gathered the cost of attendance at schools and the amounts of loans that each student on average would have taken out. The data presented in this paper and recorded in Appendix 1&2 was received by Michael Otterstatter.

government loans, and “any loans,” which are a combination of all loans borrowed. First, the present IPED data compares loans borrowed between MLC and state universities.²² MLC recorded an average of \$7,861 of “other loans,” compared to state universities that recorded \$9,466 borrowed on average. For federal loans, state universities recorded an average of \$5,392, where MLC averaged \$5,480 borrowed. For “any loans,” state universities recorded an average of \$7,072, where MLC recorded an average of \$6,773 borrowed. The data shows that MLC students borrowed less overall compared to state universities. Otterstatter also compared data with other theological schools.²³ They have an average of \$10,769 borrowed in “other loans,” \$5,331 borrowed in “federal loans,” and \$7,086 borrowed from “other loans.” MLC’s students take out loans at a similar rate to other theological schools. This means that graduates from MLC will face similar problems to those at other universities.

Effects on enrollment, graduation, and studies

Education costs affect a school’s attendance, while enrollment affects the overall cost of education. Those effects are present even before a student walks on to the campus of a school. The risk that a student may go into debt is not necessarily going to stop a student from attending their school of choice, but the risk of unmanageable amounts of educational debt could. If students can fall into risky amounts of debt, they may decide it is not worth attending that particular school.²⁴ Students today are becoming more aware of the lasting effects that debt can

22. See appendix 1 for clarification on which state schools were compared.

23. Refer to appendix 2.

24. Dwyer, McCloud, Hodson, 1137

and will have when they graduate. That means that “the question of the impact of student debt on life after college has become a central focus of discussions of college affordability.”²⁵ Students want to make sure that they have the best foundation for their future, and that means looking at their situation in graduation; not every student worries about this issue, but many are beginning to. That means many at MLC will look at the financial situation they could be left in if they attend MLC and find themselves needing to take out loans. President Emeritus of MLC, Mark Zarling, saw the potential of high educational debt as a deterrent for those borderline students who did yet know if they wanted to be in the ministry.²⁶

Studies indicate that educational debt becomes a problem when higher amounts of money are borrowed. Some studies have concluded that a reasonable amount – under \$10,000 – of educational debt can be beneficial for students and the likelihood they will graduate. On the other hand, borrowing too much money can have an adverse effect, and risk students will drop out early.²⁷ With average borrowing amounts increasing, more and more students find themselves reaching those risky dollar amounts. Students are at a greater risk of dropping out early because of the high amounts of debt they acquire to get through school. Paul Prange, chairman of the BME, noted in an interview that a small percentage of students would drop out of MLC because they owe too much and would not have a high paying job to compensate.²⁸ They felt the need to either save up more or go to a career that would make the debt more manageable. The result of these students leaving is a fewer number of called workers and future students at MLC.

25. Baum, 141

26. Mark Zarling, in discussion with the author, September 2020.

27. Dwyer, McCloud, Hodson, 1134-1135.

28. Prange, Sept. 2020.

Effects of Educational Debt on the Person

These considerable sums of debt can affect students in a variety of ways. Educational debt has effects that extend beyond the pocketbook and the financial lives of graduates. Debt can also adversely affect the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health of the graduate. According to a recent academic journal, “financial stress is associated with decreases in both mental and physical health, as well as increases in anxiety.”²⁹ Paul Prange felt that educational debt would most significantly impact the graduates' morale.³⁰ Students' anxiety and stress levels increase as the amount of debt and financial difficulties increase. One recent article stated, “It is not surprising that some scholars have noted parallels between the increasing cost of education over the past two decades and an increase in student mental health concerns.” These effects can hurt the student's education, relationships with peers, family life, and future ministries. If those effects are experienced while the student is attending school, they are at risk to experience those same issues once they graduate.

First, students may end up hurting their education in their effort to take out fewer loans. Students are encouraged to work at MLC to help pay expenses and save up to reduce the amount of money they need to borrow for the semester. Mark Zarling noticed during his years as MLC president that students in difficult financial situations would often work more than they should as a full-time student.³¹ Some students admitted to working 30-40 hours a week to help pay for

29. Payton J. Jones, So Yeon Park, and G. Tyler Lefevor, “Contemporary College Student Anxiety: The Role of Academic Distress, Financial Stress, and Support.” 253.

30. Prange Sept. 2020.

31. Though it was not a rule, students were strongly encouraged not to work more than 20 hours a week. Working more than 20 hours a week as a full-time student could and often did have a negative effect on education.

school and their other expenses.³² Working this amount only takes away from the much-needed time required for students to sufficiently prepare for their studies. When more time is spent working rather than studying, there have been cases of students needing to drop-out due to low grades.

