Grad School Debt: Thinking through the Implications of Proposed Policy Solutions

Speaker Biographies

Sandy Baum is a nonresident fellow in the Education Policy Program at the Urban Institute and professor emerita of economics at Skidmore College. An expert on higher education finance, she speaks and writes extensively about college access, college pricing, student aid policy, student debt, and affordability. Since 2002, Baum has coauthored the College Board’s annual publications Trends in Student Aid and Trends in College Pricing. She is a member of the board of the National Student Clearinghouse and has chaired major study groups through the College Board and the Brookings Institution, developing proposals for reforming federal and state student aid. Baum’s articles on higher education finance have been published in professional journals, books, and the trade press. She is the lead researcher on the Urban Institute’s college affordability website and is the author of Student Debt: Rhetoric and Realities of Higher Education Financing and coauthor of Making College Work: Pathways to Success for Disadvantaged Students. Baum earned her BA in sociology from Bryn Mawr College, where she serves on the board of trustees, and earned her PhD in economics from Columbia University. Twitter: @urbaninstitute

Tressie McMillan Cottom is an assistant professor of sociology at Virginia Commonwealth University. She is coeditor of two volumes on technological change, inequality, and institutions: Digital Sociologies and For-Profit Universities: The Shifting Landscape of Marketized Higher Education. Her book Lower Ed: The Troubling Rise of For-Profit Colleges in the New Economy has received national and international acclaim. Cottom serves on dozens of academic and philanthropic boards and publishes widely on inequality, work, higher education, and technology. In 2017, the Sociologists for Women in Society awarded Cottom the Feminist Activist award for using sociology to improve the lives of women. Her research on higher education, work, and technological change in the new economy has been supported by the Microsoft Research Network’s Social Media Collective, The Kresge Foundation, the American Educational Research Association, and the University of California, Davis, Center for Poverty Research. Her public scholarship has appeared in the New York Times, the Washington Post, Slate, and the Atlantic. Twitter: @tressiemcphd

Kevin James is the founder and CEO of Better Future Forward, a nonprofit social enterprise focused on developing income-share agreement funds to free students from the burdens of debt and help every person achieve his or her potential regardless of background. Previously, James was the director of higher education at the Jain Family Institute and a research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. His work has been published in the Wall Street Journal, US News and World Report, National Affairs, and The Hill. James also spent four years as a legislative aide working for Representative Tom Petri, where he oversaw the development of legislation to substantially reform the federal student loan system. James has bachelor’s degrees in computer science and political science from Virginia Tech and a master’s degree in economics from George Mason University. Twitter: @KevinJamesEd

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Adam Looney is a senior fellow in Economic Studies at the Brookings Institution. Previously, he served in the US Treasury Department as deputy assistant secretary for tax analysis, where he advised the secretary on economic issues related to tax policy, analyzed current and proposed legislation, and supervised revenue estimation for the administration’s budgets. In prior roles, he was an economist at the White House Council of Economic Advisers, in the Treasury’s Office of Financial Stability, and at the Federal Reserve Board. He received a BA in economics from Dartmouth College and a PhD in economics from Harvard University. Twitter: @BrookingsInst