

Andrew Delbanco

## Three Reasons College Still Matters

[*Boston Globe Magazine*, March 4, 2012]

### BEFORE YOU READ

Do you think college and higher education should be available to everyone? Why or why not? Do you think higher education should be focused on specific careers or tasks, or do you think it should encompass multiple areas of study, from arts and humanities to science and engineering?

### WORDS TO LEARN

*supplant* (para. 3): to replace  
(verb)

*dissenters* (para. 7): people whose  
opinion differs from the majority  
(noun)

*punditry* (para. 12): opinions of  
experts or authorities (noun)

*trepidation* (para. 15): fear (noun)

*utilitarian* (para. 16): regarding  
usefulness over beauty (adj)

For a relatively few students, college remains the sort of place that Anthony Kronman, former dean of Yale Law School, recalls from his days at Williams, where his favorite class took place at the home of a philosophy professor whose two golden retrievers slept on either side of the fireplace “like bookends beside the hearth” while the sunset lit the Berkshire Hills “in scarlet and gold.” For many more students, college means the anxious pursuit of marketable skills in overcrowded, under-resourced institutions. For still others, it means traveling by night to a fluorescent office building or to a “virtual classroom” that only exists in cyberspace.

It is a pipe dream to imagine that every student can have the sort of experience that our richest colleges, at their best, provide. But it is a nightmare society that affords the chance to learn and grow only to the wealthy, brilliant, or lucky few. Many remarkable teachers in America’s community

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*Andrew Delbanco is the director of American Studies at Columbia University, where he also serves as the Julian Clarence Levi Professor Chair in the Humanities. He is the author of several books, and his essays regularly appear in the New York Review of Books. In 2001, he was both elected Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and named “America’s Best Social Critic” by Time magazine.*

thoughtful participants in a democracy. Delbanco also praises the intellectual and spiritual satisfactions of college, where students of all classes “have the capacity to embrace the precious chance to think and reflect before life engulfs them.”

In contrast, professor and researcher Alex Tabarrok argues that “[t]he obsessive focus on a college degree has served neither taxpayers nor students well.” In “Tuning In to Dropping Out,” he says the college dropout rate in the United States, the highest in the industrialized world, is just one sign that college—and even the traditional high school education— isn’t for everyone. Instead, Tabarrok contends, we need to do a better job of creating alternatives to both paths, such as vocational and apprenticeship programs like those in Europe. Additionally, Tabarrok makes the case that taxpayers should subsidize only those students pursuing degrees that provide “spillover” benefits to the larger economy—degrees in fields such as microbiology, chemical engineering, and computer science. He adds that “there is little justification for subsidizing sociology, dance, and English majors.”

In “Not All College Majors Are Created Equal,” financial-advice columnist Michelle Singletary agrees that students need to consider how much their majors will be worth in the job market. She concludes, “I wouldn’t want to discourage people from pursuing a career they love, even if the pay isn’t very high. However, that choice should be made with the understanding of which job opportunities might be available and weighing what you can expect to earn annually against the cost of taking on debt to finance your education.”

But in the final essay of the chapter, “A College Degree Is a Worthy Achievement,” Maria Dimera, a student at Santa Monica College, urges potential college attendees not to let concerns about loan debt, tuition, and job prospects discourage them from pursuing a degree, which, she says, is “more than just a piece of paper. It is an experience and an accomplishment that no one can take away, no matter what comes after college.” According to Dimera, obtaining scholarships and applying to more affordable institutions are just a couple of ways to put college within reach.

The e-Page at the end of the chapter offers a look into a virtual classroom of the Khan Academy, whose goal is to provide a “free world-class education to anyone anywhere.” What does the existence of the Khan Academy suggest about the education of the future?

colleges, unsung private colleges, and underfunded public colleges live this truth every day, working to keep the ideal of democratic education alive. And so it is my unabashed aim to articulate in my forthcoming book, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*, what a college — any college — should seek to do for its students.

What, then, are today's prevailing answers to the question, what is college for? The most common answer is an economic one. It's clear that a college degree long ago supplanted the high school diploma as the minimum qualification for entry into the skilled labor market, and there is abundant evidence that people with a college degree earn more money over the course of their lives than people without one. Some estimates put the worth of a bachelor of arts degree at about a million dollars in incremental lifetime earnings.

