

Intelligence Squared debate decides the college question for Chicago Ideas Week

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Out & About blog

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The nice thing about a debate—a real debate with points and counterpoints—is that at the end, there’s a declared winner. In this case, the winner was: “Yes, too many kids go to college.”

The debate was the first-ever Chicago dust-up held by Intelligence Squared U.S. (IQ2US), an Oxford-style debate program, headquartered in New York City (and based on a similar London program), that spars over topics from clean energy to the Middle East.

The contest was decided, reality-TV-style, by audience vote. The team arguing that too many kids go to college consisted of PayPal co-founder Peter Thiel and author Charles Murray. The team defending the number of kids who go to college was Northwestern University president emeritus Henry Bienen and Vivek Wadhwa, who is the director of research at Duke University’s Center for Entrepreneurship and Research Commercialization. ABC News Nightline’s John Donvan acted as moderator. The victory was a close one—47 percent of the audience voted in favor of the too-many-kids side and 46 percent opposed it. One of the audience members in question was Mayor Rahm Emanuel. The debate, IQ2US’s 54th such verbal battle, was part of Chicago Ideas Week.

Points made in favor of college for the many included: College increases your chance of finding and keeping employment; it makes students into better citizens; high college attendance allows the U. S. to continue to compete with India and China. Points against sending so many kids to college included the concern that college saddles students with potentially crippling debt. The debate will be broadcast on NPR stations nationwide Oct 22.



Photo: Lois Neustadt