

Want to Get Into College? Learn to Fail

Education Week, February 1, 2012

By Angel B. Pérez

Commentary

- 1 I ask every student I interview for admission to my institution, Pitzer College, the same question, “What do you look forward to the most in college?” I was stunned and delighted recently when a student sat across from me at a Starbucks in New York City and replied, “I look forward to the possibility of failure.” Of course, this is not how most students respond to the question when sitting before the person who can make decisions about their academic futures, but this young man took a risk.
- 2 “You see, my parents have never let me fail,” he said. “When I want to take a chance at something, they remind me it’s not a safe route to take. Taking a more rigorous course or trying an activity I may not succeed in, they tell me, will ruin my chances at college admission. Even the sacrifice of staying up late to do something unrelated to school, they see as a risk to my academic work and college success.”
- 3 I wish I could tell you this is an uncommon story, but kids all over the world admit they are under tremendous pressure to be perfect. When I was traveling in China last fall and asked a student what she did for fun, she replied: “I thought I wasn’t supposed to tell you that? I wouldn’t want you to think I am not serious about my work!”
- 4 Students are usually in shock when I chuckle and tell them I never expect perfection. In fact, I prefer they not project it in their college applications. Of course, this goes against everything they’ve been told and makes young people uncomfortable. How could a dean of admission at one of America’s most selective institutions not want the best and the brightest? The reality is, perfection doesn’t exist, and we don’t expect to see it in a college application. In fact, admission officers tend to be skeptical of students who present themselves as individuals without flaws.
- 4 These days, finding imperfections in a college application is like looking for a needle in a haystack. Students try their best to hide factors they perceive to be negative and only tell us things they believe we will find impressive. This is supported by a secondary school culture where teachers are under pressure to give students nothing less than an A, and counselors are told not to report disciplinary infractions to colleges. Education agents in other countries are known to falsify student transcripts, assuming that an outstanding GPA is the ticket to admission.
- 5 Colleges respond to culture shifts, and admission officers are digging deeper to find out who students really are outside of their trophies, medals, and test scores. We get the most excited when we read an application that seems real. It’s so rare to hear stories of defeat and triumph that when we do, we cheer. If their perspectives are of lessons learned or challenges overcome, these applicants tend to jump to the top of the heap at highly selective colleges. We believe an error in high school should not define the rest of your life, but how you respond could shape you forever.

- 6 I've spent enough time in high schools to know teenagers will never be perfect. They do silly things, mess up, fall down, and lack confidence. The ability to bounce back is a fundamental life skill students have to learn on their own. The lessons of failure can't be taught in a classroom; they are experienced and reflected upon. During my weekend of interviews, another student told me, "I'm ashamed to admit I failed precalculus, but I decided to take it again and got a B-plus. I'm now taking calculus, and even though I don't love it, I'm glad I pushed through!" I asked him what he learned from the experience. "I learned to let go of shame," he said. "I realized that I can't let a grade define my success. I also learned that if you want anything bad enough, you can achieve it."
- 7 I smiled as I wrote his words down on the application-review form. This kid will thrive on my campus. Not only will the faculty love him, but he has the coping skills he needs to adjust to the rigors of life in a residential college setting. Failure is about growth, learning, overcoming, and moving on. Let's allow young people to fail. Not only will they learn something, it might even get them into college.

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Hidden Intellectualism

An excerpt from *They Say/I Say:*

The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing

By Gerald Graff

- 1 Everyone knows some young person who is impressively “street smart” but does poorly in school. What a waste, we think, that one who is so intelligent about so many things in life seems unable to apply that intelligence to academic work. What doesn’t occur to us, though, is that schools and colleges might be at fault for missing the opportunity to tap into such street smarts and channel them into good academic work.
- 2 Nor do we consider one of the major reasons why schools and colleges overlook the intellectual potential of street smarts: the fact that we associate those street smarts with anti-intellectual concerns. We associate the educated life, the life of the mind, too narrowly and exclusively with subjects and texts that we consider inherently weighty and academic. We assume that it’s possible to wax intellectual about Plato, Shakespeare, the French Revolution, and nuclear fission, but not about cars, dating, fashion, sports, TV, or video games.
- 3 The trouble with this assumption is that no necessary connection has ever been established between any text or subject and the educational depth and weight of the discussion it can generate. Real intellectuals turn any subject, however lightweight it may seem, into grist for their mill through the thoughtful questions they bring to it, whereas a dullard will find a way to drain the interest out of the richest subject. That’s why a George Orwell writing on the cultural meanings of penny postcards is infinitely more substantial than the cogitations of many professors on Shakespeare or globalization (104-16).
- 4 Students do need to read models of intellectually challenging writing—and Orwell is a great one—if they are to become intellectuals themselves. But they would be more prone to take on intellectual identities if we encouraged them to do so at first on subjects that interest them rather than ones that interest us.
- 5 I offer my own adolescent experience as a case in point. Until I entered college, I hated books and cared only for sports. The only reading I cared to do or could do was sports magazines, on which I became hooked; becoming a regular reader of *Sport* magazine in the late forties, *Sports Illustrated* when it began publishing in 1954, and the annual magazine guides to professional baseball, football, and basketball. I also loved the sports novels for boys of John R. Tunis and Clair Bee and autobiographies of sports stars like Joe DiMaggio’s *Lucky to Be a Yankee* and Bob Feller’s *Strikeout Story*. In short, I was your typical teenage anti-intellectual—or so I believed for a long time. I have recently come to think, however, that my preference for sports over schoolwork was not anti-intellectualism so much as intellectualism by other means.

