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Jobs

Three Pie Charts That Prove You Shouldn't Slack Off in College

By [Peter Coy](#) September 02, 2014

Students who did as little as possible during college continued to drift after graduation, according to a new book about postcollegiate outcomes for the ill-fated class of 2009.

Aspiring Adults Adrift: Tentative Transitions of College Graduates, by sociologists Richard Arum of New York University and Josipa Roksa of the University of Virginia, is the follow-up to their book *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*, published in 2010. For *Academically Adrift*, Arum and Roksa surveyed 1,600 students over the course of their college years. The new book checks in with the almost 1,000 students they were able to find two years later, in 2011.

The authors' earlier book found that many college students took easy courses, regarded themselves as privileged customers, socialized heavily, and came away with little to show for their years on campus. "I was fairly academically engaged in that I tried very hard not to fail most of my classes [laughter]," one student, Eric, a biological/life sciences major at a "more selective" institution, was quoted as saying.

American college graduates finished below the average of their peers in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's most recent Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies. After four years of college, the authors found, the average student rose just 18 percentile points on the Collegiate Learning Assessment—in other words, he or she knew more than 68 percent of the incoming freshmen did, instead of just half of them.

The first pie chart shows that college students spent almost three-quarters of their time sleeping or socializing.

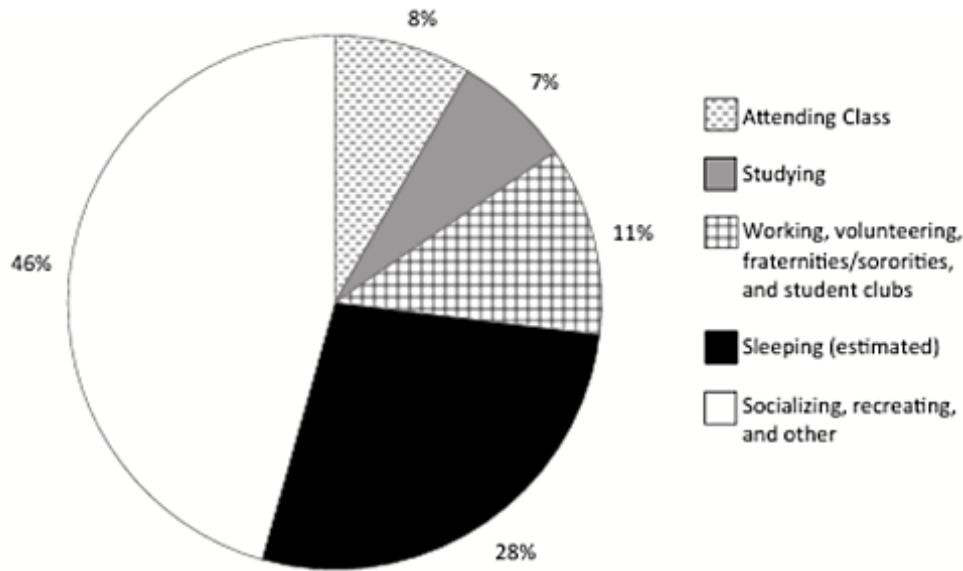


Figure 2.1 Time use by college seniors. Percentages are based on a full seven-day week totaling 168 hours.

Richard

Arum, Josipa Roksa, Camille Z. Charles

Emerging into one of the worst job markets of the postwar period hit them like a bucket of ice water. “The students in our study ... graduated into a particularly difficult and unforgiving economic climate, where often they had little more than their own optimism and a diploma to sustain them in a quest to realize their expectations,” the authors write.

Two years after college, only a little over a quarter of the students had landed jobs paying better than \$40,000 a year, as this chart shows.