Aside from the need to work, the extreme stress that debt causes can hurt students' academics. The financial stress students take on can cause high anxiety levels, which can ultimately hinder academic performance. The anxiety caused by financial stress can lead to overall lower grade point averages and even school failure.³³ MLC strives to give their future called workers the best chance at success, which means providing its students with the best education possible. However, educational debt can ultimately hinder the education they are striving to provide.

When students feel the need to work extra, they can also miss out on important social events. When preparing for the ministry, it is important and beneficial to develop good relationships with classmates. These connections and friendships will be a much-needed support and encouragement throughout a graduate's ministry. It is important to have numerous supports to help combat anxiety and stress and provide necessary outlets for coping with unexpected situations often faced in ministry. Studies show that peers are the most effective support for students.³⁴ Students who do not take the time for these relationships because of work will miss

Students had less time to study and prepare for class. There could also be a negative impact on the social life of students. In a school where we are all training to be fellow ministers of the Gospel it is good to regularly socialize and get to know one another.

32. Mark Zarling 2020.

33. Jones, Park and Lefover 253.

34. Jones, Park, and Lefover 254.

out on this necessary and extremely beneficial support. When students habitually miss such social gatherings during their school years, those bad habits could transfer over to ministry years and hurt their ministries in the long run.

Scripture addresses the challenges that students and called workers could face when burdened with educational debt. The book of Proverbs offers wisdom about the effect debt can have on a person's life. Proverbs is a book of general guidelines and truths that will help the reader live a better life. In Proverbs 23:7 the wise teacher explains to the reader, "The borrower is slave to the lender."³⁵ In biblical times, the lender had control over the borrower's life. The lender could come and take away the borrower's children and sell them into slavery.³⁶ The lender could also have the borrower thrown in prison and tortured until the debt was paid off.³⁷ Being in debt meant losing one's freedom. The Wise Teacher points out that a person loses the ability to live as they want. One commentator explains this Proverb by saying, "Debt is debilitating and demoralizing. No one can live the happy, prosperous life Proverbs recommends in that condition."³⁸ The level of control lenders have today may be much less than what lenders in Old Testament times had, but there is still a level of control they will have over these graduates going into the ministry.

35. Proverbs 22:7 NIV.

36. The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the LORD. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves." 2 Kings 4:1.

37. Jesus parable in Matthew 18 gives some insight into how indebtedness worked and what control the lender had.

38. Duane A. Garrett *Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Songs* NAC v 14 (Broadman Press, Nashville 1993), 188.

Affects Debt Can Have on the Called Worker

Educational debt can influence the way that a called worker handles ministry. Educational debt, especially in large sums, causes financial stress. Financial stress is the top stressor in the United States today.³⁹ Most of our graduates are starting their ministries with educational debt that is more than half of what they will make in a year. Add in potential credit card debt, medical bills, or car payments, and one could certainly understand how graduates could struggle. Stress caused by this debt can affect how they can do ministry as the stress could cause various health issues, such as depression and high blood pressure.⁴⁰ Like many Americans, the called worker may end up “drowning in negative psychological repercussions including a decreased sense of ability to manage one’s money, lower self-esteem, decreased sense of financial wellbeing, lower productivity, and higher levels of overall stress.”⁴¹ They will not be able to perform as well and hurt their ministry. Stress caused by education debt – added to the stresses of ministry and the possibility of starting a new family at this stage in their lives – could also lead to quicker burnout. There is the potential for this financial stress to affect ministry decisions. Prange and Zarling were both concerned with the potential of educational debt becoming the number one consideration for taking or turning down a call.⁴²

High levels of debt have the potential to influence the graduate in making important decisions. One such decision is whether or not to start a family. Prange was concerned that

39. Carrie Doehring *In over Our Heads with Financial Anxiety from Student Debt* 116.

40. Doehring 116.

41. Doehring 117.

42. Prange and Zarling, 2020.

educational debt could cause called worker families to delay having children.⁴³ According to one study, the decision to delay having children due to debt usually stems from the wife. The chance of a wife making that decision goes up to five percent for every \$5,000 of debt.⁴⁴ If that is true, according to Table 1, twenty percent of students graduating with debt will likely consider not having children. That percent potentially doubles for those students marrying fellow MLC graduates. Educational debt continues to have an increasing impact on called workers' decisions in the ministry and their personal lives.

43. Prange 2020

44. Erin Velez, Melissa Cominole, and Alexander Bentz “Debt Burden after College: The Effect of Student Loan Debt on Graduates’ Employment, Additional Schooling, Family Formation, and Home Ownership.” *Education Economics* 27. Routledge:186–206. (2019). 189.

PART II: UNDERSTANDING THE FACTORS

There are a variety of substantial factors that influence educational debt for students graduating from MLC. Each of the issues that will be mentioned affect the overall amount of educational debt differently. Again, please note that this paper will not be trying to solve any issues or offer guaranteed solutions to help reverse some of these outcomes. Some of the factors contributing to increases in educational debt are unavoidable. This section will highlight three major factors that have led to current state of educational debt. First, this paper will focus in depth on the increased cost of education. Second, this paper will quickly discuss the effects culture has had. Finally, this paper will briefly highlight the role personal stewardship has on educational debt. Understanding these contributors will hopefully lead to future unified and productive conversations for those dealing with this issue.