- 6 In the Chicago neighborhood I grew up in, which had become a melting pot after World War II, our block was solidly middle class, but just a block away—doubtless concentrated there the real estate companies—were African Americans, Native Americans, and “hillbilly” whites who had recently fled postwar joblessness in the South and Appalachia. Negotiating this class boundary was a tricky matter. On the one hand, it was necessary to maintain the boundary between “clean cut” boys like me and working class “hoods,” as we called them, which meant that it was good to be openly smart in a bookish sort of way. On the other hand, I was desperate for the approval of the hoods, whom I encountered daily on the playing field and in the neighborhood, and for this purpose it was not at all good to be book smart. The hoods would turn on you if they sensed you were putting on airs over them: “Who you lookin’ at, smart ass?” as a leather jacketed youth once said to me as he relieved me of my pocket change along with my self-respect.
- 7 I grew up torn then, between the need to prove I was smart and the fear of a beating if I proved it too well; between the need not to jeopardize my respectable future and the need to impress the hoods. As I lived it, the conflict came down to a choice between being physically tough and being verbal. For a boy in my neighborhood and elementary school, only being “tough” earned you complete legitimacy. I still recall endless, complicated debates in his period with my closest pals over who was “the toughest guy in the school.” If you were less than negligible as a fighter, as I was, you settled for the next best thing, which was to be inarticulate, carefully hiding telltale marks of literacy like correct grammar and pronunciation.
- 8 In one way, then, it would be hard to imagine an adolescence more thoroughly anti-intellectual than mine. Yet in retrospect, I see that it’s more complicated, that I and the 1950s themselves were not simply hostile toward intellectualism, but divided and ambivalent. When Marilyn Monroe married the playwright Arthur Miller in 1956 after divorcing the retired baseball star Joe DiMaggio, the symbolic triumph of geek over jock suggested the way the wind was blowing. Even Elvis, according to his biographer Peter Guralnick, turns out to have supported Adlai over Ike in the presidential election of 1956. “I don’t dig the intellectual bit,” he told reporters. “But I’m telling you, man, he knows the most” (327).
- 9 Though I too thought I did not “dig the intellectual bit,” I see now that I was unwittingly in training for it. The germs had actually been planted in the seemingly philistine debates about which boys were the toughest. I see now that in the interminable analysis of sports teams, movies, and toughness that my friends and I engaged in—a type of analysis, needless to say, that the real toughs would never have stooped to—I was already betraying an allegiance to the egghead world. I was practicing being an intellectual before I knew that was what I wanted to be.

- 10 It was in these discussions with friends about toughness and sports, I think, and in my reading of sports books and magazines, that I began to learn the rudiments of the intellectual life: how to make an argument, weigh different kinds of evidence, move between particulars and generalizations, summarize the views of others, and enter a conversation about ideas. It was in reading and arguing about sports and toughness that I experienced what it felt like to propose a generalization, restate and respond to a counterargument, and perform other intellectualizing operations, including composing the kind of sentences I am writing now.
- 11 Only much later did it dawn on me that the sports world was more compelling than school because it was *more intellectual than school*, not less. Sports after all was full of challenging arguments, debates, problems for analysis, and intricate statistics that you could care about, as school conspicuously was not. I believe that street smarts beat out book smarts in our culture not because street smarts are nonintellectual, as we generally suppose, but because they satisfy an intellectual thirst more thoroughly than school culture, which seems pale and unreal.
- 12 They also satisfy the thirst for community. When you entered sports debates, you became part of a community that was not limited to your family and friends, but was national and public. Whereas schoolwork isolated you from others, the pennant race or Ted Williams's .400 batting average was something you could talk about with people you had never met. Sports introduced you not only to a culture steeped in argument, but to a public argument culture that transcended the personal. I can't blame my schools for failing to make intellectual culture resemble the Super Bowl, but I do fault them for failing to learn anything from the sports and entertainment worlds about how to organize and represent intellectual culture, how to exploit its game-like element and turn it into arresting public spectacle that might have competed more successfully for my youthful attention.
- 13 For here is another thing that never dawned on me and is still kept hidden from students, with tragic results: that the real intellectual world, the one that existed in the big world beyond school, is organized very much like the world of team sports, with rival texts, rival interpretations and evaluations of texts, rival theories of why they should be read and taught, and elaborate team competitions in which "fans" of writers, intellectual systems, methodologies, and -isms contend against each other.
- 14 To be sure, school contained plenty of competition, which became more invidious as one moved up the ladder (and has become even more so today with the advent of high stakes testing). In this competition, points were scored not by making arguments, but by a show of information or vast reading, by grade grubbing, or other forms of one-upmanship. School competition, in short, reproduced the less attractive features of sports culture without those that create close bonds and community.
- 15 And in distancing themselves from anything as enjoyable and absorbing as sports, my schools missed the opportunity to capitalize on an element of drama and conflict that the intellectual world shares with sports. Consequently, I failed to see the parallels between the sports and academic worlds that could have helped me cross more readily from one argument culture to the other.

