



AP[®] English Language and Composition 2014 Free-Response Questions

© 2014 The College Board. College Board, Advanced Placement Program, AP, AP Central, and the acorn logo are registered trademarks of the College Board.

Visit the College Board on the Web: www.collegeboard.org.

AP Central is the official online home for the AP Program: apcentral.collegeboard.org.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

SECTION II

Total time—2 hours

Question 1

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts for one-third of the total essay section score.)

Many recent college graduates have faced record levels of unemployment. This situation has led people to question what they value about higher education. Some high school students and their parents are wondering if a college education is worth the cost. Others, however, believe that a college education prepares students for more than just a job or career.

Carefully read the following six sources, including the introductory information for each source. Then synthesize information from at least three of the sources and incorporate it into a coherent, well-developed essay that evaluates whether college is worth its cost.

Your argument should be the focus of your essay. Use the sources to develop your argument and explain the reasoning for it. Avoid merely summarizing the sources. Indicate clearly which sources you are drawing from, whether through direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary. You may cite the sources as Source A, Source B, etc., or by using the descriptions in parentheses.

Source A (Crawford)

Source B (Roth)

Source C (chart)

Source D (Leonhardt)

Source E (Wieder)

Source F (Pew)

Source A

Crawford, Matthew B. "The Case for Working with Your Hands." *New York Times Magazine*. New York Times, 24 May 2009. Web. 19 Dec. 2011.

The following is excerpted from an article in the Sunday magazine section of a national newspaper.

High-school shop-class programs were widely dismantled in the 1990s as educators prepared students to become "knowledge workers." The imperative of the last 20 years to round up every warm body and send it to college, then to the cubicle, was tied to a vision of the future in which we somehow take leave of material reality and glide about in a pure information economy. This has not come to pass. To begin with, such work often feels more enervating than gliding. More fundamentally, now as ever, somebody has to actually do things: fix our cars, unclog our toilets, build our houses.

When we praise people who do work that is straightforwardly useful, the praise often betrays an assumption that they had no other options. We idealize them as the salt of the earth and emphasize the sacrifice for others their work may entail. Such sacrifice does indeed occur—the hazards faced by a lineman restoring power during a storm come to mind. But what if such work answers as well to a basic human need of the one who does it? I take this to be the suggestion of Marge Piercy's poem "To Be of Use," which concludes with the lines "the pitcher longs for water to carry/and a person for work that is real." Beneath our gratitude for the lineman may rest envy.

This seems to be a moment when the useful arts have an especially compelling economic rationale. A car mechanics' trade association reports that repair shops have seen their business jump significantly in the current recession: people aren't buying new cars; they are fixing the ones they have. The current downturn is likely to pass eventually. But there are also systemic changes in the economy, arising from information technology, that have the surprising effect of making the manual trades—plumbing, electrical work, car repair—more attractive as careers. The Princeton economist Alan Blinder argues that the crucial distinction in the emerging labor market is not between those with more or less education, but between those whose services can be delivered over a wire and those who must do their work in person or on site. The latter will find their livelihoods more secure against outsourcing to distant countries. As Blinder puts it, "You can't hammer a nail over the Internet." Nor can the Indians fix your car. Because they are in India.

If the goal is to earn a living, then, maybe it isn't really true that 18-year-olds need to be imparted with a sense of panic about getting into college (though they certainly need to learn). Some people are hustled off to college, then to the cubicle, against their own inclinations and natural bents, when they would rather be learning to build things or fix things. One shop teacher suggested to me that "in schools, we create artificial learning environments for our children that they know to be contrived and undeserving of their full attention and engagement. Without the opportunity to learn through the hands, the world remains abstract and distant, and the passions for learning will not be engaged."

"The Case for Working with Your Hands" by Matthew B. Crawford from *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work*, copyright © 2009 by Matthew B. Crawford. Used by permission.

Source B

Roth, Michael. "What's a Liberal Arts Education Good For?" *Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 1 Dec. 2008. Web. 20 Dec. 2011.

The following is excerpted from an online article by the president of a liberal arts university.