Increased Cost of Education

To understand the factors that contribute to educational debt it is important to closely inspect the increased cost of education. This is the factor that has the biggest impact on students. The cost to attend MLC has risen steadily through the years. There are three areas that will be addressed to understand the increase in cost of education. MLC will be the focus of these three areas. First, this section will address the continuing increase of cost to attend MLC. Second, it will highlight the

numbers and statistics relevant to cost of education for students who attend MLC. Finally, this section will note the attempts MLC has made to balance these costs for students.

An Overview of the Numbers

Higher education has never been considered “cheap,” but over time, costs have continued to increase. In recent years, college tuition prices have risen to the highest numbers ever recorded. This rise in the cost to attend postsecondary education directly relates to the number of loans students are getting to attend those schools. “The average published tuition and fee price for a year at a four-year public college is almost four and a half times as high in 2017-2018, after adjusting for inflation, as it was in 1967-1968.”⁴⁵ A study done in 2013 stated,

The cost of attending college has increased significantly in the last 10 years. The average cost of attending a public four-year institution was \$11,496 in 2001-2002. A decade later, 2011-2012, the average cost of attending college had increased by nearly 50% to \$17,131. Overall, the average cost of attending college increased an average of 5.5% per year beyond the rate of inflation over the last 10 years.⁴⁶

For MLC, this is especially true as MLC serves as the only college-level ministry training school for the WELS in the U.S.

MLC has not been immune to the nationwide increase in the cost of attendance. Since opening the doors in 1995, MLC has seen an increase in attendance cost that students will need to pay. Most schools divide room and board and the tuition and fees. The difference between

45. Baum 136

46. Victoria Javine *Financial Knowledge and Student Loan Usage in College Students* “Financial Services Review 22, 367-387.” (2013). 367-368

other schools and MLC is that most, if not all, students attending MLC will be required to pay the room and board fee.

Year	Room and Board	Tuition and Fees	Total
1995	\$2,010	\$3,899	\$5,909
1996	\$2,100	\$4,144	\$6,244
1997	\$2,205	\$4,476	\$6,681
1998	\$2,285	\$4,617	\$6,902
1999	\$2,310	\$4,875	\$7,185
2000	\$2,340	\$5,155	\$7,495
2001	\$2,420	\$5,295	\$7,715
2002	\$2,530	\$5,920	\$8,450
2003	\$2,290	\$7,310	\$9,600
2004	\$3,300	\$8,500	\$11,800
2005	\$3,475	\$8,925	\$12,400
2006	\$3,640	\$9,380	\$13,020
2007	\$3,820	\$9,850	\$13,670
2008	\$4,020	\$10,350	\$14,370
2009	\$4,140	\$10,660	\$14,800
2010	\$4,260	\$10,990	\$15,250
2011	\$4,390	\$11,320	\$15,710
2012	\$4,570	\$11,770	\$16,340
2013	\$4,860	\$12,300	\$17,160
2014	\$5,100	\$12,920	\$18,020
2015	\$5,350	\$13,570	\$18,920
2016	\$5,510	\$13,980	\$19,490
2017	\$5,790	\$14,680	\$20,470
2018	\$6,080	\$15,410	\$21,490
2019	\$6,260	\$15,870	\$22,130
2020	\$6,480	\$16,420	\$22,900

Table 4: Increase in Cost of Attending MLC Since 1995⁴⁷

Most students who attend MLC live out of state and will need to pay the room and board charges along with the tuition cost. The overall cost of attendance at MLC has nearly doubled in the last fifteen years and tripled in the last twenty years. If these increases in tuition continue similarly to how they have over the last thirty years, the WELS synodical training college could see students needing to pay more than they are willing to in order to attend MLC. Students would not be able to handle or keep up with those kinds of costs. Those seeking to enter the full-time ministry would require more and more loans to successfully train for a job that would struggle to handle the educational debt many would need to graduate.

There is a direct correlation between cost increases and the number of loans students are required to obtain to pay for their education. Table 5 highlights this correlation. Over the last ten years, the average amount of money that students borrowed has consistently grown with the

47. Data annually recorded by MLC

increases in the overall cost of attendance. While there is a steady increase in attendance costs, there are higher fluctuations in the overall debt students acquire.