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For such economic reasons alone, it is alarming that for the first time in history, we face the prospect that the coming generation of Americans will be less educated than its elders.

Within this gloomy general picture are some especially disturbing particulars. For one thing, flat or declining college attainment rates (relative to other nations) apply disproportionately to minorities, who are a growing portion of the American population. And financial means have a shockingly large bearing on educational opportunity, which, according to one authority, looks like this in today's America: If you are the child of a family making more than \$90,000 per year, your odds of getting a BA by age 24 are roughly 1 in 2; if your parents make less than \$35,000, your odds are 1 in 17.

Moreover, among those who do get to college, high-achieving students from affluent families are four times more likely to attend a selective college than students from poor families with comparable grades and test scores. Since prestigious colleges serve as funnels into leadership positions in business, law, and government, this means that our "best" colleges are doing more to foster than to retard the growth of inequality in our society. Yet colleges are still looked to as engines of social mobility in American life, and it would be shameful if they became, even more than they already are, a system for replicating inherited wealth.

Not surprisingly, as in any discussion of economic matters, one finds dissenters from the predominant view. Some on the right say that pouring more public investment into higher education, in the form of

enhanced subsidies for individuals or institutions, is a bad idea. They argue against the goal of universal college education as a fond fantasy and, instead, for a sorting system such as one finds in European countries: vocational training for the low scorers, who will be the semiskilled laborers and functionaries; advanced education for the high scorers, who will be the diplomats and doctors.

Other thinkers, on the left, question whether the aspiration to go to college really makes sense for “low-income students who can least afford to spend money and years” on such a risky venture, given their low graduation rates and high debt. From this point of view, the “education gospel” seems a cruel distraction from “what really provides security to families and children: good jobs at fair wages, robust unions, affordable access to health care and transportation.” 8

One can be on either side of these questions or somewhere in the middle, and still believe in the goal of achieving universal college education. Consider an analogy from another sphere of public debate: health care. One sometimes hears that eliminating smoking would save untold billions because of the immense cost of caring for patients who develop lung cancer, emphysema, heart disease, or diabetes. It turns out, however, that reducing the incidence of disease by curtailing smoking may actually end up costing us more, since people who don’t smoke live longer and eventually require expensive therapies for chronic diseases and the inevitable infirmities of old age. 9

In other words, measuring the benefit as a social cost or gain does not quite get the point — or at least not the whole point. The best reason to end smoking is that people who don’t smoke have a better chance to lead better lives. The best reason to care about college — who goes, and what happens to them when they get there — is not what it does for society in economic terms but what it can do for individuals, in both calculable and incalculable ways. 10

The second argument for the importance of college is a political one, though one rarely hears it from politicians. This is the argument on behalf of democracy. “The basis of our government,” as Thomas Jefferson put the matter near the end of the 18th century, is “the opinion of the people.” If the new republic was to flourish and endure, it required, above all, an educated citizenry. 11

This is more true than ever. All of us are bombarded every day with pleadings and persuasions — advertisements, political appeals, punditry of all sorts — designed to capture our loyalty, money, or, more narrowly, our vote. Some say health care reform will bankrupt the country, others that it is an overdue act of justice; some believe that abortion is the work of Satan, others think that to deny a woman the right to terminate 12

an unwanted pregnancy is a form of abuse. The best chance we have to maintain a functioning democracy is a citizenry that can tell the difference between demagoguery and responsible arguments.

Education for democracy also implies something about what kind of education democratic citizens need. A very good case for college in this sense has been made recently by Kronman, the former Yale dean who now teaches in a Great Books program for Yale undergraduates. In his book *Education's End*, Kronman argues for a course of study that introduces students to the constitutive ideas of Western culture, including, among many others, "the ideals of individual freedom and toleration," "a reliance on markets as a mechanism for the organization of economic life," and "an acceptance of the truths of modern science."

Anyone who earns a BA from a reputable college ought to understand something about the genealogy of these ideas and practices, about the historical processes from which they have emerged, the tragic cost when societies fail to defend them, and about alternative ideas both within the Western tradition and outside it. That's a tall order for anyone to satisfy on his or her own — and one of the marks of an educated person is the recognition that it can never be adequately done and is therefore all the more worth doing.