- 16 Sports is only one of the domains whose potential for literacy training (and not only for males) is seriously underestimated by educators, who see sports as competing with academic development rather than a route to it. But if this argument suggests why it is a good idea to assign readings and topics that are close to students' existing interests, it also suggests the limits of this tactic. For students who get excited about the chance to write about their passion for cars will often write as poorly and unreflectively on that topic as on Shakespeare or Plato. Here is the flip side of what I pointed out before: that there's no necessary relation between the degree of interest a student shows in a text or subject and the quality of thought or expression such a student manifests in writing or talking about it. The challenge, as college professor Ned Laffhas put it, "is not simply to exploit students' nonacademic interests, but to get them to see those interests through academic eyes."
- 17 To say that students need to see their interests "through academic eyes" is to say that street smarts are not enough. Making students' nonacademic interests an object of academic study is useful, then, for getting students' attention and overcoming their boredom and alienation, but this tactic won't in itself necessarily move them closer to an academically rigorous treatment of those interests. On the other hand, inviting students to write about cars, sports, or clothing fashions does not have to be a pedagogical cop-out as long as students are required to see these interests "through academic eyes," that is, to think and write about cars, sports, and fashions in a reflective, analytical way, one that sees them as microcosms of what is going on in the wider culture.
- 18 If I am right, then schools and colleges are missing an opportunity when they do not encourage students to take their nonacademic interests as objects of academic study. It is self defeating to decline to introduce any text or subject that figures to engage students who will otherwise tune out academic work entirely. If a student cannot get interested in Mill's *On Liberty* but will read *Sports Illustrated* or *Vogue* or the hip-hop magazine *Source* with absorption, this is a strong argument for assigning the magazines over the classic. It's a good bet that if students get hooked on reading and writing by doing term papers on *Source*, they will eventually get to *On Liberty*. But even if they don't, the magazine reading will make them more literate and reflective than they would be otherwise. So it makes pedagogical sense to develop classroom units on sports, cars, fashions, rap music, and other such topics. Give me the student anytime who writes a sharply argued, sociologically acute analysis of an issue in *Source* over the student who writes a lifeless explication of *Hamlet* or Socrates' *Apology*.

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10 Rules For Going To College When Nobody Really Expected You To

studentsites.net, 2012

By Joe Rodriguez

- 1 A vital revolution in American education has launched a slew of academic programs and charter schools that pluck bright minority, poor and blue-collar students from the educational abyss and turn them into college-bound scholars. Teachers are inspiring them to dream while showing them how to study, do research, write term papers, think critically and effectively cram for finals.
- 2 In many ways, the kids have learned the hard parts of surviving college.
- 3 But when the mere act of attending college is totally unexpected, there are unforeseen obstacles—including family and friends—that tend to blow nontraditional students off their paths like land mines.
- 4 Recently I spoke to a high school graduating class at Menlo-Atherton Computer Academy, a program in Silicon Valley that captures bright students who would have fallen through the cracks in the school system. Of the 41 students, 37 are slated for school next fall. And because they are excellent students, they imagine college being a piece of cake.
- 5 As someone who was lucky to attend college, I know there are difficult challenges unique to that particular group, one that is expanding here and all over the country.
- 6 I grew up in East Los Angeles and attended the famous Garfield High of the 1988 film “Stand and Deliver.” I was gone by the time Jaime Escalante, an unorthodox math teacher, had the nerve to successfully teach advanced placement calculus to underachieving Mexican-American kids.
- 7 As a book-loving barrio kid, I went off to college having no idea it would take me eight years to muddle through because I did not know then what I know now.
- 8 That’s why my graduation speech at Menlo was dubbed “Top 10 Rules for the Guess Who’s Going to College?” Like a certain late-night TV host, let’s start this adaptation of my talk at the end and work our way to the top.
- 9 Rule No. 10: Be a total student. Even if you live at home, work full-time and attend school part-time, you must feel and think like a full-time student. Studying is the highest priority. Hang out more on campus. Join student clubs. Get involved. Hang out less or not at all with old friends who aren’t doing anything. Just say no to those who would interfere with your studies, even if they don’t mean to get in the way.
- 10 No. 9: Resist the temptation to buy expensive stuff. Do you really need a late-model car or those shiny, spinning, chrome rims to make it look cooler? I’ve been there, done that. I bought a motorcycle when I should have selected an electric typewriter. A nice set of wheels may carry you many miles, but a good education will carry you for life.

- 11 No. 8: Handle the family crises that pressure students like you to leave school. Somebody dear to you will likely become deathly ill. It takes only one medical catastrophe or foreclosure or something as terrible to make you feel guilty about attending college. Some issues might set your siblings against you for not doing your share to help. Always remember: The best thing you can do for your family is to be the one who got a college education.
- 12 No. 7: Your parents will love this one: Don't worry too much about the high cost of college tuition. In most cases, only the wealthy pay the full bill. Go to the best school for you—no matter what. Some wise financial digging—at almost any school—will unearth a reasonable combination of grants, loans and work-study.
- 13 No. 6: Study harder in college. Put in more time, effort and energy than you did in high school. College professors rule on campus. And often, they're egomaniacal and nasty compared with the kindly, nurturing teachers you've had until now—so don't take it personally. And trust your fellow pupils, but be cautious. College breeds dangerous depths of competition.
- 14 No. 5: You will become lonely or homesick and it will upset you very much. Many minority and blue-collar students feel terrible isolation at big, public campuses and also at small, elite colleges. Don't question whether you belong there—you do. And don't "run" home. Call home, seek out students with similar interests and backgrounds and discuss your mutual anxieties. Soon the worst will pass.
- 15 No. 4: Get to know students of different racial, ethnic or social backgrounds. College is a prime gateway to our ever-shrinking, globalizing, melting-pot world. Learn another language. Success comes to those who branch out, not to those to shrink back to the only corner they ever knew.
- 16 No. 3: Ignore career confusion. Stay in school even if your dream job seems to become a delusion. Taking a break to rethink your future is only for rich kids. For you, that idea is Armageddon—the first step to dropping out. It's OK to change your major, just remain intent on graduating as soon as you can. You will pick up missing pieces on the job or in graduate school.
- 17 No. 2: You are much more than a future employee, so don't think like one. College isn't a four-year application for a specific job. Study what you love. Campuses are delightful villages of practical and heart's delight learning. Embrace and expand there, even if the job market says you're an idiot. I have two nieces who graduated with liberal studies degrees. Guess what? They both got plum jobs with a multinational insurance company before graduation day. Take that, business majors!
- 18 No. 1: Remember where you came from and who helped you get this far. Your family and community installed good things in your head, heart and soul. That foundation is what will support you as you figure out this world, improve upon it and attempt to correct the injustices you, your family and your community have endured. Jump off that foundation and you plop down in quicksand and so do all the people who helped you ascend. There is no worse sinking feeling than that.
- 19 Thank you and good luck.

