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Bachelors or Burgers: The mythically rickety bridge of higher education

Neal McCluskey’s “Viewpoints: Is college worth it? That depends” challenges the idea that college is always a good investment and that college graduates are usually better off than those that never attend college. McCluskey articulates that those that have both readied themselves for the rigors of college classes and are choosing a major that is in need of graduates, should go to college. Speculating about lifetime earnings McCluskey quotes a statistic claiming that college graduates make 1 million dollars more than persons with only a high school diploma; however McCluskey insists that people who would rather choose a saturated field or do not want to do college level work should think twice about going to college. Contrasting the impact of government subsidies, the rising cost of school, and the dropping value of a diploma, McCluskey highlights many of the downsides of attending college without the determination and skill set required to graduate and be successful. In addition, McCluskey stresses research that emphasizes underemployment and the number of degree holders in jobs that don’t require it. Finally, McCluskey illustrates the financial burden on college dropouts and the response of many small loan holders to default given the difficulty of paying their debts without the boon of a higher wage from completing their degree.

Neal McCluskey makes a fairly frightening argument to those on the fence about going to college, however, he fails to give his reader any alternatives except a brief word about investing which to most is a topic that requires a degree just to understand. In fact there are many alternatives for students that don’t want the full college experience and majoring in a “softer field” is far from a death wish. Trent Hamm, a writer for the simple dollar, contends that trade school is a fitting choice for people that are not ready or do not have the luxury of going to a four year college. Trade school and other vocational trainings give underprivileged people the opportunity to receive a higher education and job training without the massive debt of a traditional university (Hamm). Initially McCluskey observes the wage gap between college graduates and graduates with only a high school diploma. Unfortunately, McCluskey struggles to grasp that a college degree is worth more than a high school diploma in every field, as it shows employers that a person can work hard and accomplish difficult tasks for a prolonged period without giving up. A study done by the Pew research center found that college graduates overall made more money than people with only a high school diploma no matter the field they studied. Showing that while all college graduates do not live the fast lives of the rich and famous, they do enjoy a higher wages than those without a degree.

Another point McCluskey touches on is the difference between in demand degrees like engineering and “softer majors” including English. Although, on the contrary, Robert Matz, who holds a Phd in English, wrote the article “What can I do with an English major?” Where he outlines the rather diverse and well populated fields of the English major and while most graduates of the English program go on to become teachers, only 1 percent of graduates end up in food service. In addition, with a little digging using the tools provided by Matz, a reader can find that most of those degree holding food service personnel are in fact chefs. They are possibly following a passion rather than being shoehorned into an undesirable career due to their choice of major.

Finally, McCluskey condemns the idea of federal funding and subsidies on education blaming it for the exorbitant cost of a higher education and the degrading value of a degree. On the other hand, without government support many underprivileged students would be unable to attend a university, leaving a large group of high school graduates who may be prepared for college level work and want to go into an in demand major without any way of receiving such an education and thus being shoehorned into undesirable careers with no way out. Neal McCluskey’s article masquerades as a warning to undecided possible students to be weary of the idea of college but unfortunately fails to develop any helpful alternatives for its readers to consider; ultimately leaving them stuck between a career of minimum wage earnings or the gamble of college.