Gambling your way into College

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As if getting into college (and paying for it) wasn't hard enough, the state of Illinois wants citizens to risk their hard earned dollars in a lottery for college tuition. The new "Cash 4 College" game is a $2 scratch-off ticket that offers full college tuition payments for five top winners. Winners will get to choose from a number of colleges nationwide.

This lottery is basically a tax to raise money for education (which is supposedly where most profits from state-run lotteries go). Lotteries are considered a regressive tax, meaning the tax imposes a greater burden on the poor than on the rich. Poor and middle-class families are having a hard enough time as it is paying for college, and this "Cash 4 College" game will more than likely be marketed to them. Unfortunately, less fortunate high school grads may start seeing these scratch tickets in their graduation cards (instead of cash) from relatives as their one big shot to pay for school.

Speaking of college and lotteries…

In 1774, Harvard College, who was running a little short on cash, received special permission to run a lottery to gather funds to erect Stoughton Hall. Harvard reintroduced this lottery again in 1794, prolonging the drawing for 10 years. After 10 years the lottery produced a net of $18,400 (over $250,000 in today's dollars). For some reason Harvard purchased $2000 in tickets for itself. The winning ticket was announced as ticket No. 18,547, which just so happened to be one of the tickets Harvard had purchased.

Lotteries also helped establish many other prominent colleges, including Yale, Dartmouth, Williams, Princeton, Penn, and Columbia University.