Rather than pursuing business, technical or vocational training, some students (and their families) opt for a well-rounded learning experience. Liberal learning introduces them to books and the music, the science and the philosophy that form disciplined yet creative habits of mind that are not *reducible* to the material circumstances of one's life (though they may depend on those circumstances). There is a promise of freedom in the liberal arts education offered by America's most distinctive, selective, and demanding institutions; and it is no surprise that their graduates can be found disproportionately in leadership positions in politics, culture and the economy. . . .

What does liberal learning have to do with the harsh realities that our graduates are going to face after college? The development of the capacities for critical inquiry associated with liberal learning can be enormously practical because they become resources on which to draw for continual learning, for making decisions in one's life, and for making a difference in the world. Given the pace of technological and social change, it no longer makes sense to devote four years of higher education entirely to specific skills. Being ready on DAY ONE, may have sounded nice on the campaign trail, but being able to draw on one's education over a lifetime is much more practical (and precious). Post secondary education should help students to discover what they love to do, to get better at it, and to develop the ability to continue learning so that they become agents of change—not victims of it.

A successful liberal arts education develops the capacity for innovation and for judgment. Those who can image how best to reconfigure existing resources and project future results will be the shapers of our economy and culture. We seldom get to have all the information we would like, but still we must act. The habits of mind developed in a liberal arts context often result in combinations of focus and flexibility that make for intelligent, and sometimes courageous risk taking for critical assessment of those risks. . . .

America's great universities and colleges must continue to offer a rigorous and innovative liberal arts education. A liberal education remains a resource years after graduation because it helps us to address problems and potential in our lives with passion, commitment and a sense of possibility. A liberal education teaches freedom by example, through the experience of free research, thinking and expression; and ideally, it inspires us to carry this example, this experience of meaningful freedom, from campus to community.

The American model of liberal arts education emphasizes freedom and experimentation as tools for students to develop meaningful ways of working after graduation. Many liberal arts students become innovators and productive risk takers, translating liberal arts ideals into effective, productive work in the world. That is what a liberal education is good for.

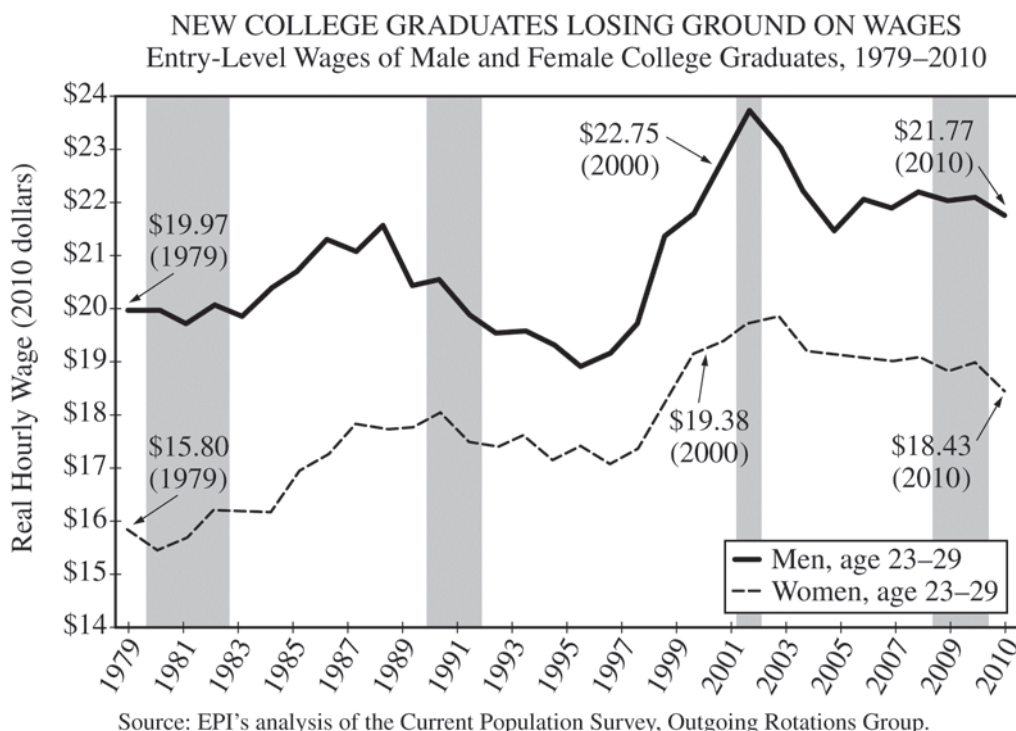
President Michael S. Roth
Wesleyan University
Huffington Post

Source C

Shierholz, Heidi. "New college grads losing ground on wages." *Economic Policy Institute*. Economic Policy Institute, 31 Aug. 2011. Web. 20 Dec. 2011.

