Bonus Discussion Question Five: What did you know about higher education in other countries before you started your research? If you did know something, where did you learn it—was it based on knowledge or assumptions? If you've started investigating the topic, what have you learned? Have you found any interesting sources? (You can share a link with everyone by clicking the world with a chain link icon at the top of the message box and pasting in the link.)

STUDENT POST: I have only a few experiences with higher education in other nations. I was in Germany Pre-9/11, and dating a German girl that was studying nursing with a minor in Spanish at the university in Munich. If I remember correctly, her class load was about the same as a full-time student in the U.S., but a full time job during breaks went with the schooling. Germany is a socialist nation, therefore higher education is inexpensive for the student, because it benefits society. I have seen other universities. I saw the university in Baghdad looted in 2003, which was a crime, and I have seen the University of Kabul, which was starting to teach more females and hire more female professors. Needless to say, studying another nations higher education was not a priority for me in Iraq or the 'Stan, but it was nice to deal with educated nationals in these countries who understood what our mission was. It helped to settle "rifts" between U.S. Forces and the indigenous population.

INSTRUCTOR REPLY: These personal insights are interesting. Have you decided which country you're doing to focus on? It would be very interesting to learn more about universities in Iraq, though it might be harder to research.

STUDENT REPLY: First of all, thank you for your service to our nation :) And second of all, I find it very interesting that Germany and so many other countries are able to offer college for free or such a reduced rate. It makes me wonder where we have gone wrong and why obtaining a college degree in the U.S. means going deeply into debt. It seems that we could benefit by studying other countries who are doing this successfully and noting the differences between our system and their approaches to higher education.

STUDENT REPLY: Germany is actually starting to model closer to the U.S. due to the financial instability of Europe. Budgets are being cut by the States and Regions forcing tuition to be paid by the student. Universities are now competing for national funds through research and graduation statistics.

STUDENT POST: I new just a little about higher education in a few countries, I guess you could say the popular ones? Like Japan, they start the kids there on a path in elementary school. Children are taught Multiple languages in elementary school, and start them in business training, higher levels of math. England, or the UK just the names of a few universities, everyone has
heard of Oxford. There are very old structures there they use for schooling. I am looking at taking a Spanish class, so I thought I would look at Spain. I new the history there was deep and a very big college was in Barcelona. I did not know Spain has the oldest University there that date back to 1218. I was a little surprised they start children as young as 6-12 years old on the path for college learning program(s). They also start them on either a technical path or a liberal arts path. The time spent in school works out to be about the same, but there are time differences in the way the government breaks it up. Spain is a part of the European Union (no big surprise), and the EU has set up so people can study, or transfer around to different countries to complete their studies. The funding was very interesting I thought. I don't really understand why our government can't do what other countries seem to be able to do. The technical program they have there seems kind of like what the US is doing with the trade schools also, but this brought about a big change for Spain and the EU. Found looking for this information a little difficult, but it wasn't to bad. Did notice that checking or finding reliable sources is important, some stats I found just didn't sound realistic.

STUDENT REPLY: So they start preparing children in Spain for college as early as age six? That's pretty early to be thinking about what job you might want as a grown up.

STUDENT REPLY: Yes, I was very surprised and thought the same thing. They actually start them on a course of study for what they may want to do, it can change up to a certain point. Shot I know "adults" now that don't know what they want to be when they grow up, and they're older then ME! I can see there being issues, but it sounds like they have done it this way for a few years now. Pick wise young one.

STUDENT REPLY: I think that's a good thing that they start their children at a young age, at least they know what they are doing by age 10.

STUDENT REPLY: I also find it very interesting that they start children on a designated path at such a young age. I am not sure that any child of that age is prepared to be labeled for the remainder of their educational career. I am not very comfortable with this approach and feel that it would seriously limit options for several individuals.

STUDENT POST: Before I started research about higher education in other countries I had heard some things on the subject. I heard from a couple sources that many other countries provided free higher education. I know I had heard that many European countries provided free higher education. I had also heard that Canada provided free higher education. I hadn't done much research though until this assignment. I began research with Italy for my country. There turned out not to be a wealth of information on that country. I was surprised to find that higher education wasn't free in Italy. Then I switched countries and focused on Finland. I found more information available for higher education in Finland. A certain level of higher education is free in
Finland. You can earn a Bachelor's degree for free there. I have a couple of websites to suggest for anyone else researching Finland.

STUDENT REPLY: Finland is also my choice. One of the factors for choosing Finland was the free education. I was also interested that Finland ranks very high globally as far the top ranked universities. The problems of our education system here at home have definitely stirred some questions in my mind. Thanks for the links.

STUDENT POST: I am surprised at how seriously uninformed I am when it comes to higher education in other nations. I was operating under the assumption that the United States was the world leader (of course!) when it came to higher education. The more I learn about this topic, the more I realize how behind the curve we are in so many areas. I have chosen to study China's education system. The differences are astounding. I was also assuming that because China is a communist country, their education system would be somewhat antiquated. I was surprised to learn that this is not at all the case. While it is definitely more competitive, it is also quite progressive in many ways. I was shocked to learn that the average cost for a student in China obtaining a bachelors degree is anywhere from $400 to $2200. This figure includes instruction, room/board, and meals. The cost of living in China is substantially less, but a fair comparison still claims that college in the U.S. still costs approximately 50% more than in China. Until recently, the only real option to obtain a bachelors degree in China was to attend a government university. This type of education is reserved for the very best students and the families who are able to foot the bill. Recently, the education system was renovated to allow more students to work towards a degree. By allowing private colleges to award the same degree as government universities, they are making graduation more achievable than ever before. I also have learned that Chinese students are much better prepared to enter college due to the competitive nature of their primary education system and the extensive testing and evaluations that they must undergo just to be admitted to high schools. I believe that Americans could learn so much from studying other countries and their approaches to higher education. It seems that we have a lot of room for growth and could benefit from studying what is working for our competition.