There is a third case for college, seldom heard, perhaps because it is harder to articulate without sounding platitudinous and vague. I first heard it stated in a plain and passionate way after I had spoken to an alumni group from Columbia, where I teach. The emphasis in my talk was on the Jeffersonian argument — education for citizenship. When I had finished, an elderly alumnus stood up and said more or less the following: "That's all very nice, professor, but you've missed the main point." With some trepidation, I asked him what that point might be. "Columbia," he said, "taught me how to enjoy life."

What he meant was that college had opened his senses as well as his mind to experiences that would otherwise be foreclosed to him. Not only had it enriched his capacity to read demanding works of literature and to grasp fundamental political ideas, it had also heightened and deepened his alertness to color and form, melody and harmony. And now, in the late years of his life, he was grateful. Such an education is a hedge against utilitarian values. It slakes the human craving for contact with works of art that somehow register one's own longings and yet exceed what one has been able to articulate by and for oneself.

If all that seems too pious, I think of a comparably personal comment I once heard my colleague Judith Shapiro, former provost of Bryn Mawr and then president of Barnard, make to a group of young people about what they should expect from college: "You want the inside of your head to be an interesting place to spend the rest of your life."

What both Shapiro and the Columbia alum were talking about is sometimes called "liberal education" — a hazardous term today, since it has nothing necessarily to do with liberal politics in the modern sense of the word. The phrase "liberal education" derives from the classical tradition of *artes liberales*, which was reserved in Greece and Rome — where women were considered inferior and slavery was an accepted feature of civilized society — for "those free men or gentlemen possessed of the requisite leisure for study." The tradition of liberal learning survived and thrived throughout European history but remained largely the possession of ruling elites. The distinctive American contribution has been the attempt to democratize it, to deploy it on behalf of the cardinal American principle that all persons, regardless of origin, have the right to pursue happiness — and that "getting to know," in poet and critic Matthew Arnold's much-quoted phrase, "the best which has been thought and said in the world" is helpful to that pursuit. 18

This view of what it means to be educated is often caricatured as snobbish and narrow, beholden to the old and wary of the new; but in fact it is neither, as Arnold makes clear by the (seldom quoted) phrase with which he completes his point: "and through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits." 19

In today's America, at every kind of institution — from underfunded community colleges to the wealthiest Ivies — this kind of education is at risk. Students are pressured and programmed, trained to live from task to task, relentlessly rehearsed and tested until winners are culled from the rest. Too many colleges do too little to save them from the debilitating frenzy that makes liberal education marginal — if it is offered at all. 20

In this respect, notwithstanding the bigotries and prejudices of earlier generations, we might not be so quick to say that today's colleges mark an advance over those of the past. 21

Consider a once-popular college novel written a hundred years ago, *Stover at Yale*, in which a young Yale declares, "I'm going to do the best thing a fellow can do at our age, I'm going to loaf." The character speaks from the immemorial past, and what he says is likely to sound to us today like a sneering boast from the idle rich. But there is a more dignified sense in which "loaf" is the colloquial equivalent of contemplation and has always been part of the promise of American life. "I loaf and invite my soul," says Walt Whitman in that great democratic poem "Song of Myself." 22

Surely, every American college ought to defend this waning possibility, whatever we call it. And an American college is only true to itself when it opens its doors to all — the rich, the middle, and the poor — who have the capacity to embrace the precious chance to think and reflect before life engulfs them. If we are serious about democracy, that means everyone. 23

converse, decide which side of the argument you side with and explain your decision.

2. Although Delbanco was able to narrow down the reasons college still matters to three, come up with another reason of support for Delbanco's argument. Write a few paragraphs that expand and support your point.
3. Many students feel pressured to choose a major or path of study in college that will prove lucrative when they graduate. In a brief essay, write about what you would study if practicality or marketability were no object after graduation. If this is already what you are studying, what made you make that decision? If it is not what you are studying, why have you chosen your current path?

Alex Tabarrok

## Tuning In to Dropping Out

[*The Chronicle Review*, March 9, 2012]

### BEFORE YOU READ

How essential do you think college is to success? Are you planning on following a traditional education plan, or are you going to take the vocational education route? Why does your choice make sense to you?