Year	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Tuition	10,660	10,990	11,320	11,770	12,300	12,920	13,570	13,980	14,680	15,410	15,870
Room & Board	4,140	4,260	4,390	4,570	4,860	5,100	5,350	5,510	5,790	6,080	6,260
Cost of Enrollment	14,800	15,250	15,710	16,340	17,160	18,020	18,920	19,490	20,470	21,490	22,130
US Inflation Factor	1.5%	3.0%	1.7%	1.5%	0.8%	0.7%	2.1%	2.1%	1.9%	2.3%	1.4%
	1,015	1,045	1,063	1,079	1,088	1,095	1,118	1,142	1,164	1,190	1,207
Cumulative Inflation Factor	1.5%	4.5%	6.3%	7.9%	8.8%	9.5%	11.8%	14.2%	16.4%	19.0%	20.7%
Cost of Enrollment Adjusted for Inflation (AFI)	14,581	14,587	14,776	15,141	15,775	16,450	16,917	17,068	17,592	18,053	18,334
Average Debt All Graduates	13,965	16,283	17,171	19,919	14,847	18,045	16,932	18,511	20,814	21,077	19,720
Average Debt All Graduates AFI	13,759	15,575	16,150	18,458	13,649	16,473	15,139	16,211	17,887	17,706	16,338
Average Debt Grads with Debt	21,799	22,406	21,500	21,997	21,463	25,519	22,822	24,153	27,926	27,196	26,186
Average Debt Grads with Debt AFI	21,477	21,432	20,222	20,383	19,731	23,296	20,406	21,151	24,000	22,847	21,694
Stafford Loan (4 year maximum)	27,000	27,000	27,000	27,000	27,000	27,000	27,000	27,000	27,000	27,000	27,000
Stafford Loan (4 year maximum) AFI	26,601	25,826	25,394	25,019	24,821	24,648	24,141	23,645	23,204	22,682	22,369

Table 5: Correlation of Educational Debt and Tuition Costs⁴⁸

Throughout 2018-2020, numbers have slightly improved from previous years. While, yes, any progress occurring is beneficial, the “occurrences” over the last 30 years are slight, and they quickly dissipate. Steady decreases in the needed loan borrowing are what students truly need. Meaningful solutions need to be long-term trends. Unfortunately, a trend of overall long-term decreases in necessary student loans does not seem likely with the cost increases occurring in MLC’s cost of attendance. Based on the data, it seems more likely that MLC students will continue to see an overall increase in the next decades rather than any debt relief.

The increase in costs of attending schools is going up faster than the amount of aid provided for students. The cost of total merit and non-merit aid goes up about 5 percent a year. For each student, that 5 percent total increase becomes less than 1 percent increase. Aid increase has not been able to match the 3 percent increase in attendance costs that each student will bear.

48. Annual statistics recorded by MLC and put together by Carla Hulke.

With merit and non-merit-based aid following behind cost increases, students continue to face higher and higher need for additional money to pay for school.

Year	T/R&B	Total Institutional Aid (Need/Merit)	Fall Enrollment Count	Average Need/Merit Award Per Student	Out of Pocket After MLC Need/Merit	% Increase OOP Cost Since 10-11
10-11	\$15,250	\$1,827,255	705	\$2,592	\$12,658	
11-12	\$15,710	\$1,949,709	679	\$2,871	\$12,839	1.43%
12-13	\$16,340	\$2,027,154	696	\$2,913	\$13,427	6.08%
13-14	\$17,160	\$2,095,643	702	\$2,985	\$14,175	11.98%
14-15	\$18,020	\$2,184,478	708	\$3,085	\$14,935	17.98%
15-16	\$18,920	\$2,279,808	705	\$3,234	\$15,686	23.92%
16-17	\$19,490	\$2,651,145	716	\$3,703	\$15,787	24.72%
17-18	\$20,470	\$2,527,179	740	\$3,415	\$17,055	34.73%
18-19	\$21,490	\$2,585,735	747	\$3,461	\$18,029	42.43%

Table 6: Aid-to-Cost Comparison⁴⁹

Changing Sources of Income

MLC has several considerable budget items that contribute to the high cost of attendance.

Running and maintaining a college and its campus is expensive. The New Ulm campus includes four dormitories, a cafeteria, a beautiful chapel, three buildings for classes, a library, and numerous campus houses requiring regular upkeep and maintenance. Both athletics and fine arts require the use of indoor and outdoor fields, facilities, and equipment. Along with that, MLC's primary purpose is to properly train and equip men and women seeking to enter the full-time ministry. This function makes MLC a multi-track school. In order to successfully complete each track, a wide variety of courses must be offered and taught each semester. More programs and expanded learning opportunities have been created over the last three decades, which in turn contribute to MLC's growing budget. All of these individual factors combined add to the inflated cost of attendance that today's students now face when attending MLC.

49. Data collected by Mark Bauer

Student attendance plays a significant role in deciding how much MLC needs to charge students to attend college. Losing even ten students would have a significant hit on the budget. MLC had cost of attendance at \$22,900 out-of-pocket from the students. That means having ten people decide not to attend equates to losing over \$220,000 that year.

