To anyone skeptical of the importance of college, distraught at the challenges of studying, wondering if it will ever be worth it: Yes, you’ll be fine, it will: here’s why.

On one comfortable, sunny fall morning, when I was walking straight down from my dorm, Sharp Hall, past The Green to the dining hall, I noticed there were a bunch of tents and stands being setup. One was a booth about organ donations, another looked like a yard sale, and some others seemed to be a series of small games like hoops. I surmised it was some sort of Fair, but didn’t pay it much heed: I was hungry.

After leaving the dining hall though and walking back up, a man called out to me from the side asking for the fastest way to The Green. (There are actually 3 greens, North, Central, and South. We were on South, my dorms on North, but both were empty. I assumed he meant the Central Green). I asked if he meant where all the tents were being setup, and when he said yes, told him to simply keep walking up this brick road and it would be straight ahead.

He thanked me and turned to walk north, now walking besides me. Since it would be a few minutes till we reached the Green, I asked what he was doing there. I learned his name was Allan, and he said he was part of an organization that went to elementary schools and exposed students to science by hosting workshops and fun, short labs.

We talked for a short while, and as we were about to part Allan said: “I’m impressed with you, you’re doing well for yourself”

I was confused by this, because the only thing I had told him about myself was that I was an Economics & Computer Science Major. How would he know how I’m doing? So I asked.

Allan replied: “I know you’re doing well because you’re here”. Spreading his hands apart as he stood in the center of the University of Delaware. “You’re at school hitting the books, and that’s hard. Do you know how many people don’t want to go to school? I come from a family where I was the first to graduate from college, and I know how hard it is. I was hitting the books and studying while my cousins and friends were out partying on the beach [he was from Florida]. I was stuck studying while everyone else was partying and getting on with their lives. But you know what? Looking back, I was the one who got ahead. I worked hard to study, and I would spend days, not hours in the lab. But now I’m ahead of all of the ones who played.

“You’re here studying, and as long as you keep learning while everyone else is out partying, you will be ahead.”

I had heard before that only something like 18% of American’s get a college degree, but this man put meaning to those numbers. College graduates don’t get ahead because they have a piece of paper that says they’re better. They get ahead because they put in time and effort and work to learn and study while others weren’t. Those four years of learning, being around others who were learning, and investing in yourself: that’s what matters. And yes, it’s hard, but it is worth it. Allan is testament to that.