Not Going to College is a Viable Option

education.com, 2012

By Lawrence B. Schlack

- 1 Any retired superintendent who's running around the country telling high school seniors not to go to college had darn well better explain himself or herself. OK, here goes.
- 2 I've seen too many high school graduates who have gone off to college in September but are back home with mom and dad in December. And I've seen those who have made it through the first year but transferred back home to a community college for the second. And there are plenty of those who have stuck it out for a year or two, changing majors, dropping classes, starting over, racking up debt and finally dropping out—with debt but no degree.
- 3 The go-to-college tsunami has given us colleges full of young people who really don't know why they are there or where they are going. They've been told college is their only option and they are using the experience as a very expensive and often futile form of career exploration.
- 4 Status, economics and competition are three powerful forces behind the pressure to attend college that exists today. It's become a status issue. Going to college is first class. Not going to college is second class. High school seniors who can't declare they are college bound are made to feel like failures.
- 5 It's an economic issue. Students are told they will land better jobs and earn more money with a college degree. And it's an international competition issue. There's widespread belief the United States is somehow running behind other nations in producing a competitive workforce and more college degrees will make us more competitive.

Honorable Alternatives

- 6 College, however, is not always the logical next step for high school graduates. There are plenty of honorable and viable choices for the year after high school. The decision not to go to college should not necessarily be viewed in negative terms.
- 7 Europeans use the term "Gap Year." It's the year after secondary education in which the graduate takes time off for travel, work or public service before making a decision whether to go on to higher education.
- 8 Many could profit by simply going to work in a field they want to explore. Here's an example. A sign on the door at my local gas station reads "Assistant Manager Wanted." I ask the manager whether he'd hire an 18-year-old right out of high school. Sure would, he says. Qualifications are honesty in handling money, good customer relations and dependability. Couldn't this be a good career beginning for someone wanting to own or manage a business? Instead of paying tuition you earn money while learning business skills.

- 9 Other honorable non-college choices right out of high school include military service, cultural immersion while working in an overseas country, doing mission work in Central or South America, becoming a nanny, a hospital aide, or teaching English overseas.

Important Questions

- 10 Here are some questions we should ask members of the class of 2007. The answers would help them chart a productive post-graduate path.
- 11 “Senior, can you list your strengths, talents, aptitudes, abilities? Can you name four or five careers you can realistically aspire to? Can you describe where you want to go and what you want to do in life? Do you really need college to get where you want to go?”
- 12 For those who answer, “Yes, I know my strengths and I have a pretty good idea where I want to go in life and I do need college to get there,” college is the right choice. If the answer is, “I’m not really sure what my strengths are or where I want to go in life,” then deferring college is the better choice.
- 13 High school doesn’t always prepare students to answer these important questions. Too many young people graduate without a realistic picture of their own talents and aptitudes and too many don’t have any clear idea of where these strengths might take them in the work world. Better preparation with these questions could result in fewer misguided students going on to college.

Narrow Perspectives

- 14 School leaders—particularly in suburban communities where the go-to-college push is most apparent—should be out in front on this issue. These are the districts that take pride in saying things like “90 percent of our senior class went on to college last year.” They should stand up and be clear that college is not the only path to success in life.
- 15 Best current estimates are that not more than 20 percent of careers in the work world of tomorrow will require a four-year degree. A Penn State professor, Kenneth Gray, goes further, quoting U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predictions that as few as 12 percent of all jobs will require a B.A. Most of the work world will require a high school diploma and perhaps an additional year or two of training. And that work world will include high-flying non-college graduates such as Dell Computer founder Michael Dell, TV talk show host Larry King and Wendy’s Restaurants founder Dave Thomas.
- 16 Last fall an 8th-grade student in my hometown was quoted in our local newspaper saying, “College is like your life. If you don’t go to college ... you can’t live a successful life.”
- 17 Too many students believe this. School leaders can get out in front and help them see there are many paths to a successful life and college is only one of them.

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Why Go to College?

How 2 Choose, University of North Texas

March 23, 2010

Consider these statistics:

- 1 • The average four-year college education at a public university in Texas (in-state tuition and fees) costs about \$19,434 — less than the average price of a new car.
- 2 • The annual income for a person with a bachelor's degree is nearly twice that of someone with only a high school diploma.
- 3 You'll get more mileage out of a college education than you will from a car, and a four-year education will likely enable you to buy a car or two and many other things in your lifetime. In making the decision of whether — and where — to attend college, you and your parents should consider those four years as a lifetime investment, not just as annual expenses for job training.

Factoid

- 4 A college education can challenge you to explore and broaden your interests, attain your goals and meet some of the best friends you'll ever have.

Starting a new chapter

- 5 Many high school students look forward to putting high school behind them and moving on with their lives. At college, you'll explore and broaden your interests, pursue your goals, meet lifelong friends and define yourself in ways you can only imagine now. This website will guide you through the sometimes confusing process of selecting a college so that you can concentrate on starting a new chapter of your life.

The big payoff

- 6 The competitive advantage is yours if you choose to graduate from college. Experts who have researched the performance and job success of college graduates have concluded that, nationwide, college graduates with a bachelor's degree earn 74 percent more per year than those who only complete high school. In fact, those whose education stops with a high school diploma may see their real wages decline over time.