The following is from an online article published by a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank that aims to broaden discussions about economic policy to include the needs of low- and middle-income workers.

As college students head back to the classroom this semester, a harsh reality confronts them—the rewards for the time, energy, and money that young people put into college are less than they were a decade ago. Since 2000, America's young college graduates have seen wages, adjusted for inflation, deteriorate. This lack of wage growth may be particularly surprising to those used to reading about the vast unfilled need for college graduates, which if true would lead to *increases* in their earnings. The **chart below** tracks the average inflation-adjusted hourly wage for young college graduates with no advanced degree from 1979 to 2010.



After gains in the 1980s and particularly in the 1990s, hourly wages for young college-educated men in 2000 were \$22.75, but that dropped by almost a full dollar to \$21.77 by 2010. For young college-educated women, hourly wages fell from \$19.38 to \$18.43 over the same period. Now, with unemployment expected to remain above 8% well into 2014, it will likely be many years before young college graduates—or any workers—see substantial wage growth.

Source: EPI's analysis of the Current Population Survey, Outgoing Relations Group. Taken from "New college grads losing ground on wages" by Heidi Shierholz, copyright © 2011 by Economic Policy Institute. Used by permission.

Source D

Leonhardt, David. "Even for Cashiers, College Pays Off."
New York Times. New York Times, 25 June 2011.
Web. 20 Dec. 2011.

The following is excerpted from an online article in a national newspaper.

The evidence is overwhelming that college is a better investment for most graduates than in the past. A new study even shows that a bachelor's degree pays off for jobs that don't require one: secretaries, plumbers and cashiers. And, beyond money, education seems to make people happier and healthier.

"Sending more young Americans to college is not a panacea," says David Autor, an M.I.T. economist who studies the labor market. "Not sending them to college would be a disaster."

The most unfortunate part of the case against college is that it encourages children, parents and schools to aim low. For those families on the fence—often deciding whether a student will be the first to attend—the skepticism becomes one more reason to stop at high school. Only about 33 percent of young adults get a four-year degree today, while another 10 percent receive a two-year degree.

So it's important to dissect the anti-college argument, piece by piece. It obviously starts with money. Tuition numbers can be eye-popping, and student debt has increased significantly. But there are two main reasons college costs aren't usually a problem for those who graduate.

First, many colleges are not very expensive, once financial aid is taken into account. Average net tuition and fees at public four-year colleges this past year were only about \$2,000 (though Congress may soon cut federal financial aid).

Second, the returns from a degree have soared. Three decades ago, full-time workers with a bachelor's degree made 40 percent more than those with only a high-school diploma. Last year, the gap reached 83 percent. College graduates, though hardly immune from the downturn, are also far less likely to be unemployed than non-graduates.

Skeptics like to point out that the income gap isn't rising as fast as it once was, especially for college graduates who don't get an advanced degree. But the gap remains enormous—and bigger than ever. Skipping college because the pace of gains has slowed is akin to skipping your heart medications because the pace of medical improvement isn't what it used to be.

The Hamilton Project, a research group in Washington, has just finished a comparison of college with other investments. It found that college tuition in recent decades has delivered an inflation-adjusted annual return of more than 15 percent. For stocks, the historical return is 7 percent. For real estate, it's less than 1 percent.

Another study being released this weekend—by Anthony Carnevale and Stephen J. Rose of Georgetown—breaks down the college premium by occupations and shows that college has big benefits even in many fields where a degree is not crucial.

Construction workers, police officers, plumbers, retail salespeople and secretaries, among others, make significantly more with a degree than without one. Why? Education helps people do higher-skilled work, get jobs with better-paying companies or open their own businesses.

