



# Unlocking the Value of Education

The Sujeeth Foundation White Paper.

The Sujeeth Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to unlocking the opportunity of education. We empower students to optimize their education by providing essential resources and interactive "Work Out Loud" circles that foster hands-on learning.

## Contents

Executive Summary .....	3
By the Numbers.....	3
1. Earnings Boost .....	3
2. Enrollment Surge .....	3
3. Rising Tuition Costs .....	4
4. Student Loan Debt .....	4
5. Underemployment Challenge .....	4
6. Workplace Enthusiasm.....	4
7. The Challenge .....	4
8. Unlocking the Value of Education .....	4
Finding Your Passion .....	5
The Role of Personal Interests.....	5
Real Constraints and Desire .....	5
The Importance of Interest Discovery .....	5
Experimenting and Growing .....	6
The Power of a Growth Mindset .....	6
Fixed Mindset vs. Growth Mindset.....	6
Lessons for College Students.....	7
Applying Mindset.....	7
Recruiting Help.....	8
The Essence of Working Out Loud.....	8
Applying Working Out Loud to College Life .....	8
Beyond College.....	8
Exerting Agency.....	9
Understanding Agency.....	9
Embracing Agency in College .....	9
Exerting Agency Beyond College .....	9

## Executive Summary

Higher education is a transformative journey, offering opportunities for personal growth, career advancement, and a fulfilling life. In this comprehensive guide, we explore the profound impact of pursuing higher education, navigating its challenges, and harnessing its potential to shape your future.

We start by [reviewing the existing state](#) of education. There are more students than ever before in part because education is an opportunity to significantly increase an individual's earning potential. At the same time, student debt and underemployment are a significant challenge for graduates. Successful students make the most of their time in college. They leverage university resources to experiment and gain experience in a wide range of interests. By connecting these experiences to potential career paths, they enhance their prospects for a fulfilling and successful transition to the workforce.

Key aspects to the journey include:

- [Understanding your interests](#)
- [Embracing a growth mindset](#)
- [Working out loud](#)

Success is not linear. Being mindful about the college experience increases the luck surface area. By recognizing your capacity to make choices and take action, you can shape your college experience and build a fulfilling career. As you embark on this exciting journey, remember that agency empowers you to not only find your passion but also create a path to a passion-filled career. It's your story to write, and your choices and actions will shape the chapters ahead.

The Sujeeth Foundation provides scholarships, training, and other services to college students. Learn more at <https://portal.sujeeth.org>.

## By the Numbers

One of the most compelling reasons to pursue higher education is its potential to transform your life. The numbers speak volumes:

### 1. Earnings Boost

A college degree is a powerful asset. On average, individuals with a Bachelor's degree earn a staggering 80% more than those with just a high school diploma.<sup>1</sup> This significant income disparity underscores the potential for personal and financial growth through education.

### 2. Enrollment Surge

The pursuit of higher education is more popular than ever. As per the US Census, an astounding twelve million students are currently enrolled in colleges across the nation.<sup>2</sup> This surge in enrollment, however, comes with some important implications.

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<sup>1</sup> US Bureau of Labor Statistics Education pays, 2022 report

<sup>2</sup> US Census Figure A-6. Number of Persons Enrolled in College by Sex and Age

### 3. Rising Tuition Costs

The cost of tuition and fees has experienced a noteworthy increase over the past decade, with a collective rise of 10%.<sup>3</sup> Today, the average cost for public, in-state college stands at a substantial \$27,940 annually. These escalating expenses have prompted many students to turn to student loans for assistance.

### 4. Student Loan Debt

Consequently, the burden of student loan debt has grown significantly. The typical borrower now carries a staggering \$37,338 in student loan debt, translating into a monthly payment of around \$300.<sup>4</sup> It is crucial to approach this financial responsibility with careful planning and consideration.

### 5. Underemployment Challenge

Another challenge faced by college graduates is underemployment. Astonishingly, nearly half of college students find themselves working in roles that do not necessarily require a college degree.<sup>5</sup> This discrepancy can lead to frustration in the professional world.

### 6. Workplace Enthusiasm

Gallup reports a sobering statistic - only a third of employees express genuine enthusiasm about their work and workplace. This statistic serves as a stark reminder of the common challenges people face in finding deep satisfaction and fulfillment in their careers.<sup>6</sup> However, it's important to note that if some individuals can discover this level of enthusiasm in their work, it suggests that the potential for workplace fulfillment is real and attainable.