Year of Graduation	Number of Students	Year of Graduation	Number of Students
2000	1026	2010	724
2001	1060	2011	697
2002	1063	2012	708
2003	1021	2013	714
2004	946	2014	727
2005	818	2015	723
2006	731	2016	742
2007	720	2017	756
2008	723	2018	764
2009	712	2019	731

Table 7: Attendance Numbers⁵⁰

Table 7 shows that MLC has seen a significant drop in students over 300 students over the last two decades. Adding 300 students in 2020 would equate to \$6,870,000 of total income from students' out-pocket-expenses. The drop in overall attendance over the last two decades has directly impacted how much money the school receives and needs to charge students who attend. The college has tried a number of methods to attract more students, like adding specific courses future teachers will want to take, improving visual elements around campus, continuing to offer sports, and others. All of these additions have added to the amount MLC spends each year, and the attendance has shown little overall improvement over the last decade. That is why MLC has been trying to find programs like the early childhood education program to draw in more students and future teachers. Michael Otterstatter stated the importance of classes like special education. Losing one of these additional programs could result in eight to ten students choosing

50. Data from this chart is recorded yearly by MLC.

not to attend MLC.⁵¹ That would equate to \$229,000 that MLC would receive toward its operational costs.

The increase in courses MLC offers has added significant operational costs. For every class offered, the school needs qualified educators to teach the students. The cost of a single professor at MLC is a noticeable addition to the budget. In 1997, professors' pay range was anywhere from \$20,472 to \$37,097 depending on the years of service they had.⁵² The professors' pay scale has increased to a range between \$32,705 - \$56,986 in the 2020-21 school year, depending on years of service.⁵³ The number of called workers at MLC has not changed much year to year, but the professors' pay and benefits have had a more significant effect on the budget.⁵⁴ Each professor also receives housing or a housing allowance, Social Security, VEBA insurance, pension, and reimbursement on any business-related expenses, like travel and conferences.⁵⁵ These budget items are all under one category in the budget MLC submits to WELS in the biennial meetings. In 2001-02 MLC recorded a need for just over five and a quarter-million dollars for their curricular work.⁵⁶ That number rose to just over seven million dollars in 2019.⁵⁷ Most of that increase came from the cost to keep teachers properly insured. MLC paid \$606,845 to provide teachers with healthcare in 2000. In 2019, the cost to provide

51. Michael Otterstatter (Vice-President for Mission Advancement Office), in discussion with the author, October 2020.

52. WELS 1995, 29-30.

53. WELS 2019, 107.

54. Paul Prange 2020.

55. WELS 2019, 105.

56. WELS 2003, 125.

57. Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. *Book of Report and Memorials* (Milwaukee 2017). 186.

insurance had risen to \$2,134,215.⁵⁸ That is most of the almost two million dollar increase to provide qualified instructors for students. With the huge increase in cost for properly paid instructors combined with the loss of over 300 students, it is no wonder why the cost of attendance went up just under fifteen thousand dollars from 2002 to 2019.

Along with qualified educators, MLC requires a trained staff of administrators to keep everyday operations running. These full-time workers help organize the student information, balance the budgets, distribute money, and do many other essential tasks that professors are not trained to do, nor do they have the time. The college spent a total of \$1,808,308 on administrative help during the 2001-02 school year.⁵⁹ Due to inflation and other factors, that amount increased to \$2,638,200 in the 2018-19 school year.⁶⁰ These buildings are relatively old and do require regular maintenance. Along with dormitories, MLC maintains almost ninety acres of land. Poorly kept grounds will undoubtedly have a negative impact on recruitment and student life. To manage the grounds, MLC has hired the necessary staff that requires full-time pay and benefits. This adds hundreds of thousands to the budget every year.

In order to successfully run a college campus, students are necessary. Every year, MLC spends a significant amount on merely getting students into the buildings they faithfully maintain. This task rests mainly on the shoulders of the recruitment department and the Mission Advancement Department. In 2001-02 this undertaking of recruitment equated to \$497,933 of MLC's budget.⁶¹ That number increased to over six hundred thousand in the 2018-19 school

58. Data collected and received by Carla Hulke.

59. WELS 2003, 125.

60. WELS 2017, 186.

61. WELS 2003, 125.

year.⁶² Recruitment focuses MLC resources on getting potential students interesting in coming to MLC. They provide students with the opportunity to see themselves as a part of the college and, one day, God willing, a called worker. The goal of recruitment is to fulfill MLC's mission, "to train a corps of Christian witnesses who are qualified to meet the ministry needs of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod."⁶³ The work of the recruitment office plays an important role in fulfilling that mission.

Food and sports are also budget items that will affect recruitment and student life costs. MLC pays an annual amount of money to be part of the NCAA. Students go to MLC to be apart of the ministry. These students also want the opportunity to play sports while they study for the ministry. They would attend other schools if sports were not available at all. Poor quality or quantity of food is also a significant deterrent for students living away from home. Knowing this, MLC has built a beautiful cafeteria, complete with buffet-style breakfast, lunch, and dinner offered daily. Students can eat as much as they want, and food is available throughout the entire day as well as select hours at night. Knowing such a wide range of food options exists is an attractive recruitment item, even if it is small.