The big picture

- 7 Right now, it's probably tough to imagine where you'll be in a year or two, much less 10, 20, 30 or 40 years down the road. Where do you expect to be, and what do you want out of life? By attending college immediately after high school, you get a head start on answering those important questions.
- 8 But you don't have to sign a four-year contract, and you don't even have to decide immediately on a major area of study. College is a time to test yourself and to see what you can achieve. Academic advisors and professors are accessible on campus, and tutoring and other forms of academic support are available. At most universities, a counseling staff is available to help see you through tough times.

- 9 You'll be able to pursue your own interests through extracurricular activities and perhaps discover a career direction you've never considered or a talent that's been waiting to blossom. College gives you the chance to say "yes" to you.

Which college is best?

- 10 Two key words are missing in that question. It should read, "Which college is best for you?" Your choices depend on your interests, career goals and academic record. Talk to your high school counselor about your options and attend College Night at school. Most Texas high school seniors are allowed a certain number of days to visit college campuses.
- 11 You may discover that you prefer the intimacy of a smaller campus or the setting of a community or church affiliated college. On the other hand, you may be ready for the swirling activity and myriad opportunities of a large university. The only way to find out is to visit. You'll get the most value out of your four-year investment by being open to many possibilities now, while you're still in high school.

Great expectations

- 12 As you outline your future, spend time considering what you want to do with your life. As with any major purchase, you'll want to be a wise consumer: look at the choices, compare prices, think about what's important to you and go for the best quality your money can buy. College doesn't guarantee happiness and success, but it does help you make the best of your own life.

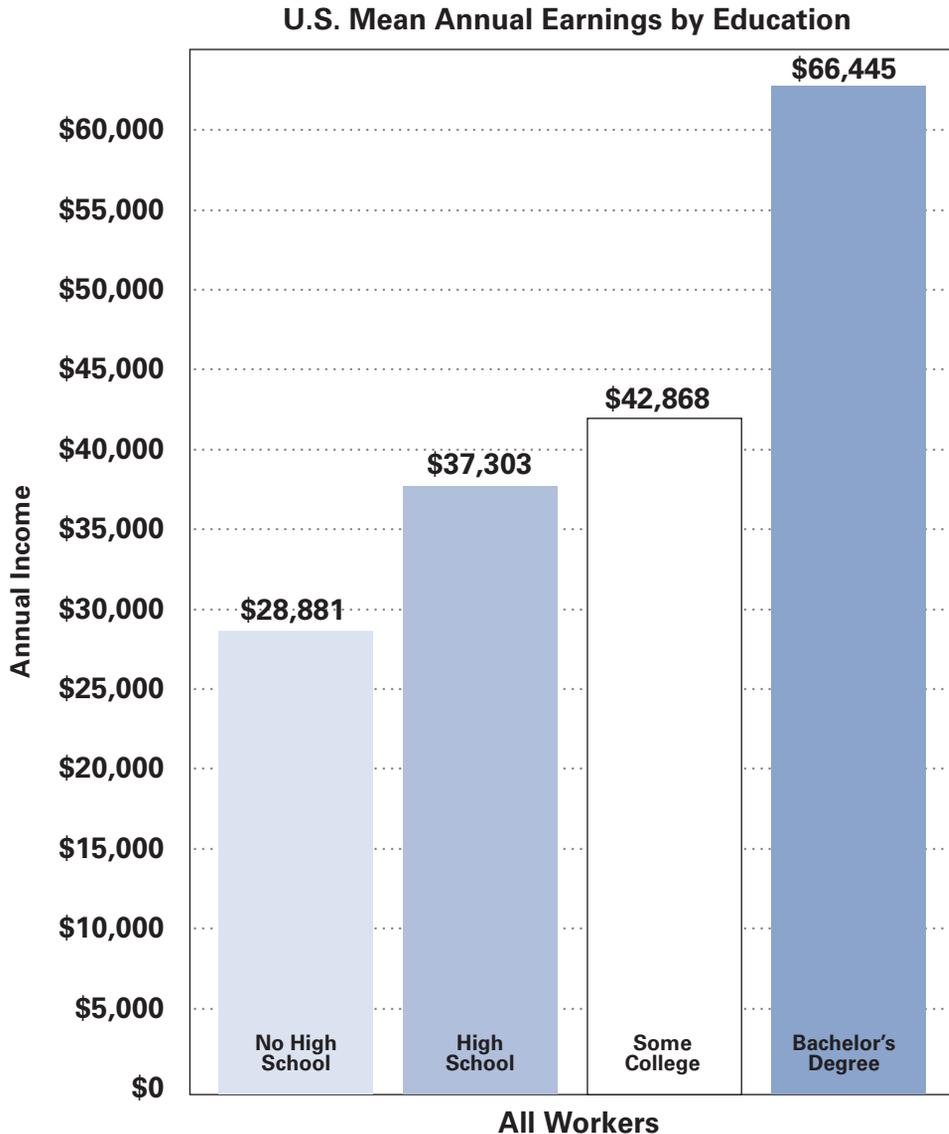
What, no money?

- 13 Financial aid is available to everyone with a desire for a college education. Scholarships, loans, grants and prepaid tuition programs are out there, and this website will help you find them. On-campus jobs are also available, with flexible schedules that allow you to attend classes.
- 14 Whether you attend a public or private institution, you can expect to receive financial aid information from your high school counselor and college representatives. Incidentally, earning a degree from an Ivy League school or an expensive private college is no guarantee that you'll land the best job and have the highest earning potential. In fact, the effect on future earnings may only be marginal.