STUDENT REPLY: With the influx of business, China had to increase the education level of its people. It has been a cheap source of labor for the manufacturing industry for years, but there is a need for management, IT, etc. when industrialization grows. A classic case of supply and demand that had to be met, and I think it has forced China to change. The same happened in Japan during the 1950's, when Japanese corporations were awarded huge U.S. military contracts during the Korean War.

STUDENT REPLY: I was also very surprised to find out some of the things I have found out about higher education. Seems to me the US got out in front of the world as far as higher education goes and waited for everyone else to catch up, and got passed and left in the dust! Now the US could learn a lot from other countries about higher education.
I feel also that the reason they start children so early is to kind of hold them responsible for their choices and to help them make better-informed choices in what the future hold for them. The only rationale I can put to it. Like I replied to Hazel, I know "adults" that don't know what they want to be when they grow up.

**Bonus Discussion Question:** In your research on higher education in other countries, are you finding similar controversies to what we have been talking about HE here in the US? Why do you think we are struggling so much with costs, retention, "value" of a degree? Is it something inherently American or is it something about the way our system is set up?

**STUDENT POST:** Personally what I think has happened is, The US got out in front of the world as far as education goes, and sit on what they had accomplished. This aloud the rest of the world to restructure education in their education system and passed the US. Now the US has so much invested in our system of education, the amount of change would simply cost to much for the size of restructuring the US would have to do. Seems like there are a lot of countries that have "college level" education built into their secondary education level (what I would consider to be High School?). Global education does seem to be a better way to look at how people are educated especially with all the markets and everything else refereeing to Global this or that. Just one observation.

**INSTRUCTOR REPLY:** You bring up a good point--in different countries, college and university are different education levels (whereas here they're both used to discuss the same level). For example, I know in England, mandatory schooling ends at 16 (where students get a qualification called a GCSE). The next step is college (aged 16-18 where they get A-Levels) and then university (to get their degrees).

**STUDENT REPLY:** That's interesting that college level work starts at 16 for students in England. I wonder if that better prepares students there for university. I'd say the U.S. makes an attempt to preview the rigor of college for high school students by offering AP classes, but obviously those aren't mandatory.

**INSTRUCTOR REPLY:** One thing that I found (and this is purely personal experience so I have no idea how it plays out country-wide) is that some English students who go to college find out pretty quickly whether or not it's for them (for example, unlike mandatory school, they can choose whether or not to come to class, they don't have to stay on campus all day, etc). I experienced many students who actually dropped out of college relatively quickly; while this was a shame, at least it kept them from getting into debt or wasting years of their lives. Another thing that is done in England (and many other European countries) is a "gap year." This is the year after secondary school where students deliberately do not go straight to more education, but instead take time to "figure out" what they want to do. This may mean getting a job or traveling or doing "community" work. Unfortunately, because of the economy, many families can't afford to allow
their kids to just "take a year off" these days, but I think the theory is a good one. It allows young people to think about what they want to do--rather than make a quick decision (such as not going just because they've sick of school or automatically going because they feel pressure into it) and then regret that decision later.

STUDENT POST: In Finland, after attending basic education from age 7 to 16, students chose between vocational or general education which takes them up to age 19. After that students go on to universities or polytechnics (vocational schools). In contrast, students in the United States attend basic education from age 6 to 18, and then go straight to college. I kind of like the transition period that is offered in Finland. Three years to prepare for university or polytechnics seems like a nice thing for students. I think this is also true in other countries as well as Finland. If I remember correctly, China has a similar system of dividing vocational, general, and specialized education at an early age.

STUDENT REPLY: I completely agree. It seems like a great idea to allow a person's strengths to guide them towards their career rather than having a "one for all" attitude. And you are correct; China's system is structured very similarly. :)

STUDENT POST: After researching the Chinese education system and listening to so many other students in class discussing the structure of higher education in varying countries, I am convinced that we need to reevaluate our approach. I do not believe that our current system is the best that we can do for our young people who are deciding how to spend the rest of their lives. The US education system seems to be driven by capitalism (like so many things in our country). I find this very discouraging. I think it is sad that we are so willing to hand out grants and loans to 18 year olds and allow them to take a blind leap of faith into higher education. Fact of the matter is that many of them have no business attending a four-year college and would be much better suited for an alternative form of study. Vocational training and the military offer a great option for so many but seem to be overlooked because our society holds on to this belief that a college degree opens all the doors to our futures. Unfortunately, this just is not the case. China is a bit obsessive about their tests and the way they track a student's progress, but their system gives students a purpose that they work towards from a young age. There is a lot of success to be found in fields that do not require a four-year degree. I think it is time for those other options to be presented in the same light as the traditional college experience. For some reason, our society has this general belief that vocational training and other forms of study are a second tier option to college. This is a very outdated way of thinking, and we need to change it rather than standing by and watching more young people make bad decisions based on misinformation.

STUDENT REPLY: Totally agree, I also believe if the "Kids" had a little say in what or how they could learn (as we are finding out other countries are doing something like that) and they had some of the responsibility for their education. I believe this country would start getting stronger and smarter again.