From The New York Times, 6/25/2011 © 2011 The New York Times. All rights reserved. Used by permission and protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States. The printing, copying, redistribution, or retransmission of this Content without express written permission is prohibited.

2014 AP[®] ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Source E

Wieder, Ben. "Thiel Fellowship Pays 24 Talented Students \$100,000 Not to Attend College." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. The Chronicle of Higher Education, 25 May 2011. Web. 20 Dec. 2011.

The following is excerpted from an online article in a publication for college and university faculty members and administrators.

The winners were announced today for a new fellowship that has sparked heated debate in academic circles for questioning the value of higher education and suggesting that some entrepreneurial students may be better off leaving college.

Peter Thiel, a co-founder of PayPal, will pay each of the 24 winners of his Thiel Fellowship \$100,000 not to attend college for two years and to develop business ideas instead.

The fellows, all 20 years old or younger, will leave institutions including Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Stanford University, to work with a network of more than 100 Silicon Valley mentors and further develop their ideas in areas such as biotechnology, education, and energy. . . .

At least one student initially chosen as a Thiel fellow, however, ended up turning down the deal, opting to continue her traditional education by accepting admission at MIT.

Mr. Thiel said he had expected some applicants would decide to stay on their academic track.

He admits he probably wouldn't have applied for a program like the Thiel Fellowship when he was a student in the 1980s either.

Mr. Thiel studied philosophy at Stanford in the 1980s and later completed law school there, but he now wishes he had given more thought to the educational decisions he made and their implications.

"Instead, it was just this default activity," he said.

Questioning the Value of College

The fellowship seeks to help winners develop their ideas more quickly than they would at a traditional university. Its broader aim goes beyond helping the 24 winners, by raising big questions about the state of higher education.

Mr. Thiel ignited controversy when he told TechCrunch in April that he sees higher education as the next bubble, comparable to previously overvalued markets in technology and housing.

Both cost and demand for a college education have grown significantly in the years since Mr. Thiel was a student. He sees that rise as irrational.

Students today are taking on more debt, and recently tightened bankruptcy laws make it more difficult to shake that debt, he argues, and those factors make higher education a risky investment. "If you get this wrong, it's actually a mistake that's hard to undo for the rest of your life," he said.

Critics contend that even so, Thiel's advice to leave school and develop a business is applicable only to a tiny fraction of students and that Thiel's own success, aided by business relationships forged during his days at Stanford, argues against leaving school.

But Thiel is convinced that the social pressure for students to pursue "lower-risk trajectories" in their career choices will lead to less innovation in the future.

Copyright 2011 The Chronicle of Higher Education. Reprinted with permission.

Source F

Pew Social & Demographic Trends. "Executive Summary." *Is College Worth It?* Pew Research Center, 15 May 2011. Web. 20 Dec. 2011.

The following is excerpted from a 2011 report on a national survey of 2,142 adults ages 18 and older.

Here is a summary of key findings:

Survey of the General Public

Cost and Value. A majority of Americans (57%) say the higher education system in the United States fails to provide students with good value for the money they and their families spend. An even larger majority—75%—says college is too expensive for most Americans to afford. At the same time, however, an overwhelming majority of college graduates—86%—say that college has been a good investment for them personally.

Monetary Payoff. Adults who graduated from a four-year college believe that, on average, they are earning \$20,000 more a year as a result of having gotten that degree. Adults who did not attend college believe that, on average, they are earning \$20,000 a year less as a result. These matched estimates by the public are very close to the median gap in annual earnings between a high school and college graduate as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2010: \$19,550. A more detailed Pew Research Center analysis . . . shows that this gap varies by type of degree and field of study.

Student Loans. A record share of students are leaving college with a substantial debt burden, and among those who do, about half (48%) say that paying off that debt made it harder to pay other bills; a quarter say it has made it harder to buy a home (25%); and about a quarter say it has had an impact on their career choices (24%).

Why Not College? Nearly every parent surveyed (94%) says they expect their child to attend college, but even as college enrollments have reached record levels, most young adults in this country still do not attend a four-year college. The main barrier is financial. Among adults ages 18 to 34 who are not in school and do not have a bachelor's degree, two-thirds say a major reason for not continuing their education is the need to support a family. Also, 57% say they would prefer to work and make money; and 48% say they can't afford to go to college.