### WORD TO LEARN

*subsidize* (para. 8): to help pay for by a grant or other sum of money, usually by the government (verb)

**R**ick Scott, Florida's governor, created a firestorm recently when he suggested that Florida ought to focus more of its education spending on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and less on liberal arts. Scott got this one right: We should focus higher-education dollars on the fields most likely to benefit everyone, not just the students who earn the degrees. Scott, however, missed another part of the equation: We need to focus more attention on the

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Alex Tabarrok is Associate Professor of Economics at George Mason University. He is also the co-author of both *FDAReview.org* and the Modern Principles introductory economics textbook series. He directs research at the Independent Institute, is a research fellow at Mercatus Center, and regularly blogs with Modern Principles co-author Tyler Cowen at *MarginalRevolution.com*.

students who are being left behind, the millions of college and high-school dropouts.

Over the past 25 years, the total number of students in college has increased by about 50 percent. But the number of students graduating with degrees in STEM subjects has remained more or less constant.

Consider computer technology. In 2009 the United States graduated 37,994 students with bachelor's degrees in computer and information science. That's not bad, but we graduated more students with computer-science degrees 25 years ago!

The story is the same in other technology fields such as chemical engineering, math, and statistics. Few disciplines have changed as much in recent years as microbiology, but in 2009 we graduated just 2,480 students with bachelor's degrees in microbiology — about the same number as 25 years ago. Who will solve the problem of antibiotic resistance?

If students aren't studying science, technology, engineering, and math, what are they studying?

In 2009 the United States graduated 89,140 students in the visual and performing arts, more than in computer science, math, and chemical engineering combined and more than double the number of visual-and-performing-arts graduates in 1985.

There is nothing wrong with the arts, psychology, and journalism, but graduates in these fields have lower wages and are less likely to find work in their fields than graduates in science and math. Moreover, more than half of all humanities graduates end up in jobs that don't require college degrees, and those graduates don't get a big income boost from having gone to college.

Most important, graduates in the arts, psychology, and journalism are less likely to create the kinds of innovations that drive economic growth. Economic growth is not the only goal of higher education, but it is one of the main reasons taxpayers subsidize higher education through

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direct government college support, as well as loans, scholarships, and grants. The potential wage gains for college graduates is reason enough for students to pursue a college education. We add subsidies to the mix, however, because we believe that education has positive spillover benefits for society. One of the biggest of those benefits is the increase in innovation that highly educated workers theoretically bring to the economy.



Thus, an argument can be made for subsidizing students in fields with potentially large spillovers, such as microbiology, chemical engineering, and computer science. But there is little justification for subsidizing sociology, dance, and English majors. 9

The obsessive focus on a college degree has served neither taxpayers nor students well. Only 35 percent of students starting a four-year degree program will graduate within four years, and less than 60 percent will graduate within six years. Students who haven't graduated within six years probably never will. The U.S. college dropout rate is about 40 percent, the highest college dropout rate in the industrialized world. That's a lot of wasted resources. Students with two years of college education may get something for those two years, but it's less than half of the wage gains from completing a four-year degree. No degree, few skills, and a lot of debt is not an ideal way to begin a career. 10

College dropouts are telling us that college is not for everyone. Neither is high school. In the 21st century, an astounding 25 percent of American men do not graduate from high school. A big part of the problem is that the United States has paved a single road to knowledge, the road through the classroom. "Sit down, stay quiet, and absorb. Do this for 12 to 16 years," we tell the students, "and all will be well." Lots of students, however, crash before they reach the end of the road. Who can blame them? Sit-down learning is not for everyone, perhaps not even for most people. There are many roads to an education. 11

Consider those offered in Europe. In Germany, 97 percent of students graduate from high school, but only a third of these students go on to college. In the United States, we graduate fewer students from high school, but nearly two-thirds of those we graduate go to college. So are German students poorly educated? Not at all. 12

Instead of college, German students enter training and apprenticeship programs — many of which begin during high school. By the time they finish, they have had a far better practical education than most American students — equivalent to an American technical degree — and, as a result, they have an easier time entering the work force. Similarly, in Austria, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Switzerland, between 40 to 70 percent of students opt for an educational program that combines classroom and workplace learning. 13

In the United States, "vocational" programs are often thought of as programs for at-risk students, but that's because they are taught in high schools with little connection to real workplaces. European programs are typically rigorous because the training is paid for by employers who consider apprentices an important part of their current and future work force. Apprentices are therefore given high-skill technical training that 14

combines theory with practice — and the students are paid! Moreover, instead of isolating teenagers in their own counterculture, apprentice programs introduce teenagers to the adult world and the skills, attitudes, and practices that make for a successful career.

