*Ivory Tower*

[*Ivory Tower*](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3263520/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1); CNN Films, 2014; Directed by Andrew Rossi; PG-13. [Watch the trailer](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjfwnBuj3O0).

Summary:

Student loan debt in the United States totals over $1.2 trillion and continues to rise. College tuition has increased over 1120% since 1978, which is more than healthcare or food. The documentary *Ivory Tower* asks as a result of the student debt crisis, “Is college worth the cost?” With a focus on not-for-profit schools such as state colleges/universities and community colleges, the documentary examines how college education has become a business where students are viewed as consumers of a product that includes, at an increasing number of schools, amenities such as rock climbing walls, extravagant student housing buildings, and tanning beds. The film locates much of the growing cost of education in a reduction of government funding and a willful increase in tuition by schools who want to provide more and more services that the film argues are wholly unrelated to education.

Themes & Terms:

* Professor/student relationship. The film advocates for live interaction between professor and student.
* Flipped classrooms. In these classrooms, students work on assignments during class time, with the teacher available for questions and tutoring. Students read a text or watch a video on the concepts prior to class.
* MOOCs. These are “massive open online courses”, trumpeted by companies such as Udacity and edX.
* Excess. Colleges build massive facilities with increasingly lavish services to attract students, particularly higher-paying out-of-state students.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the purpose of higher education? How are colleges and universities now better or worse equipped for that?
2. Should the government increase its funding to state schools? Why or why not?
3. What does a high school senior need to consider when applying to college?
4. Does the “flipped classroom” fix some of the problems? Consider [Clintondale High School](http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/09/turning-education-upside-down/?_r=1) as a case study.
5. Should everyone go to college? Why or why not?