Split Views of College Mission. Just under half of the public (47%) says the main purpose of a college education is to teach work-related skills and knowledge, while 39% say it is to help a student grow personally and intellectually; the remainder volunteer that both missions are equally important. College graduates place more emphasis on intellectual growth; those who are not college graduates place more emphasis on career preparation.

For Most College Graduates, Missions Accomplished. Among survey respondents who graduated from a four-year college, 74% say their college education was very useful in helping them grow intellectually; 69% say it was very useful in helping them grow and mature as a person; and 55% say it was very useful in helping them prepare for a job or career.

Above All, Character. While Americans value college, they value character even more. Asked what it takes for a young person to succeed in the world, 61% say a good work ethic is extremely important and 57% say the same about knowing how to get along with people. Just 42% say the same about a college education.

AP[®] ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

2014 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 1

The essay score should reflect the essay's quality as a whole. Remember that students had only 15 minutes to read the sources and 40 minutes to write; the essay, therefore, is not a finished product and should not be judged by standards appropriate for an out-of-class assignment. Evaluate it as a draft, making certain to reward students for what they do well.

All essays, even those scored 8 or 9, may contain occasional lapses in analysis, prose style, or mechanics. Such features should enter into a holistic evaluation of an essay's overall quality. In no case should an essay with many distracting errors in grammar and mechanics score higher than a 2.

9 – Essays earning a score of 9 meet the criteria for the score of 8 and, in addition, are especially sophisticated in their argument, thorough in development, or impressive in their control of language.

8 – Effective

Essays earning a score of 8 **effectively** evaluate whether college is worth its cost. They develop their argument by effectively synthesizing* at least three of the sources. The evidence and explanations used are appropriate and convincing, and the link between the sources and the writer's argument is strong. The prose demonstrates a consistent ability to control a wide range of the elements of effective writing but is not necessarily flawless.

7 – Essays earning a score of 7 meet the criteria for the score of 6 but provide more complete explanation, more thorough development, or a more mature prose style

6 – Adequate

Essays earning a score of 6 **adequately** evaluate whether college is worth its cost. They develop their argument by adequately synthesizing at least three of the sources. The evidence and explanations used are appropriate and sufficient, and the link between the sources and the writer's argument is apparent. The language may contain lapses in diction or syntax, but generally the prose is clear.

5 – Essays earning a score of 5 evaluate whether college is worth its cost. They develop their argument by synthesizing at least three sources, but how they use and explain sources is somewhat uneven, inconsistent, or limited. The writer's argument is generally clear, and the sources generally develop the writer's position, but the link between the sources and the writer's argument may be strained. The writing may contain lapses in diction or syntax, but it usually conveys the writer's ideas.

4 – Inadequate

Essays earning a score of 4 **inadequately** evaluate whether college is worth its cost. They develop their argument by synthesizing at least two sources, but the evidence or explanations used may be inappropriate, insufficient, or unconvincing. The sources may dominate the writer's attempts at development; the link between the sources and the writer's argument may be weak; or the writer may misunderstand, misrepresent, or oversimplify the sources. The prose generally conveys the writer's ideas but may be inconsistent in controlling the elements of effective writing.

AP[®] ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

2014 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 1 (continued)

3 – Essays earning a score of 3 meet the criteria for the score of 4 but demonstrate less success in evaluating whether college is worth its cost. They are less perceptive in demonstrating understanding of the sources, or their explanation or examples may be particularly limited or simplistic. The essays may show less maturity in control of writing.

2 – Little Success

Essays earning a score of 2 demonstrate **little success** in evaluating whether college is worth its cost. They may merely allude to knowledge gained from reading the sources rather than citing the sources themselves. The link between the sources and the writer’s argument is weak or absent. These essays may misread the sources, fail to develop a position, or substitute a simpler task by merely summarizing or categorizing the sources or by merely responding to the prompt tangentially with unrelated, inaccurate, or inappropriate explanation. The prose of essays that score 2 often demonstrates consistent weaknesses in writing, such as grammatical problems, a lack of development or organization, or a lack of control.

