**Extra Credit with a Documentary about Higher Ed: *Declining By Degrees***

**Directions:** Watch the film with an eye toward what argument it is making and how it is building it. Use your rhetorical analysis skills, and include enough details from the film to persuade me that you watched it. (Sorry, but I get lied to a lot!)

Your written analysis/response paper should address at least some of the questions I have here, but I’d like some feedback, too, about how the depiction of the American college experience relates to your own observations of SJSU so far. Aim for at least one typed page, double spaced in MLA format.

1. Consider how the film uses **case studies**, stories about individual students and faculty members that become emblematic of particular types or particular situations. Which of these case studies was the most eye-opening for you, and why? Which of them (if any) could you relate to most closely?
2. Consider also the presentation of **historical background and testimony from experts** of various types, people from within and outside academia (part of the film’s logos appeal). Does this information seem credible? Does the film as a whole seem balanced and reasonable, or is there evidence of a bias?
3. The film shows some students really struggling with the **costs of college**, especially Ceylon, a factory worker, and Adriana, who goes to a junior college because she can’t afford the fancy private school that accepted her application. It also discusses some of the historical forces that have driven college tuition up in the last half-century as America moved away from public support (decried as “socialism” by some). Did you find the film’s arguments about this trend persuasive? Why or why not? How did the case studies help, either to explain the pressures faced by students who don’t have a lot of family money or to engage your sympathies?
4. Although it is a pretty “student-friendly” film, overall, it does examine some trends in **student behavior** that contribute to the decline of the educational experience in general, including students cheating, skipping or sleeping through class, partying too much and coming to class hung over, and students not doing their homework, especially the reading--just coming to class unprepared. Do you recognize these as problems at SJSU? Do you think the film demonstrated persuasively that these trends (particularly the relatively new one of students assuming it’s OK to not do any reading) are a problem? Why or why not?
5. The film also tries to give a sense of faculty pressures and problems, such as the “publish or perish” phenomenon and the plight of the “freeway fliers.” It also shows a few professors at Amherst, an expensive private school where professors teach fewer, much smaller classes than most of us at SJSU and earn about twice as much money. Was any of this illuminating to you? How does it relate to what you’ve seen at SJSU?

Here’s the URL to the whole film on You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcxDVYo2wH8>