### 7. The Challenge

Many students embark on their college journey without a clear plan in mind. They graduate from high school, enroll in college, but grapple with translating their academic experiences into a profession they are truly passionate about. This is a common dilemma but one that can be overcome with the right approach.

### 8. Unlocking the Value of Education

Successful students make the most of their time in college. They leverage university resources to experiment and gain experience in a wide range of interests. By connecting these experiences to potential career paths, they enhance their prospects for a fulfilling and successful transition to the workforce.

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<sup>3</sup> Forbes Advisor College Tuition Inflation

<sup>4</sup> USA Today Average Student Loan Debt Statistics

<sup>5</sup> Pew Research 10 facts about today's college graduates

<sup>6</sup> Gallup Employee Engagement Needs a Rebound in 2023

## Finding Your Passion

In the quest for passion and purpose in our careers, it's easy to wonder whether practicality should outweigh our desires. Should we really advise young people to follow their passion? Recent scientific research on interests offers a compelling answer.

The concepts from this section come from Angela Duckworth. [Angela Duckworth's Ted Talk on grit explores the role of passion and perseverance in achieving long-term goals.](#)

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## The Role of Personal Interests

Scientific studies have uncovered some critical insights about the relationship between personal interests and job satisfaction. People are significantly more satisfied with their jobs when those jobs align with their personal interests. For instance, those who enjoy abstract thinking may not find fulfillment in managing complex logistical projects; instead, they may thrive while solving mathematical problems. Similarly, individuals who relish interpersonal interactions tend to be less content working in solitary roles and may find greater happiness in professions like sales or teaching.

Moreover, when individuals' jobs align with their intrinsic personal interests, they tend to perform better, be more helpful to their colleagues, and stay in their jobs longer. College students whose majors match their personal interests tend to achieve higher grades and have a lower likelihood of dropping out.

These findings affirm the idea that interest matters significantly when it comes to job satisfaction and performance.

## Real Constraints and Desire

While it's true that not everyone can make a living doing exactly what they enjoy, the research confirms that interest plays a substantial role in one's career satisfaction. William James, a philosopher and psychologist from a century ago, posited that desire and passion are the "casting vote" for our prospects of success in any endeavor.

Yet, a 2014 Gallup poll paints a grim picture: more than two-thirds of adults reported not being engaged at work, with a significant portion categorized as "actively disengaged." The situation is even more discouraging worldwide, with most countries having higher numbers of "not engaged" and "actively disengaged" workers than the United States.

So, with so few people truly loving what they do for a living, the question arises: Why do so many individuals miss the mark when it comes to aligning their occupations with their passions? Does my father's successful career, rooted in practicality, offer a counterexample to the passion argument?

## The Importance of Interest Discovery

In reality, passion for your work is often the result of a process involving discovery, development, and deepening. Here's how it unfolds:

Childhood is usually too early to predict what one will grow up to be. Longitudinal studies reveal that most people begin gravitating toward specific vocational interests during middle school. Even so, a seventh grader, even one with immense grit, is unlikely to have a fully articulated passion at that age. Adolescents are only beginning to explore their general likes and dislikes.

Interests aren't typically discovered through introspection but instead through interactions with the outside world. The process of discovering interests can be messy, serendipitous, and inefficient. Predicting what will capture your attention is challenging, and trying to force an interest upon yourself rarely works.

Interests are usually triggered and then developed through subsequent encounters. New interests need to be consistently retriggered and rekindled through repeated exposure. It's not a single event but an evolving process.

A supportive network of individuals, including parents, teachers, mentors, and peers, plays a vital role. They provide the stimulus, encouragement, and feedback necessary for interest to thrive.

In conclusion, nurturing your passion is more about a continuous journey of discovery, development, and deepening rather than an instantaneous revelation. For most, childhood is a period of exploration and forming general preferences, rather than pinpointing a lifelong passion.

Remember that interest discovery is often serendipitous. It's not a matter of willing yourself to like something but rather exposing yourself to various experiences and seeing what captures your imagination over time.

So, while it's essential to follow your interests and align your career with your passions when possible, it's equally important to foster a passion by engaging with the world and allowing your interests to evolve naturally. The process of discovering and deepening your passions may not guarantee happiness and success, but it significantly improves the odds.