All these items contribute to the overall budget maintained by MLC. The total budget for the 2001-02 school year was \$14,317,643.⁶⁴ During this time, 1,063 students were enrolled with a cost of attendance at \$8,450, which equates to \$8,982,350. Over sixty-five percent of costs were paid with student money or aid given to the students. In 2018-19, MLC had a total of \$22,388,700 of budgeted expenses.⁶⁵ That year they had 731 students with the cost of attendance

62. WELS 2017, 186.

63. <https://mlc-wels.edu/about/mission-statement>

64. WELS 2003,

65. WELS 2017.

at \$22,130 a student. They had \$16,177,030 come in from students or aid directly given to students. That is just over seventy percent of the total costs. This information shows that tuition increases have been needed to maintain the income to pay for budgeted expenses. It also shows that students continue to be the greatest source of income that MLC has.

Money MLC Receives to Offset Costs.

MLC requires a sizeable amount of support in order to keep the cost of attendance as low as it is. Without any support, MLC would require each student to pay over \$40,000 a year out of pocket. MLC needs the support of churches throughout the Synod. Mission Advancement helps promote MLC and get support from those churches.

Historically, MLC has received a subsidy from WELS to reduce the cost of students' attendance at MLC. The support given to MLC has seen a decline since MLC opened its doors. From 1967-2003, the Wisconsin Synod shouldered fifty percent of their college-level training schools' operating costs.⁶⁶ As operation costs continue to increase, the ability to support the college level training school has become increasingly difficult. Prange stated that the amount of aid the Synod gave MLC dropped in 2003. The Synod gave MLC permission to form the Advancement Office to collect donations from congregations to support operating costs.⁶⁷ The Synod also had its debt to deal with, and they lowered support to pursue a debt-free future for the Synod.

66. Data from a chart received by Paul Prange collected yearly by MLC.

67. Prange Nov. 2020.

The statistics show the drops in subsidy and how this relates to MLC's total expenses. In the 2001-02 school year, the Synod contributed \$5,121,837 of grants to MLC to support their \$14,317,643 budgets. That is only about 1.1 million dollars less than the \$6,268,109 they received from students' fees and dues.⁶⁸ The Synod support was just under thirty-six percent of MLC's total need. In the 2018-19 school year, the Synod projected giving \$3,575,200 in subsidy to help MLC's \$22,388,700 budget, which is far less than the \$14,246,500 received from tuition and fees.⁶⁹ The Synod support dropped to just over a quarter of MLC's operating needs.

The Mission Advancement office was formed to help balance the reductions to the Synod's subsidy. All the money that the Synod gives as well as the gifts received through Mission Advancement go towards tuition costs. Their combined contribution lowers what students would have to pay for tuition by half but still places the full amount of room and board on their shoulders.⁷⁰ MLC did receive gifts and support that came in due to their Mission Advancement's efforts, but students' out-of-pocket money covered the brunt of operating costs. Students enrolled in 2001-02 paid about forty percent of MLC's operating costs compared to over sixty percent in the 2018-19 school year.

Culture's Influence on Educational Debt

Americans have changed the way they feel about debt over the last couple of decades. People used to fear debt, but now, "the United States has transitioned from being a nation of savers to a

68. WELS 2003, 125.

69. WELS 2017, 186.

70. Information received in a correspondence from Paul Prange to the author in Nov. 2020.

nation of borrowers.”⁷¹ Regardless of their financial status, people have become more willing to borrow large sums of money to get what they want and need. Credit cards, financing, and extended low-interest payments have become an everyday part of life for most Americans. Young people see their parents today embracing debt, and in turn, they themselves no longer flinch at borrowing tens of thousands of dollars to pay for their education.

Changing culture attitudes toward debt are no doubt impacting levels of borrowing. Many students assume that they will borrow money to pay for their educations, and alternatives such as working longer hours, attending school part-time, or living more economically may not be considered.⁷²

Culture is difficult to fight. When someone does not feel a need to find another way, they often will not. WELS students are caught up in this cultural thought, making them more susceptible to high educational debt.

JoyElyn Krohn, the financial literacy coordinator at MLC, has spent much time studying the problem culture has on students everywhere. MLC hired her because they recognized the need to teach students about the difficulties excess loans can have and aim to help students obtain a stronger financial foundation as they begin their ministries. Students need to learn how to manage their loans. Best case is stated by Miller, “educational borrowing is not so widespread that there is no prospect of eliminating it altogether.”⁷³ Debt is part of the American lifestyle, and educational debt has become a part of going to college.

71. Dwyer, McCloud, and Hudson, 1133.

72. Maphis, Miller, and Ruger, 11.

73. Marphis, Miller, and Ruger, 12.

Stewardship's Role in Educational Debt

Students not only need more aid to help lower the cost of education, but they need to understand the financial situation their debt will create for their future. One secular study on financial literacy found disturbing results.