Elites frown upon apprenticeship programs because they think college is the way to create a “well-rounded citizenry.” So take a look at the students in Finland, Sweden, or Germany. Are they not “well rounded”? The argument that college creates a well-rounded citizen can be sustained only by defining well rounded in a narrow way. Is someone who can quote from the school of Zen well rounded? Only if they can also maintain a motorcycle. Well-roundedness comes not from sitting in a classroom but from experiencing the larger world.

The focus on college education has distracted government and students from apprenticeship opportunities. Why should a major in English literature be subsidized with room and board on a beautiful campus with Olympic-size swimming pools and state-of-the-art athletic facilities when apprentices in nursing, electrical work, and new high-tech fields like mechatronics are typically unsubsidized (or less subsidized)? College students even get discounts at the movie theater; when was the last time you saw a discount for an electrical apprentice?

Our obsessive focus on college schooling has blinded us to basic truths. College is a place, not a magic formula. It matters what subjects students study, and subsidies should focus on the subjects that matter the most — not to the students but to everyone else. The high-school and college dropouts are also telling us something important: We need to provide opportunities for all types of learners, not just classroom learners. Going to college is neither necessary nor sufficient to be well educated. Apprentices in Europe are well educated but not college schooled. We need to open more roads to education so that more students can reach their desired destination.

### VOCABULARY/USING A DICTIONARY

1. What is the definition of *apprenticeship* (para. 13)? How has it evolved over time?
2. *Mechatronics* (para. 16) is an example given of a new high-tech field. What is *mechatronics*?
3. What does the word *vocational* mean, and how does a *vocational* (para. 14) education differ from an *apprenticeship*, if at all?

### RESPONDING TO WORDS IN CONTEXT

1. In paragraph 9, Tabarrok states that “an argument can be made for subsidizing students in fields with potentially large spillovers, such as

## WRITING ACTIVITIES

1. Write a short essay in which you explore the debate of traditional American university education vs. vocational education. You may want to look back at Andrew Delbanco's essay, "3 Reasons College Still Matters" (p. 243) to help form an argument.
2. What do you think are the benefits of a vocational education? Building on the support that Tabarrok presents, further the argument that vocational education should be de-stigmatized in American education.
3. Are you a "sit-down learner," or do you learn better through doing tasks and learning as you go? Write a short essay that explores the differences between these two learning styles and how education could adapt to be effective for all kinds of learners.

Michelle Singletary

## Not All College Majors Are Created Equal

[Washington Post, January 14, 2012]

## BEFORE YOU READ

What obstacles to employment do college graduates face when they enter the workforce these days? Are you worried that your major won't help you find a job? What practical considerations should you make when choosing a path to pursue in college?

## WORDS TO LEARN

*relevant* (para. 7): having something to do with the matter at hand (adj)

*attain* (para. 10): to reach or accomplish (verb)

*substantially* (para. 14): amply or much (adv)

*marginally* (para. 15): slightly (adv)

*caveat* (para. 16): warning (noun)

*align* (para. 17): to adjust into a line (verb)

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*Michelle Singletary is an author and nationally syndicated columnist ("The Color of Money") for the Washington Post. She has appeared on personal finance segments for programs on NBC, MSNBC, ABC, CBS, PBS, and NPR, and she has served as keynote speaker at the NFL Rookie Symposium in addition to countless universities and churches across the nation.*

I have this game I play when I meet college students.

"What's your major?" I ask.

The student might say, "English," "psychology," "political science" or "engineering."

And then, in my mind, after factoring in some other information, I say to myself "job" or "no job," depending on the major.

An English major with no internships or any plan of what she might do with the major to earn a living? No job.

A political science major with no internships that could lead to a specific job opportunity? No job, I think.

