

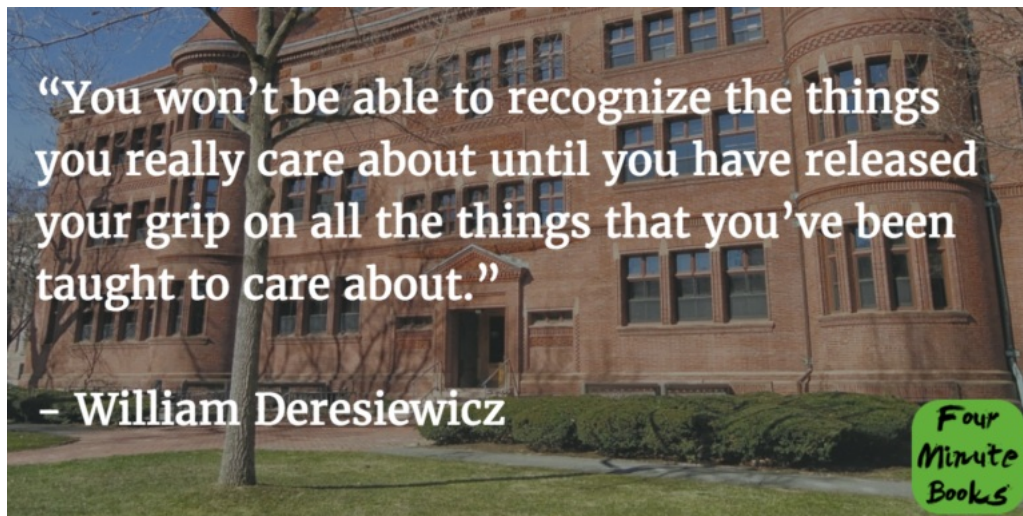
Excellent Sheep Summary

 fourminutebooks.com/excellent-sheep-summary

1-Sentence-Summary: *Excellent Sheep* describes how fundamentally broken elite education is, why it makes students feel depressed and lost, how educational institutions have been alienated from their true purpose, what students really must learn in college and how we can go back to making college a place for self-discovery and critical thinking.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



If you're a college student, read *Excellent Sheep* next. In terms of helping intelligent, young people in higher education, who secretly feel lost and like they don't know what they really want out of life, this is the best wake-up call I've found all year.

Earlier this week I started my Master's degree at Technical University of Munich, after two years of being self-employed. On the outside it'll look to a lot of people like I couldn't make freelancing work and some might even think I "came to my senses." What I haven't talked a lot about yet is that after finishing the degree, I still have no intent to work for anyone but myself.

My choice had a purely economical reason (plus I like Munich, I'll admit that): Being a student for another two years is the cheapest way to keep working on my lifestyle business in terms of tax, health insurance, etc.

I hope to not only pull it off, but to also inspire my fellow students to do their own thing in the process, which is why I started documenting the journey on my Instagram [in German]. Let's see what else I can do to try and fix the system from within, so people come out as lions and not just excellent sheep.

In the meantime, here are 3 lessons from the book:

1. Elite college students feel lost and depressed, many of whom end up in careers they don't like.
2. Prestigious universities are run like businesses, not schools.
3. College should be a time of critical thinking and self-discovery, not mere skill acquisition.

Chances are your view of higher education is warped. I know mine was. Let's remove the filter, okay?

Lesson 1: Most elite college graduates end up in financing or consulting, because they don't know what they really want and feel lost.

First of all, the problems with our educational system aren't limited to elite schools like Harvard, Yale (where the author is a professor) and Columbia. The system as a whole is fundamentally broken, and it shows. According to a 2010 study by the American Psychological Association, almost 50% of students report a feeling of hopelessness and over 30% admit being so depressed that they find it hard to function normally throughout the year.

Of course, the already tough strain that's put on students these days is taken to an extreme at schools like Stanford, where students tend to suffer from something called duck syndrome: On the surface, they seem to be cruising along, but beneath the water they're struggling.

Hard work isn't that hard when it's fun. But when you don't know what kind of life you want, it's impossible to find that kind of work.

Because most students and recent graduates don't even have the time to do the kind of self-searching college is actually meant for, they end up in jobs they don't really care for. For example, almost half of all Harvard graduates end up in finance or consulting, even though very few of them indicated any interest in these industries when they started out as freshmen.

Lesson 2: The most prestigious college institutions are run like businesses, not schools, so they miss the point of education.

The reason students feel lost lies, at least in part, with the way the colleges they attend are run. Especially prestigious schools suffer from monetization, because the more money a college has and makes, the more it's run like a business, not a school. For example, TU Munich has a budget of almost 800 million €, in case of Harvard and co., we're talking about billions.

With money comes pressure to keep and grow that money, so **elite colleges try to be efficient by spending most of their budget on research, which in turn generates more funding and revenue.**

That means economically profitable majors are preferred over liberal arts ones, the professors have to be great researchers, but not necessarily great teachers, and students are treated like customers. In spite of being artificially hard to get in (Harvard admits about 5% of all applicants),

once students enroll and pay thousands of dollars, their average GPA soars (to 3.43 in 2007).

If on a 0.0-4.0 scale, the average is 3.43, the scale is either wrong, or the numbers inflated. This adds even more pressure to perform, and so most students don't use their time in college to do what it's actually meant for, which is...

Lesson 3: Originally, college was a time of self-discovery and learning to think critically, and we need to go back to that.

...learning how to think for themselves. When you graduate high school at 18 years old, you have a whole ton of ideas and beliefs about the world – most of which aren't your own. Your parents, your teachers, your friends, they've all majorly shaped your views and values.

If done right, college is the best place to let go of these acquired beliefs, which the ancient Greeks called *doxa*, and thought it to be our duty to liberate ourselves from them.

College in its original form made this possible mainly due to two factors:

1. Being a break from the “real world,” away from family and career pressure, giving you time to think critically and discover what you really want.
2. Having qualified teachers challenge your opinions and beliefs and starting a dialogue about them.

Finding out what you really want takes time, but time is the last thing you have on an obstacle course, which is exactly what most colleges have turned into.

So wherever you go to school, remember: don't rush. Take your time, ask questions and think about what you really want.

Excellent Sheep Review

I'm not sure William Deresiewicz's solution of encouraging more people to get liberal arts degrees is enough to address this problem, especially seeing how much I've learned during the last two years about making money in ways which don't require a college education at all, but he's sure right in shining a light on the problem. I'd recommend *Excellent Sheep* to any current college student or recent graduate.

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- What “tiger parents” are and how they add to the problem

- How to cultivate the moral imagination you need to find out what you really want
- Why liberal arts degrees are better for business than business degrees
- How arts complement science and one can't exist without the other
- What percentage of people in the highest positions come from elite schools

Who would I recommend the What Every Body Is Saying summary to?

The 17 year old high school graduate, who's deliberating what should be her next move, the 22 year old college student, who's unhappy with most of his subjects and not sure what career to choose, and anyone who works in finance or consulting, but isn't really passionate about it.