1 – Essays earning a score of 1 meet the criteria for the score of 2 but are undeveloped, especially simplistic in their explanation, weak in their control of writing, or they do not use or even allude to one source.

0 – Indicates an off-topic response, one that merely repeats the prompt, an entirely crossed-out response, a drawing, or a response in a language other than English.

— Indicates an entirely blank response.

* For the purposes of scoring, synthesis means using sources to develop a position and citing them accurately.

Sample 1A

It seems that the ultimate function of American high schools has become to funnel as many young minds as possible into institutions of higher learning. The mindset behind this, though hotly debated, is that a college education increases the quality of life of the student and society as a whole. While critics contest the idea that college benefits an individual economically, other areas of life are undeniably improved by the importance of college education; freedom of thought and innovation provided by a college education cannot be valued under possible economic discrepancies.

The largest motivator behind going or not going to college seems to be money. It is commonly accepted that a college education results in better financial situations later in life. It is certainly true that college grads earn, on average, 20,000 dollars more per year than those with only a high school diploma. (source F) It is also true that college grads are less likely to be unemployed. (D) These statistics fail to impress critics. They argue that those employed in sectors that do not require a college degree are less expendable. The people that fix cars will always be needed, even during economic downturns. (A) The debate over the actual value of a college education is often boiled down to dollars and cents. When, in reality, the gains made through an education encompass so much more.

Putting aside the issue of money may seem counterintuitive when considering the worth of an education, but it is necessary; there is more to life. A large part of college is personal growth. (B) Coincidentally, personal growth also plays a large role in perceived quality of life. Taking this into consideration makes college more than a machine designed to increase an individual's level of monetary success. While some may claim that those who work in fulfilling jobs that do not require degrees feel more content, (A) it is impossible to ignore the way in which colleges "help students discover what they love to do." (B) Higher education ultimately leads to a better emotional quality of life and this cannot be discounted when weighing the value of furthering one's education.

The benefits of post-secondary education reach farther than individual lives. When judging the importance of going to college, one must think of the wider spectrum; of the ways in which education can impact society as a whole. College harbors critical thought. (B) Those that attend an institution of higher learning learn how to accurately judge situations and act accordingly. They become agents of change who are capable of producing meaningful advances in the world. (B) There are, of course, exceptions. The great minds of Silicon Valley who made such major advances in the world of technology without a college degree seem to prove the uselessness of a piece of paper with an official stamp. But in reality, this is not the case. This isn't the way it works out for most people. (E) Do you know why? Because a college degree is more than a scroll; it is proof that an individual has learned to think and act critically, and this is an invaluable skill.

The economic benefits of a college education may be questionable, but the ways in which individuals are prepared to become contributing and innovative members of society are too important to ignore. College is an essential step towards improving the societal standard of living.

Sample 1B

Today more than ever before, the importance of attending a university after high school to receive a higher education is emphasized. However, high school students and their parents are wondering if a college education is even worth the cost of attending. Though today it may seem like college is a necessity, more and more students are finding that the cost of college cannot compare to the opportunities that could be found elsewhere.

In 2011, Peter Thiel, one of the co-founders of PayPal, offered to pay each of the 24 winners of a new fellowship \$100,000 to not go to college in favor of developing business ideas instead (Wieder). Thiel believes that the traditional college environment does not invoke ideas in students that could be thought of elsewhere, tackling the world. These ideas are the ones that could be used successfully to lead new entrepreneurial excursions that would impact society and develop new companies and jobs for the future. The traditional college environment just does not provide opportunities to develop these ideas quickly. To add to this, college costs are rising and "students today are taking on more debt, and recently tightened bankruptcy laws make it more difficult to shake that debt" (Wieder). Factors like this complicate the decision to attend college even further. According to a ZOLL report on a national survey of 2,142 adults ages 18 and older, 57% of Americans agree that colleges fail to give students good value for the money they have spent to attend and 75% of Americans say college is too expensive to afford (Pew). When over half of the adult American population thinks college and a higher education is expensive and not worth the investment, then there is a problem. Supporting this claim is data from a think tank that addressed the issue of new entry-level wages for men and women leaving college. Surprisingly, though there is an emphasis on going to college in our society, college graduates are earning less than they did ten years ago (chart). Even now, "with unemployment expected to remain above 8% well into 2014, it will likely be many years before young college graduates - or any workers - see substantial wage growth (Shierholz).

