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Sex, Drugs and the Federal Budget?

Coming soon to a college near you: a primer course on the nation's looming fiscal crisis. A foundation established by **Blackstone Group** chairman [Peter G. Peterson](#) is backing programs aimed at getting the next generation interested in the huge and unsustainable tab the U.S. is running up as it continues to spend billions on entitlement programs like Social Security and Medicare.

[Public Agenda](#) said this week it will get a \$500,000 grant to roll out a [mini-curriculum](#) at up to 500 colleges and universities focusing on the nation's deteriorating financial situation. The National Academy of Public Administration and PETLab will get \$325,000 to develop a game for college students focusing on "difficult fiscal issues like unsustainable entitlement programs, rising health care costs, and financing investments in alternative energy sources."

The grants are backed by the Peterson Foundation, which was established this year to raise awareness of challenges facing the U.S., including its financial situation.

"Most students and most adults, actually, have no conception of what the components of our \$3 trillion budget are," said **Andrew Yarrow**, vice president of Public Agenda and author of "Forgive Us Our Debts: The Intergenerational Dangers of Fiscal Irresponsibility." "Most wildly underestimate the proportion of the budget going to the entitlement programs," he said.

Public Agenda's program will introduce students to the problems they'll confront, such as the fact that the U.S. will start paying out more in Social Security benefits than it collects in revenue from the program in 2017. Yarrow, who has taught the curriculum at American University, said students swing from being "somewhat concerned" about the nation's finances to "very concerned" after learning the fiscal facts. As one student in his course wrote: "I do not understand how this huge problem which is going to face future generations continues to be pushed under the carpet."

The game, meanwhile, is still being developed but is expected to be played on college campuses and also have an online component to allow students to interact across universities. – *Deborah Solomon*

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