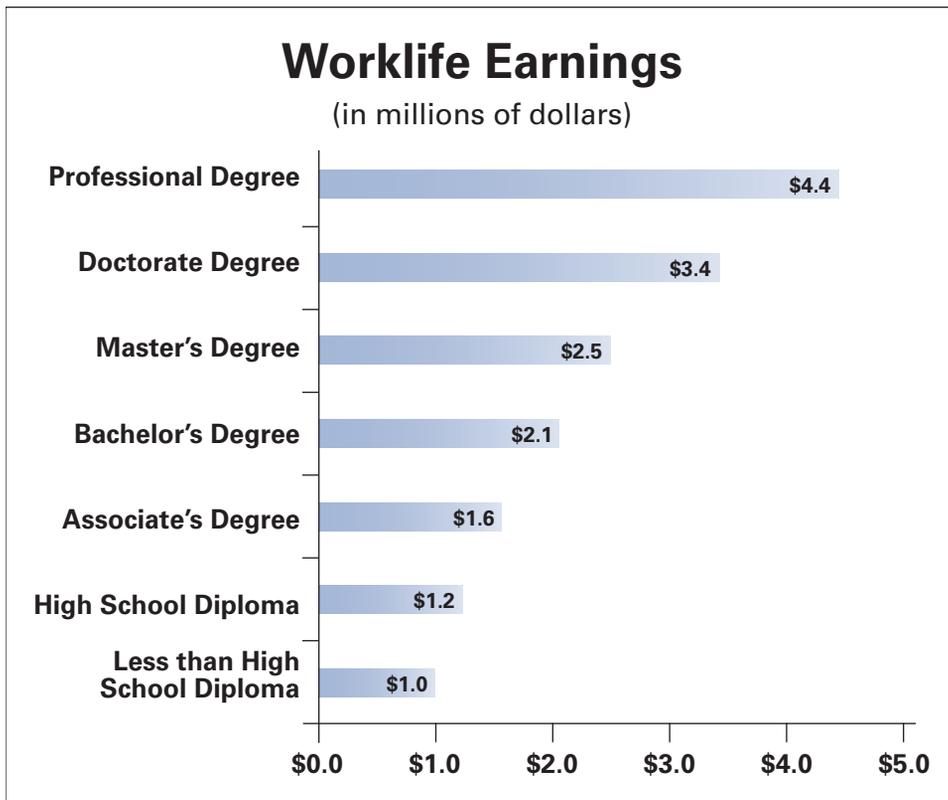
Are you better off going to college?

- 15 A high school graduate is confronted with the choice of accepting a job or entering a four-year college program. Is the student better off going to college? Because college graduates can expect to earn a salary almost double that of high school graduates, the student is much better off going to college. The difference in salary earned compounds over a lifetime.

U.S. Mean Annual Earnings by Education	
Education	Annual Income
No High School	\$28,881
High School	\$37,303
Some College	\$42,868
Bachelor's Degree	\$66,445



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey



(Earnings for full-time, year-round workers by educational attainment for worklife of approximately 40 years.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau)

Worklife Earnings	
Education	Earnings (in millions of dollars)
Professional Degree	\$4.4
Doctorate	\$3.4
Master's Degree	\$2.5
Bachelor's Degree	\$2.1
Associate Degree	\$1.6
High School Diploma	\$1.2
Less than High School Diploma	\$1.0

Earnings for full-time, year-round workers by educational attainment for work life of approximately 40 years. Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

The 10 Most Common Excuses for NOT Going to College *and Why They're All Wrong!*

www.everyCircle.com/articles/tenexcuses.htm

Author unknown

- 1 *So you think that college isn't for you? Well, you're wrong! You don't have to be "lucky" or have lots of money to go to college. You don't have to have straight "A's" in high school or know already what you want to do with the rest of your life. You do have to really want to go to college - and be ready to work hard once you get there. Unfortunately, too many students make up excuses for why they can't go to college. If you're one of those students, here's a list of the 10 most common excuses - and why they're all wrong. Please share this with others.*
- 2 **EXCUSE #1:** Nobody in my family has ever gone to college before. Why not be the first? It's true that being the first to do anything can be difficult and maybe even a little frightening, but being the first in your family to receive a college education should give you a sense of pride. Not going to college is the kind of family "tradition" you should break.
- 3 **EXCUSE #2:** My grades are not good enough for college. How do you know they're not unless you apply? Even if you haven't obtained all good grades in school, you can still be admitted to a good college that will be right for you. Colleges look at more than just grades and test scores. They look at such things as letters from teachers and other adults; extracurricular activities; jobs you might have had; special talents in art, music, and sports; and interviews. When deciding who gets in, colleges examine the whole person, not just one small part.
- 4 **EXCUSE #3:** I can't afford it. There's a lot of financial aid available to help you pay for college. This year alone there are about \$26 BILLION waiting for students who need money for college. If you apply for aid, and you demonstrate that you need it, your chances are as good as anybody else's that you will receive help. There's money available from the federal government, from your state, from the colleges you apply to, and from thousands of grant, scholarship, and work-study programs. But you won't see any of it if you don't check it out.
- 5 **EXCUSE #4:** I don't know how to apply to college, or where I want to go. You're not alone. You can start by looking at college catalogs in your high school or local library, and you can talk to your high school counselor, favorite teacher, or someone you know who's gone to college. There's a lot of good advice available, but you have to ask for it. With more than 3,000 colleges to choose from, there's bound to be one that's right for you.

