

Plagiarism Declaration I know that plagiarism is wrong.

Plagiarism is to use another's work without attributing it to them, knowingly or unknowingly. I have used the MLA9 convention for citation and referencing.

Each contribution to, and quotation in, this piece from the work(s) of other people has been cited and referenced correctly.

This is my own work, solely designed for this task. Where previous work of mine has been used, I have attributed it accordingly.

I have not allowed, and will not allow, anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as their own work.

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### **When Getting In Isn't Enough**

Getting accepted to college feels like crossing a finish line. We throw parties and act like the struggle is over. For poor students who make it into elite schools, everyone celebrates even harder. But Anthony Abraham Jack's "I was a Low-Income College Student. Classes Weren't the Hard Part" says we need to stop celebrating so soon. Jack spent his college years at Amherst dealing with problems that had nothing to do with exams or essays. The real fight starts after you arrive on campus. Jack argues that poverty does not disappear just because you walk through fancy college gates. I agree with Jack that colleges need to step up their support. But reading his essay, I kept noticing how he lumps together two different issues: what the school owes its students versus what families back home expect from them.

Jack does not just tell us about these problems. He makes us feel them. Spring break during his first year hit him the hardest. Everyone leaves campus, the dining hall locks its doors, and Jack stands there with an empty stomach because "Amherst provided no meals during holidays and breaks, but not all of us could afford to leave campus" (Jack). His classmates hopped on planes to go home or took vacations. Jack stayed behind working ten hour shifts monitoring the gym, eating CVS sandwiches and vending machine snacks. When people came back, they returned "tan" and "rested" while Jack just looked exhausted (Jack). Jack also reveals how low income students get confused about basic college rituals. Many did not understand what "office hours" meant or what to do when a professor invited them for coffee off campus, wondering "whether they were expected to pay" (Jack). Every day brought reminders that this place was designed with someone else in mind.

The campus struggles were tough, but home kept calling. His phone would light up with messages asking for money: "seventy-five dollars for diabetes medicine" or money "to turn the lights back on" (Jack). One time his family needed help with a mortgage payment. He picked up

every work shift he could find. When his financial aid officer told him to cut back on work, she had no idea he was "sending remittances back" home, serving as his family's "safety net" while having "none" himself (Jack). This is where Jack's main argument lands. He says colleges love putting "smiling black and brown faces in their glossy brochures" but then ignore what actually happens to those students (Jack). They want diversity for marketing but not the messy reality that comes with it.

Jack makes a solid case that schools need to do better. His suggestions are straightforward: leave dining halls open during breaks, set up food pantries, teach advisors that poverty follows students everywhere. A student cannot focus on chemistry when their stomach is growling. But here is where I start to question his argument. Should not colleges be upfront about their policies? If Amherst closes the dining hall during breaks, tell students before they show up. I know telling someone ahead of time does not feed them. But at least they could plan differently. Jack does not talk about this transparency issue, but it seems basic to me.

Here is my bigger problem though. Jack treats the college's responsibility and his family's expectations as the same thing. They are not. His family needed money for medicine, for keeping the lights on, for mortgage payments. Those needs are real. But are they Amherst's problem to solve? The college accepted Jack as a student and gave him financial aid for his education. They did not promise to help with bills back in Miami. When the financial aid officer told him to work less, maybe she was right. Jack was trying to be a full time student and his family's main income source at the same time. Nobody can do both well. The problem is not that the college failed him. The problem is that his family leaned on him too heavily. No college policy can fix family expectations about supporting relatives.

Even though I question where the college's job ends, I still agree with Jack's main point. Students cannot just shut off their family problems because they moved into a dorm. When your mom texts that the electricity might get cut off, that thought stays with you during lectures. Jack shows us that poverty follows you in phone calls and guilt about having chances your family never got. If colleges truly want poor students to make it, they need to see the whole picture.

Jack says that fixing these problems takes "more than an algorithm" and needs "a deeply human touch" (Jack). He is right. Colleges cannot just count diversity numbers and call it done.

Maybe they cannot fix everything. Maybe they should not pay for family emergencies miles away. But they can stop acting like admission solves everything. They can keep cafeterias open during breaks. They can tell the truth about what they offer. That is not special treatment. That is basic human recognition.

## References

Jack, Anthony Abraham. "I was a Low-Income College Student. Classes Weren't the Hard Part."  
*The New York Times Magazine*, 8 Sept. 2019.

<https://www.nytimes.com/topic/organization/amherst-college>