Among the 25,000 people who completed an online six-question assessment of fundamental financial knowledge, financial literacy has decreased from 42 percent in 2009 to 37 percent in 2015. Of particular concern is the lack of knowledge about how compound interest works, which can get people with debt into deeper trouble. Also alarming is the discrepancy between perceived and actual financial knowledge—76 percent of respondents gave themselves a very high rating on financial knowledge, yet only 37 percent scored at least 80 percent correct on basic financial literacy questions.⁷⁴

MLC has recognized the danger of students being financially illiterate. For this very reason, JoElyn Krohn meets with every first-year student and their parents to go over their financial situation. She carefully walks them through a budget and calculates their potential loan accumulation and future payments.

JoElyn meets with every student again senior year to help them create a personal, ready-to-use budget in hopes that they can control their finances when they begin their profession. The potential benefits of this education are highlighted by one study, “Making people aware of their anxiety and automatic coping along with improving their financial literacy will enhance their self-agency, ability to make more informed choices.”⁷⁵ As beneficial as financial literacy is, it will not be enough to solve this problem, which has become impactful in students' lives.⁷⁶

74. Carrie Doehring and Kelly Arora, “Spiritually-Integrated Financial Resilience: Helping Seminary Students Respond to Financial Stress.” (Iliff School of Theology) 18.

75. Doehring 117.

76. Doehring 117.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that educational debt is a growing problem for students considering MLC, those currently at MLC, and MLC graduates. As the years go on, students continue to become trapped in high debt levels if they wish to graduate from MLC. The large amounts of debt that students are starting their lives with should cause concern for everyone, especially those who are in higher education or plan to be. Educational debt cannot continue to grow the way it has, or there will be challenging consequences for both the future called workers of the WELS and for Martin Luther College. Sadly, there is no firm evidence that the swelling issue is getting better but instead continues to cause many concern.

Educational debt will continue to be a concern in our synod for many years, and, sadly, a sustainable solution may never be found on this side of heaven. Many factors contribute to this growing problem. Dealing with just one would not help, but all factors need to be addressed. Battling high operation costs, lower attendance, culture, and poor financial literacy will take much time. All the while, students will continue to shoulder a heavy burden as they prepare for a life in the ministry.

There will be many difficult situations MLC graduates may face as they bear the responsibility of educational debt needed to be a called workers in the WELS. They may face tight budgets, anxiety, stress, difficult decisions in their marriage and family lives, and many tough decisions. Having educational debt has the possibility of making those decisions harder to make. Graduates need to be ready to face these difficulties, and WELS needs to be ready to support its called workers as they do.

Amid the concern caused by growing educational debt, God continues to give his people great hope. Pastors and teachers in the WELS continue to thrive in their ministries and financial lives at home. God's people step up in love and grace to support their called workers! Graduates can be confident going into the ministry. God continues to use these graduates' many gifts to proclaim his Gospel message to a lost world! Increasing ministry opportunities open worldwide, and young men and women continue to give everything they have to serve their Savior. That is the great joy that shines even despite the darkest statistic and gloomiest fact. God will not let his church die, not even to educational debt.

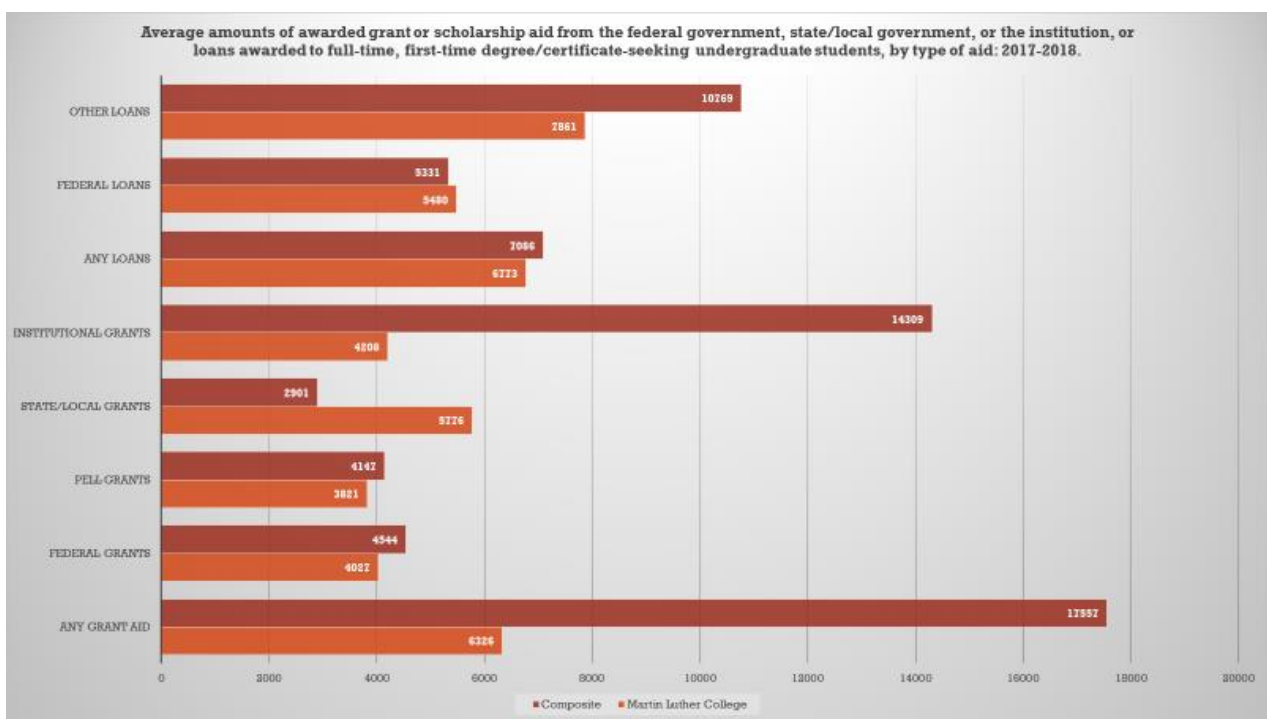
Many questions still need to be answered and many problems solved in order to help those pastors and teachers thrive in their ministries. What will the future of our graduates look like? How will MLC cope with the seemingly endless increases in costs and educational debt? This author leaves those questions for another to study and hopes this paper will benefit in that endeavor.