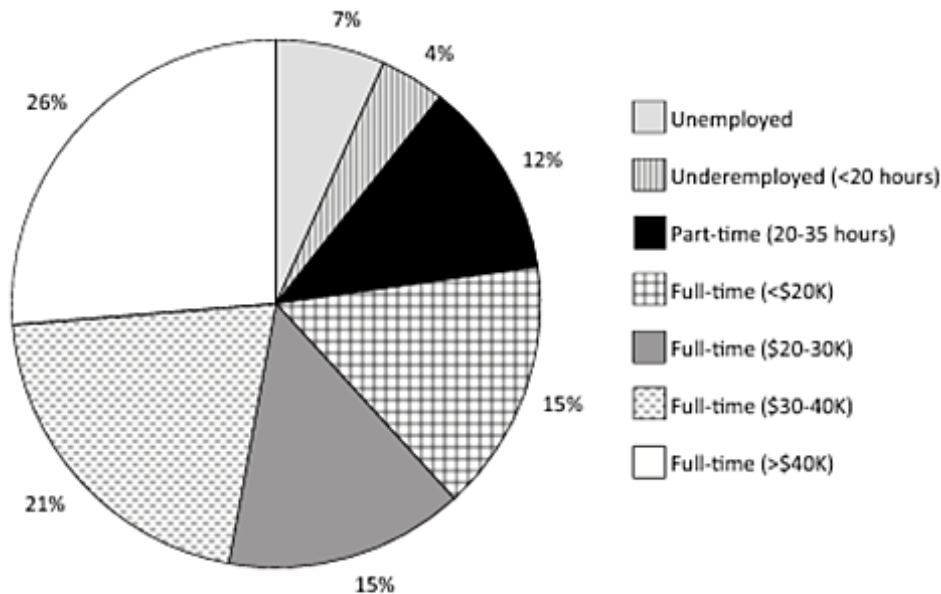


Figure 3.2 Employment outcomes and incomes of college graduates two years after on-time graduation

Richard

Arum, Josipa Roksa

“Considered as a whole, 53 percent of the college graduates who were not re-enrolled full-time in school were unemployed, employed part-time, or employed in full-time jobs that paid less than \$30,000 annually,” they

write.

That can be depressing. One woman, Leann, a business major at a selective college who was working as a cashier two years after graduation, said she was working hard to advance. “I’m depressed [laughter],” she told the authors.

Reflecting the class of ’09’s failure to launch, a quarter were living with their parents.

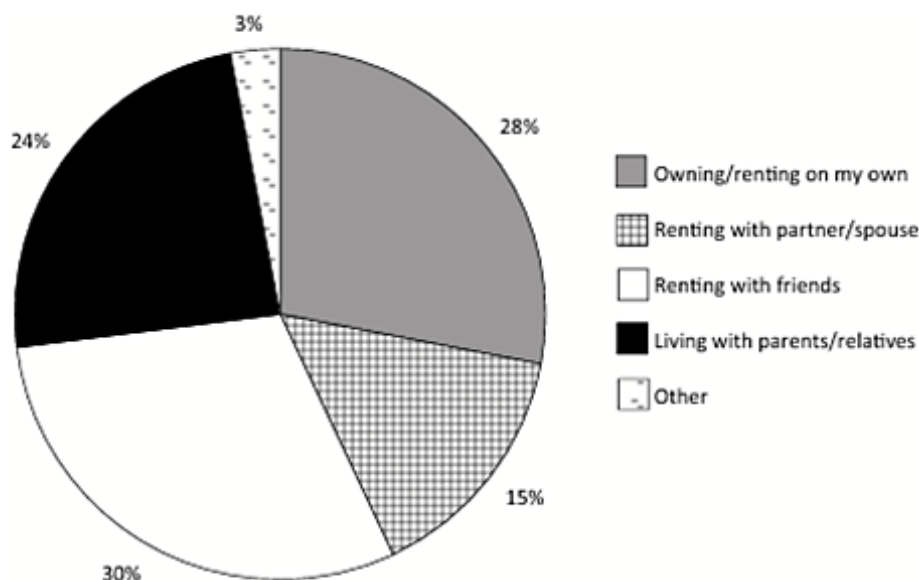


Figure 4.1 Living arrangements of college graduates two years after on-time graduation.

Richard

Arum, Josipa Roksa

That’s not to say college is a waste of time and money. It’s better than no college at all. Graduates with higher Collegiate Learning Assessment scores “fared better in the labor market than their lower-performing peers,” the authors write. “Those who leave college with greater demonstrated performance on an assessment of critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing fare better than those who fail to do so.”

But, they write, things could be a lot better, and the colleges and universities themselves bear some of the responsibility to improve. “Many emerging adults are adrift, but so too are the societal institutions designed to support and guide their development, including the colleges and universities they attend,” they write.

In fairness to the students and their *almae matres*, the authors took their snapshot at a particularly bad time for new grads. The unemployment rate for all 20- to 24-year-olds, regardless of education, was 15.1 percent in June 2009 and was still high, at 14.3 percent, around the time the survey was conducted two years later. It has since fallen to 11.3 percent. Unemployment for college graduates of all ages fell from 4.8 percent in June 2009 to 4.3 percent in June 2011, and this June had dropped to 3.3 percent.

[This article](#) in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* serves up other points from the book.



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