## Experimenting and Growing

One of the most valuable lessons on growth comes from the groundbreaking research of Carol Dweck on the concept of the "growth mindset." This mindset isn't just about academics; it's a philosophy that can profoundly impact your entire life. Here's why adopting a growth mindset matters and how it can guide your path to success:

### THE POWER OF BELIEVING THAT YOU CAN IMPROVE

The concepts from this section come from Carol Dweck. Carol Dweck's Ted Talk on Mindset provides practical advice on how to develop a growth mindset and how to apply it to your life.

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## The Power of a Growth Mindset

Carol Dweck's research emphasizes that individuals can possess one of two mindsets: a "fixed mindset" or a "growth mindset."

### Fixed Mindset vs. Growth Mindset

- **Fixed Mindset:** In a fixed mindset, people believe their abilities and intelligence are static traits. They see challenges as threats to their self-esteem, and they may avoid them to avoid failure. As a result, they often plateau in their development and shy away from taking risks.

- **Growth Mindset:** In a growth mindset, individuals believe their abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work. They see challenges as opportunities for growth, and they embrace setbacks as chances to learn and improve. This mindset encourages resilience and a love of learning.

## Lessons for College Students

As a college freshman, adopting a growth mindset can be a game-changer. Here are some lessons from Carol Dweck's research to help you apply this mindset to your college experience:

1. **Embrace Challenges:** In college, you'll face academic challenges, new experiences, and personal growth opportunities. Instead of avoiding them out of fear, approach these challenges with enthusiasm. Understand that facing difficulties head-on is the path to improvement. Whether it's a tough course, a complex project, or a personal goal, view each challenge as a chance to learn and grow.
2. **Effort is the Path to Mastery:** A growth mindset recognizes that effort is the key to mastery. Success in college is not solely about innate talent; it's about the dedication and hard work you invest in your studies and personal development. When you encounter obstacles, remember that putting in effort and seeking help when needed can lead to progress and success.
3. **Embrace Setbacks as Learning Opportunities:** Mistakes and setbacks are inevitable in any college journey. Instead of viewing them as failures, see them as opportunities to gain valuable insights and develop resilience. A growth mindset allows you to bounce back from setbacks with renewed determination and a commitment to learning from your experiences.
4. **Seek Feedback and Continuous Improvement:** Feedback is a valuable tool for growth. Embrace feedback from professors, peers, and mentors as a means to refine your skills and knowledge. A growth mindset encourages you to actively seek feedback, appreciate constructive criticism, and use it to make continuous improvements.
5. **Cultivate a Love of Learning:** College is not just about earning grades; it's about fostering a lifelong love of learning. Embrace the joy of discovering new ideas and expanding your horizons. With a growth mindset, every subject and challenge becomes an opportunity to deepen your understanding and broaden your skills.

## Applying Mindset

As you embark on your college journey, remember that adopting a growth mindset can set you on a path to not only academic success but also personal growth and fulfillment. Embrace challenges, put in effort, learn from setbacks, seek feedback, and cultivate a genuine love of learning. By embracing the principles of a growth mindset, you'll not only excel in your studies but also thrive in the ever-evolving landscape of college life. This mindset will guide you toward the goal of exploring your interests, finding a job, and building a passion-filled career. In the following sections, we'll explore how this mindset can be applied to your journey of discovering your true potential and building a fulfilling career.

## Recruiting Help

In your journey towards success, you don't have to go it alone. John Stepper's concept of "Working Out Loud" (WOL) offers a powerful framework for connecting with others, building relationships, and achieving your goals collaboratively. Here's how you can harness the principles of Working Out Loud to recruit the help and support you need to excel in college and beyond:

### WORKING OUT LOUD: THE MAKING OF A MOVEMENT

The concepts from this section come from John Stepper. John Stepper's Ted Talk is an inspiring and informative look at how sharing your work can help you achieve your goals, build relationships and make an impact.

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## The Essence of Working Out Loud

Working Out Loud is all about making your work visible and connecting with a network of like-minded individuals who can help you along your journey. It's a practice that encourages you to share your goals, challenges, and progress openly, fostering a collaborative and supportive community.