APPENDIX (GROUP ONE)

IPEDS DATA: STUDENT COST COMPARISONS

MLC vs. The 23

(A comparison group comprised of similarly sized, private, denominational institutions, including BLC, WLC, and UMAC members)

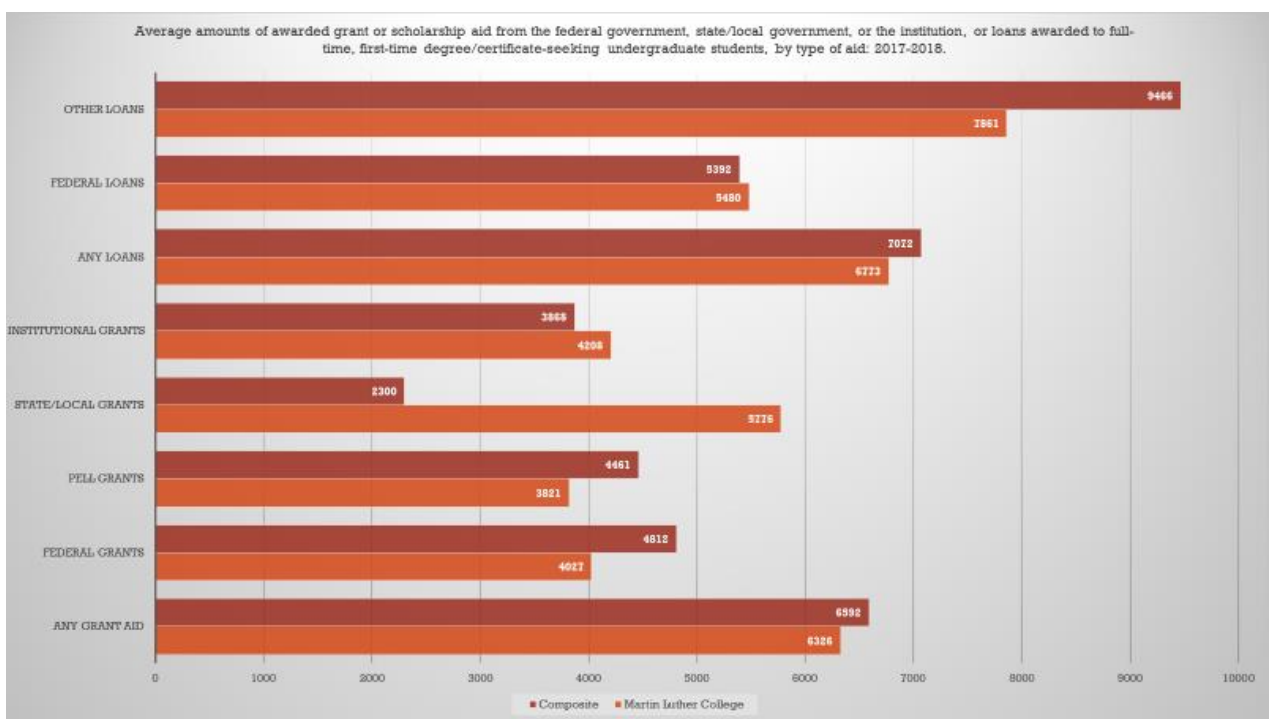


APPENDIX (GROUP 2)

IPEDS DATA: STUDENT COST COMPARISONS

MLC vs. The 40

(A comparison group comprised of **public** state universities of Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin)



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