With all this evidence supporting the lack of need for college learning, it is important to refer back to our society's laurel and focus on developing our young adults' characters. "For a young person to succeed in the world, 61% say a good work ethic is extremely important and 57% say the same about knowing how to get along with people" (Pew). These traits and others can be developed outside of a higher education and better prepare young adults for life in the real world. The cost of college cannot be compared to the opportunities that could be found elsewhere.

Sample 1C

Do you want to grow up to be like Bill Gates, Oprah Winfrey, or Barack Obama? Do you want to be successful and have millions of dollars? I'm not positive that you will ever be as successful as these inspiring people, but one way to become successful is to go to college. Every time I mention the word "college," many of my friends and family start to panic. The cost of college may be very expensive, but I strongly believe a college education is worth the cost! Entering college could be very beneficial to you in the future. Once you break college, you will have a successful job, graduate, and career, and you will not only make your parents proud but you will also make yourself proud as well.

Primarily, a college education is worth the cost because you will never find yourself working in a fast food restaurant such as McDonald's or Burger King. However, many people don't have a chance to work at fast food restaurants because they can't afford college, as their parents can't afford it. There are a plethora of ways one can pay for college! First and foremost, there's financial aid. "Once financial aid is taken into account, average net tuition and fees at public four-year colleges this past year were only about \$2000." Many people are torturing themselves by becoming retail salespeople, real estate agents, plumbers, etc., because they can't afford college. Sure, they might look happy, but are they really? "Education helps people do higher-skilled work, get jobs with better paying companies, or open their own businesses?" (source) In the end, education leads to happiness and success.

In addition, a college education is worth the cost and many people would agree. A 2011 report on a survey of 2,142 adults ages 18 and older shows why college benefits them. Having a college education will not only improve your knowledge but also your character. Statistics say 61% say a good work ethic is extremely important and 57% say the same about knowing how to get along with people. Just 42% say the same about a college education. (source F) College doesn't always have to be about the cost, because it is a good investment. College benefits one's character by making them more mature and helps them grow intellectually.

Furthermore, a college education is worth the cost because it helps you earn a living. Many students are being pressured about not going to college because they either want to build things or fix things. Although "somebody has to actually do things: fix our cars, unclog our trucks, and build our houses" (source A), that doesn't mean they have to force themselves into doing these jobs. And if they are forced, they are obviously taking the easy road and not challenging themselves for more entry-level jobs. A college education will help students become more "knowledge workers."

To sum up, a college education is really important to have in your life because it illustrates how determined you are to become successful like Bill Gates, Oprah Winfrey, or Barack Obama. I strongly believe a college education is worth the cost because there are scholarships, financial aid, and loans to help you through it. A college education can benefit one's entire life in a blink of an eye.

AP[®] ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

2014 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 1

Overview

Question 1, the synthesis prompt, opened with a brief account of differing ways to assess the value of a college education in the context of rising unemployment among college graduates. Students were then instructed to read six short sources, one containing a visual text charting the average wages of male and female college graduates from 1979 to 2010, and to “use” the sources to develop their own arguments about whether college is worth its cost. Source A was a book excerpt that made a case for preferring hands-on trade labor over the cubicle office work many college students are destined for after graduation; Source B extolled the multifaceted values (economic, civic, personal) of a liberal arts education over more specifically career-focused higher education; Source C charted the downward trend of college graduates’ salaries from 2000 to 2010; Source D argued that a college education is a wise financial investment; Source E gave an account of \$100,000 fellowships offered by one of the founders of PayPal to entice students to be mentored by Silicon Valley innovators instead of attending college; and Source F listed public survey responses to a series of questions on respondents’ beliefs about the values of college education and the qualities that best equip individuals for employment. Students were further asked to cite the sources they used in their arguments, identifying them either by author or by letters assigned to the sources. This question was intended to elicit students’ performance of several skills in combination: critical reading of the six sources, synthesis of information and perspectives drawn from three or more of the sources, construction and articulation of a source-informed argument *evaluating* the worth of college, and accurate citation of sources. This question, more than some of the synthesis questions from years past, invited students to augment the sources by drawing from their own experience and observations of college costs, educational and social opportunities, and financial, as well as other, outcomes. In “using” the sources to “develop” their arguments, students were not constrained to use sources only as support. In addition to providing support, for instance, sources could provoke an argument or offer opposing arguments that students could consider and respond to in refining their own arguments.