Engineering major with three relevant internships in the engineering field? Ding. Ding. We have a winner. Job.

Certainly a college degree is the ticket to many jobs. The unemployment rate for people with only a recent high school diploma is 22.9 percent, and it's an astonishing 31.5 percent among recent high school dropouts. Nonetheless, the lack of career planning before a school is chosen, a major is selected, and debt is borrowed is shocking to me. Not enough students — and their families who are also taking on student loans — are asking what their college major is worth in the workforce.

For years, long before the Great Recession<sup>1</sup> and today's almost 9 percent unemployment rate among new college graduates, I've been begging students and their parents to consider the fallout from their choice to borrow heavily to attend a school when the student has no clue about the expected career opportunities of a chosen major.

Too many students aren't sure what job they could get after four, five, or even six years of studying a certain major and racking up education loans. Many aren't getting on-the-job training while they are in school or during their semester or summer breaks. As a result, questions about employment opportunities or what type of job they have the skills to attain are met with blank stares or the typical, "I don't know."

And don't get me started on people who borrow heavily to get an advanced degree without really knowing whether it will lead to a fatter paycheck that can easily service the debt. In some cases it will, but for some academic disciplines, the salary bump isn't as much as people expect.

Maybe a new report from the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce will help encourage students to make better choices about

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<sup>1</sup> Great Recession (para. 9): Also known as the Global Recession, a financial crisis felt throughout the world economy that began in 2008, the effects of which were still felt in 2012.

which college and degrees they pursue. *Hard Times: College Majors, Unemployment and Earnings: Not All College Degrees Are Created Equal* answers the question that many people are asking in the aftermath of the recession. Is college still worth it?

For most it is. But it all depends on your major, the report concludes.

"It was true in the 1970s that the purpose of going to college was to get a degree because you could move through a lot of occupations," said Anthony P. Carnevale, director of the Georgetown Center. "But since then, the difference among degrees has grown substantially."

Median annual earnings among recent college graduates vary from \$55,000 among engineering majors to \$30,000 in the arts. Education, psychology, and social work majors have relatively low unemployment, but their earnings are also low and only improve marginally with experience and graduate education.

"Today's best advice, then, is that high school students who can go on to college should do so — with one caveat," the report's authors write. "They should do their homework before picking a major because, when it comes to employment prospects and compensation, not all college degrees are created equal."

A series of reports released by the Georgetown Center has focused on matching jobs with majors. In 2010, the center warned about the growing disconnect between the types of jobs that employers need to fill and the number of people who have the education and training to fill them. The report, *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2018*, argues that students should align their postsecondary educational choices with available careers.

In the *Hard Times* report, the center found that the unemployment rate for recent graduates is highest in architecture (13.9 percent) because of the collapse of the construction and home-building industry. Not surprisingly, unemployment rates are generally higher in non-technical majors, such as the arts (11.1 percent), humanities and liberal arts (9.4 percent), social science (8.9 percent), and law and public policy (8.1 percent).

A college education is not an investment in your future if you are taking out loans just for the college experience. It's not an investment if you're not coupling your education with training. It's not an investment if you aren't researching which fields are creating good-paying jobs now and 30 years from now.

I wouldn't want to discourage people from pursuing a career they love, even if the pay isn't very high. However, that choice should be made with the understanding of which job opportunities might be available and weighing what you can expect to earn annually against the cost of taking on debt to finance your education.

## WRITING ACTIVITIES

1. Create a list of majors you are familiar with and try to come up with five possible jobs for each that one might apply for after earning a college degree. Are some majors more difficult to pair with jobs? Is Singletary too quick to judge which college students will get jobs based on their majors, or do you think she is correct in her assumptions?
2. In a brief essay, discuss how college can be viewed as an investment. Does your idea of what kind of investment college is match Singletary's view? Explain.
3. What sort of fears do you have about finding employment once you finish college? Does Singletary's essay do anything to quell those fears? Does her essay add to those fears? Write a personal essay that discusses your future plans and makes use of Singletary's argument to help explain your feelings about your future.

Maria Dimera (student essay)

## A College Degree Is a Worthy Achievement

[*The Corsair*, Santa Monica College, October 8, 2011]

## BEFORE YOU READ

Do you believe the value of a college education should be measured in terms of money? If so, why? If not, why not?