- 6 **EXCUSE #5:** I think college may be too difficult for me. Not likely, if you're willing to work hard. Thousands of students graduate from college every year, and chances are many of them were afraid college would be too difficult for them - but they made it in spite of their fears. College is a big change from high school. The competition will be greater and the homework assignments will be longer and tougher. And it isn't always easy to adjust to strange surroundings and make new friends. But once you get involved with your work, you'll find that many of your classmates feel as you do. Who doesn't worry sometimes that they might not make it? And even if you find that you're not doing well in certain subjects, you can still do something about it. Tutoring is available from professors or fellow students, and counseling for personal problems is available on campus too.
- 7 **EXCUSE #6:** I'm not sure that I'll "fit in" in college. Just about any college you might attend will have students from all kinds of backgrounds, so you are sure to find other people whom you can relate to. If you're a minority student, for example, find about student clubs sponsored by African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, Native Americans, Asians, or other groups. Such clubs can help give you a sense of community away from home. Regardless of your ethnic background, you should remember that one of the good things about college is getting to know all kinds of people. It will be interesting to learn about different life-styles and cultures, and it will help prepare you for the world you will face after graduation.
- 8 **EXCUSE #7:** I don't even know what I want to major in or do with my life. The great majority of college freshmen don't have a clue about these things either. Giving you choices is what college is all about. You can take courses in different fields and see what you like and what you're good at. You may be surprised to find a subject or a career field that you never would have thought of before. The biggest mistake you can make is to think that any decision you make is cast in concrete and that you can never change your major - or your life.
- 9 **EXCUSE #8:** There's no way I can go to college full-time. So go part-time. Most colleges offer programs you can attend in the evening or on weekends. Some colleges even give classes where you work or in neighborhood churches and community centers. You can also study many subjects through correspondence courses in home-study programs, and a number of states have external degree programs that let you work for a degree without - believe it or not - any classroom attendance! Ask your counselor about these possibilities.
- 10 **EXCUSE #9:** I'm too old to go to college. Nonsense! You're never too old to learn. Even if you've been out of high school for a while, you can still go to college. Almost half of all full-time and part-time students in the country are adults older than 25 years of age. If they can do it, so can you!

- 11 **EXCUSE #10:** I just want to get a good job and make lots of money. College will help you with that and more. Studies have shown that a college graduate will earn several hundred thousand dollars more during the course of his or her working life than someone who has only a high school diploma. Of course, money isn't everything, but most challenging and interesting jobs with good futures require a college education. A college degree will also give you a greater variety of job choices. There's something else that college will give you: a sense of personal satisfaction, confidence, and self-respect. These are not easy to measure, but they are very important in helping you become the kind of person you want to be. There are probably many other reasons you can think of for not going to college. But why sit around making up excuses when you can use that time and energy to do something that will benefit you the rest of your life? Decide now that you want to go to college and then start working at it. This is the bottom line: If you are willing to give it a shot, college can be for you too.

FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) Guide for College or Work

Things to Do When Planning for College

This can be an overwhelming and complicated process. There is no best way to go about this other than to be as thorough as you can be and to collect as much information as you can. Consult “Web Site Resources” to help you identify sources for research.

Deciding where to begin your research depends on how well formed your plans are. If you already know where you are going to college, then you might want to begin the application process for that institution. If you are not sure where you want to go to college, you may want to start with looking at college cultures, the kind of programs or majors they offer, and how easy it is to get in.

If you think you want to go to college, but are unsure of why or what you would do, you may want to start looking at the relation between your career plans and the programs colleges offer in your area of interest.

In short, there is no single best way to begin, but once you begin, make sure you keep careful records. It is important to keep a folder for each school you are considering.

Here is a brief list of what you should record:

1. The address of websites you visit and information about what you found there
2. Any information about deadlines, requirements, and passwords you need to develop in order to continue to explore a particular college (the CSU system requires you to establish a user name and password.)
3. Any information about tests you need to take or records you need to have access to
4. Information about financial aid, how to apply, who to contact
5. Any contact information, web addresses and phone numbers
6. A calendar that shows who you contacted and when
7. A space for writing notes, planning, and doing more research about going to college

Things to Consider When Building Your FAQ

- The Application
 - Deadlines
 - Admission requirements
 - Grades and tests
 - Addresses
 - Contacts
 - Majors and impacted majors

- Financial Aid
 - Requirements for Cal Grant
 - Requirements for Federal Grants (FAFSA)
 - Deadlines
 - Filing options
 - Recent announcements
- Your college major
 - What can you do with the major?
 - Which colleges offer it?
 - What kind of knowledge is associated with your major?
 - What sort of things do majors read and study?
 - What kind of groups or communities are formed around the major?
- The kind of college you want to attend
 - What are the costs of attending?
 - Who is accepted?
 - What is the graduation rate?
 - Who goes to the college?
 - What kind of support is offered there?
 - What is life around the college like?

Remember that your task here is to find answers to questions that you have about attending college. The questions provided above are not comprehensive. While you are researching, you should pay attention to questions that surface as you gather more information about applying for and attending college. Finally, remember to keep records; you will need to use the information you have gathered about college to not just fill out an application, but to use in your personal statement letter.

Things to Do When Planning For a Career:

Planning for a career or any job opportunity takes patience and a little imagination if you are going to explore possibilities and perhaps expand your sense of what is possible for you as a high school graduate hoping to enter the work force. One way to begin this process is by taking a look at John Holland's "Theory of Career Choice." Reading this document will help you make some larger decisions about your areas of interest and how your interests may be matched with some types of jobs, sometimes called "job families." You will find the web address for this document in Appendix 2, in the section on career web sites.

Once you have considered areas of interest for yourself, it will be a good idea to start looking at specific kinds of work. Both the *Oklahoma Career Planner* and the *Oklahoma Career Information System* will provide you with access to links that provide a wealth of information about jobs.

The *California Careers* website will also provide you with information. If you work through its multiple web sites, you should be able to find an abundance of information about jobs, job availability, job requirements, and life on the job you are interested in. Web addresses for these sites are also listed in "Web Site Resources."