Students were told to “avoid merely summarizing the sources,” in the hope that they would *analyze* the individual sources and *put them in conversation with one another* in the process of constructing their own arguments. For instance, many students did this by using Source D’s account of the widening gap between starting wages for workers with and without a college education to critique Source C’s report that salaries for college graduates had declined during the recession; Source D enabled these students to point out that salaries for workers without a college education had declined even more precipitously during the same period. Similarly, many students used sources A, B, and E to develop an account of noneconomic educational values not acknowledged by Sources C and D. Some students successfully employed rhetorical analysis of the sources, for instance, by noting that the author of Source B, who advocated liberal arts education, was himself the president of a liberal arts college and therefore personally and professionally invested in his argument, while the cofounder of PayPal, though he disparaged college as a “default” choice, had himself benefitted in a number of ways from his own college education at Stanford.

The prompt also directed students to make their own arguments the focus of their essays. That is, they were expected to use the sources to develop their own arguments, not to summarize or interpret the arguments in the sources as ends in themselves, nor to agree or disagree with one or more of the sources. Because their own arguments were to be central to their essays, students needed to explain their reasoning as they encountered the sources and constructed their arguments.

AP[®] ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

2014 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 1 (continued)

Sample: 1A

Score: 8

This essay effectively evaluates whether college is worth its cost. It argues that although the “debate over the actual value of a college education is often boiled down to dollars and cents . . . in reality the gains made through an education encompass so much more.” The essay effectively discusses the issue of money through source-informed argumentation using Sources A, D, and F, but then it continues by arguing that “there is more to life,” using Source B for support. This point is fully developed through a discussion about personal growth, which is gained through the college experience and “plays a large role in perceived quality of life.” The essay then extends the argument of benefits from the individual to “society as a whole,” noting that college “harbors critical thought,” and that those with a college education can become “agents of change who are capable of producing meaningful [*sic*] advances in the world.” The essay concludes that, no matter what the economic benefits of a college education, “the ways in which individuals are prepared to become contributing and innovative members of society is [*sic*] too important to ignore.” The evidence and explanations used are appropriate and convincing, and the link between the sources and the argument is strong. For its thorough development and control of language, this essay earned a score of 8.

Sample: 1B

Score: 6

This essay adequately evaluates whether college is worth its cost and argues that “the cost of college cannot be compared to the opportunities that could be found elsewhere.” The link between the argument and Source E is apparent, as the essay contends that the “traditional college environment just does not provide opportunities to develop these ideas quickly.” The essay moves with some facility into Source F, using the sentence “Factors like this complicate the decision to attend college even further” to transition into a discussion of the statistics presented in that source. The essay ends with a slight inconsistency (“With all this evidence supporting the lack of need for college learning, it is important to refer back to our society’s laurels and focus on developing our young adults’ characters”), but overall, the evidence and explanations are appropriate and sufficient, and the prose is clear.

Sample: 1C

Score: 4

This essay is inadequate in evaluating whether college is worth its cost. It begins by stating the position that a college education is worth the cost, but overall, the essay is insufficient and unconvincing. The essay cites the sources but makes an inadequate link between the sources and an argument for its position. For example, the citation of several statistics (which demonstrate that the surveyed Americans value character over a college education) from Source F is followed by two unrelated assertions that college “has a good investment” and that “[c]ollege benefit [*sic*] one’s character.” The essay asserts that a “college education is worth the cost because it will earn a living” but uses Source A unsuccessfully for support. The prose generally conveys the student’s ideas but is inconsistent in its control of the elements of effective writing. For these reasons, the essay earned a score of 4.