## Applying Working Out Loud to College Life

Working Out Loud can be a game-changer. Here's how you can apply its principles to your college experience:

1. **Share Your Goals and Progress:** Whether it's academic achievements, personal projects, or career aspirations, don't keep your goals to yourself. Share them with peers, professors, and mentors. By making your intentions clear, you open the door for valuable guidance and support.
2. **Seek Feedback and Advice:** Working Out Loud encourages you to ask for feedback and advice openly. Don't hesitate to approach professors or more experienced students for insights on your coursework, projects, or career choices. Their expertise can be invaluable in helping you succeed.
3. **Collaborate and Build Relationships:** Connect with your peers who share your interests. Collaborate on projects, study groups, or extracurricular activities. Building relationships within your college community not only enriches your college experience but also opens doors to future opportunities.
4. **Pay It Forward:** As you receive help and support, remember to pay it forward. Offer your assistance to others when they need it. Working Out Loud creates a cycle of generosity and collaboration, fostering a culture of mutual aid.

## Beyond College

The principles of Working Out Loud extend well beyond college. They can serve as a lifelong approach to building meaningful connections, advancing your career, and achieving your dreams. By embracing Working Out Loud, you not only recruit help during your college years but also cultivate a network of support that can guide you towards a passion-filled career.



In the following sections, we'll delve deeper into the concept of Working Out Loud, exploring how it can empower you to exert agency and connect with others to reach your goals and aspirations.

## Exerting Agency

In your journey towards success, you don't have to go it alone. You can shape your path, navigate challenges, and find purpose in unexpected places. Drawing from the insights of "Mindset" by Carol Dweck, "Grit" by Angela Duckworth, and "Work Out Loud" by John Stepper, here's how you can harness the concept of agency to navigate college life and beyond:

### Understanding Agency

Agency is the driving force behind personal growth and achievement. It's the belief in your capacity to influence the outcomes of your life through your actions and decisions. By acknowledging your agency, you can actively shape your college experience and future career.

#### THE SUJEETH FOUNDATION SPOTLIGHT

The Sujeeth Foundation Spotlight highlights the stories of individuals to inspire and educate.

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### Embracing Agency in College

1. **Set Clear Goals:** Define your academic and personal goals, as outlined in "Mindset" by Carol Dweck. Whether it's excelling in your major, engaging in extracurricular activities, or building a strong network, clarity about your objectives is the first step toward achieving them.
2. **Develop a Growth Mindset:** Embrace the principles of a growth mindset, as emphasized in "Mindset" by Carol Dweck. Understand that challenges and setbacks are opportunities for growth. Effort and resilience are the keys to mastering new skills and overcoming obstacles.
3. **Cultivate Grit:** "Grit" by Angela Duckworth highlights the power of passion and perseverance. Apply the concept of grit to your college journey. When faced with challenges, stay committed to your long-term goals and keep pushing forward.
4. **Take Initiative:** As advocated in "Work Out Loud" by John Stepper, don't wait for opportunities to come to you. Seek out internships, research projects, and leadership roles that align with your interests and goals. Be proactive in your pursuit of experiences that will enrich your college journey.
5. **Build a Support Network:** Surround yourself with mentors, professors, and peers who inspire and support your aspirations. Seek guidance and feedback from those who have walked a similar path.
6. **Adapt and Learn:** Embrace challenges and setbacks as opportunities for growth, a concept reinforced by "Grit" and "Mindset." Learn from your experiences, adjust your strategies when necessary, and persist in the face of adversity.
7. **Leverage Resources:** Utilize the resources available to you, such as career services, academic advisors, and networking events. These resources can provide valuable insights and opportunities.

### Exerting Agency Beyond College

Your journey doesn't end with college; it's a steppingstone to a fulfilling career and life. Here's how you can continue to exert agency as you transition into the professional world:

1. **Craft a Career Path:** Define your career goals and aspirations. Take deliberate steps to build the skills and experiences necessary to achieve them.
2. **Network Strategically:** Build and maintain a professional network that can support your career growth. Seek out mentors and peers who can provide guidance and opportunities.
3. **Continual Learning:** Embrace a mindset of lifelong learning. Stay curious, adapt to changes in your field, and seek out opportunities for professional development.
4. **Embrace Challenges:** Approach challenges in your career with the same resilience you've shown in college. See them as opportunities to learn, grow, and excel.
5. **Give Back:** As you achieve success in your career, consider how you can give back to your community and support the growth of others.

In conclusion, agency is the driving force behind personal and professional success. By recognizing your capacity to make choices and take action, you can shape your college experience and build a fulfilling career. As you embark on this exciting journey, remember that agency empowers you to not only find your passion but also create a path to a passion-filled career. It's your story to write, and your choices and actions will shape the chapters ahead.

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