Here is a brief list of things you need for your search:

- **A folder for keeping records:**
 - Taking in so much information calls for some organization on your part. You should have a folder to keep all information in, a place to take notes on what you discover, and a place to keep records of web addresses, resources, and other information that may help you plan for work.

- **A plan**
 - Simply looking around isn't going to be very helpful if you plan to make your research effective. Here are a few suggestions about things to look for when considering the kind of career you want.
 - What kind of activity does this job require?
 - What are the common tasks?
 - What are the working conditions?
 - What skills or abilities do I need to have?
 - What do I need to know in order to do this job?
 - What kind of preparation do I need for this line of work?
 - How do people get hired?
 - What can I expect to get paid for this work?
 - What are the chances for advancement?
 - What is the outlook for this kind of work in the future?
 - What programs help prepare for this kind of work?
 - Are there any resources that can help me learn more about this line of work?

Keeping a record of what you learn about different jobs will help you make an informed decision about the line of work you want to pursue and, perhaps, will help you make a decision to continue your learning either in college or some other setting. Remember that you are doing this research not only to learn about potential careers, but also to prepare yourself for writing a letter of introduction to a future employer. What does this information help you understand about the way you need to represent yourself?

Web Site Resources

Web Suggestions for College Bound Students

General

- The college checklist for academic and financial preparation
 - <http://studentaid.ed.gov/prepare-for-college/checklists>

Financial Aid Information

- College financial aid terms: US News and World Report> The Scholarship Coach
 - <http://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/the-scholarship-coach/2012/07/19/12-college-financial-aid-terms-defined>
- Cal Grants
 - <http://www.calgrants.org>
- Federal Grants (FAFSA)
 - <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>

Applying to California colleges:

- CaliforniaColleges.edu—information on all California colleges
 - <http://californiacolleges.edu>
- University of California
 - <http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/admissions>
- California State University
 - <http://www.csumentor.edu>
 - <http://www.csusuccess.org>
- California Community Colleges
 - <http://www.cccapply.org>

Choosing a College and Information about College Life

- The Choice, NY Times, Education- student and professional blogs
 - <http://thechoice.blogs.nytimes.com>
- US News and World Report-advice of all kinds
 - <http://www.usnews.com/education>
- College Insight—good site for thinking about costs
 - <http://college-insight.org/#spotlight/go>
- College Board-facts about schools
 - <http://www.collegeboard.org/>
- Unigo—information from students about college life
 - <http://www.unigo.com/>

Advice about Choosing a Major

- College Majors 101
 - <http://www.collegemajors101.com>

Web Site Resources

Web Suggestions for Career Bound Students

The Career Key—Holland’s Interest Chart.

- Good source for linking your interests to particular fields of work
 - http://www.careerkey.org/asp/your_personality/hollands_theory_of_career_choice.html

Oklahoma Career Planner

- Does not provide local information, but a very good resource for looking at careers by industry, occupation, or military.
- Best link indexes occupations and provides information about work conditions, physical demands, wages, opportunities and much more.
 - <http://www.okcareerplanner.com/index.php?id=3>

Occupations Index in the Oklahoma Career Information System

- This is a good site to check into the requirements for many different jobs.
 - Go to: http://okcistest.intocareers.org/index_cluster.aspx?FileID=Occ
 - Then choose a cluster
 - Choose a specific occupation
 - Read overview and then in the left hand column
 - Select any of the other links for more information

California Careers Info

- This is the home page for three excellent web sites that provide everything a you will need to consider your future work plans.
 - <http://www.californiacareers.info/>

Career Zone:

- This site provides information on a wide range of job families (types) and specific careers within different job families. A great place to start thinking about the relation between your interests and job possibilities.
 - <http://www.cacareerzone.org/>
 1. Go to the site and register, it’s free. Remember to write down your user name and password.

2. Once inside, click on any of the links to
 - a. Assess yourself
 - b. Explore job families
 - c. Get a reality check about your plans
3. Inside “Assess yourself” you will find all kinds of information about jobs.
 - a. Click on your areas of interest
 - b. Click on “View Results”
 - c. On the next page you can reset any dollar amounts, or job families you are interested in.
 - d. Then open the list on “in job family” and select a family that interests you.
 - e. Select a line of work and open the page
 - f. There you will find information about the job, names for the job, what they do, things you need to know to do the job, wages, work prospects in California and much more.
 - g. Explore as many areas of interest as you can and take notes on information you may use in your letter of introduction to the community (Portfolio, remember?)

Explore Job Families:

- This is the second link on the Career Zone home page.
 - <http://www.cacareerzone.org/clusters>
- This page allows you to explore job families. Job families are clusters or groups of jobs that seem to relate to common interests or shared work. Best here to
 1. Select a “family” (Health care Practitioner and Technical Occupations)
 2. Skim through the jobs and examine their qualities (occupational therapist, emergency medical technician, and so on.)
 3. Once inside a job, take notes on its requirements and opportunities. Do your best to see if the job description matches your own sense of what you want to do with your life after high school.

Get a Reality Check:

- This link allows you to figure out how much money you will need to live the way you may be imagining yourself to live in the near—or distant—future.
 - <http://www.californiarealitycheck.com/>
- Simply work through the 1, 2, 3 directions to get a final summary and “reality check” for your plans.
- Don’t forget, once you have filled out all the information about how you want to live, check out the kind of occupations that seem to match your lifestyle choices.

California Jobs and Career Information

- This site lists jobs and their salaries. It also provides links to Career Schools in California. In those links you can find information about any kind of tech or vocational school.
 - <http://www.seniorjobbank.org/database/California/California.html>