## WORDS TO LEARN

*enroll* (para. 1): to register (verb)

*allegedly* (para. 2): according to what is asserted without proof (adv)

*ponder* (para. 5): to consider (verb)

*eternity* (para. 9): endless time (noun)

*incur* (para. 10): to acquire or bring upon oneself (verb)

*discontinue* (para. 11): to put an end to (verb)

*expiration* (para. 14): the point at which something ends (noun)

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*Maria Dimera is a journalism student at Santa Monica College, where she has served as a staff writer for the campus newspaper.*

The decision of whether or not to enroll in college often comes down to the financial aspect. With the nation's current economic difficulties, college students have already suffered many fee hikes and can only hope for a break. How many increases do students need to endure until it becomes too burdensome to attend a community college?

In fall 2011, Santa Monica College's tuition fee increased from \$26 to \$36, and will allegedly increase another \$10 in the summer of 2012. Although a 10-dollar increase isn't the end of the world, California community colleges should only be considering \$46-per-unit fees as the last resort.

For international student Anna Jonsson, paying \$36 per unit would be ideal. "As an international student," said Jonsson, "I pay approximately \$250 per unit. It's like seven times more than an average American student, so they should be glad they don't have to pay what I pay." Despite the high tuition fee, Jonsson embraces the opportunity to get a college degree abroad. "It's worth every penny."

As an international student, I completely agree with Jonsson. Although most students can make ends meet and pay for college, the recent increase is not joyful news for anyone. The increase, however, will not affect students who qualify for a fee waiver, which is great for them, since they can still apply and get one.

In today's world, many ponder the importance and benefits of a college degree. Bobby Simmons, a communications professor at SMC, believes that "a college education is more important than ever before, both in terms of economic opportunity, and in terms of developing oneself as an engaged member of a community."

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many ponder  
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college degree.

Of course, learning is available in many different forms. College may not be for everyone, and some students will give up on earning a degree. These students either blame debt, lack of a guaranteed job, or they may simply consider it a waste of time. College students shouldn't let these issues pull them back from earning a degree, but rather push them ahead to succeed.

Plenty of colleges and other institutions offer grants and scholarships for students who could use the extra cash. Many SMC students have won thousands of dollars in scholarships. More students should take advantage of these awards and find other possible ways to pay for college, especially when facing financial strain.

"Not every institution is a smart investment, and students have to make good decisions about how to spend scarce resources. Part of the process is recognizing that what you are seeking is not a degree as much as an education," said Simmons, who has earned two bachelor's degrees, two master's degrees, and is closing in on a doctorate.

A college degree can leave behind a burden of discouragingly juicy debt that will take an eternity to repay, but a degree has a lot more to offer. It is entirely different from a high school diploma, since it's the ticket to one's desired field and higher pay.

SMC journalism professor Lyndon Stambler said, "In today's economy, students are finding that college degrees pay off, providing that they don't incur excessive debt."

Choices made while in college and afterwards play an important role in decision-making. While some may discontinue educational pursuits past an associate degree, others will go on to pursue a bachelor's or master's, which can help them to a better job. Still, other jobs may only require a basic education, and an associate degree will be enough to launch or advance a career.

"Even with the fee increases, which place additional financial stress on students, SMC is still affordable compared to most four-year universities. Students can spend a couple of years at SMC trying to figure out if they want to make the much bigger investment of attending a four-year university," said Stambler.

Many think that a college degree has less value today than it did a few decades ago, but a college degree is more than just a piece of paper. It is an experience and an accomplishment that no one can take away, no matter what happens after college.

The phrase, "It's not what you know, but who you know," is familiar among many, but it seems that "who you know" reflects a temporary situation, while "what you know" has no expiration date.

#### VOCABULARY/USING A DICTIONARY

1. What does the prefix *inter* mean? Based on that definition, how do you define the word *international* (para. 3)? What other words do you know that share that same prefix?
2. How do you define the word *increase* (para. 1)? How is it different from the word *decrease*?
3. From what language does the word *doctorate* (para. 8) come?

#### RESPONDING TO WORDS IN CONTEXT

1. What is a *waiver* (para. 4)? In Dimera's essay, what might possibly be *waived* for a qualified student?