

WRITING SUGGESTIONS

1. **Analysis:** What is persuasive about this image? Four million copies of it were printed during World War I to stimulate enlistment—and it worked. For it to have been so effective, what assumptions about his audience and their motivations must Flagg have had? In an essay, analyze the image as an example of persuasion.
2. How do the armed services promote enlistment in the 21st century? Is a static image, such as a poster, enough? Must it be a video? Look for advertisements targeted at young men and women (e.g., “Army Strong”). Select one and in an essay, analyze its persuasive elements and its assumptions about its audience. Include a copy of the visual with your essay.
3. Find two print advertisements that represent contradictory positions on the same issue, for example, legalized gambling, gun control, conflicts between personal freedoms and government regulations. In an essay, analyze how each side uses the techniques of argument and persuasion to advance its position and discredit the opposition.

Debate Casebook: Is College for Everyone and Just How Valuable Is a College Education?

College costs (tuition, room and board, fees, and books) are increasing substantially each year. Low-cost loan programs have been sharply cut back. Students are forced to borrow large amounts of money that they will have difficulty repaying. Those who do finish their degrees often have difficulty finding an appropriate job. These realities have forced many students and parents to weigh the benefits of a two-year or four-year college education. Schools that provide technical job training are flourishing as a more affordable and more realistic alternative.

The selections in this casebook highlight a number of issues. The two essays debate the “value” of a college education. Porter’s essay is objective and scholarly, citing substantial evidence provided by a number of research studies; Lee’s essay is subjective and draws on her experience with her son. Lee argues, for example, that the benefit or value of a college education depends upon the student’s attitude and seriousness. Because of the difference in their approaches, their conclusions can be equally valid.

The data provided in the table “The 30 Occupations with the Largest Employment Growth, 2006–2016” from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

raises other issues. Only six of the thirty “growth” occupations require a four-year college degree. How do we justify sending 70 percent of our high school graduates to college when many will end up underemployed?

The forum conducted by *the Chronicle of Higher Education* and excerpted here offers a series of perspectives on attending college from experts in public policy and education. They respond to a series of provocative questions including “Who Should and Shouldn’t Go to College?,” “How Much Does Increasing College-Going Rates Matter to Our Economy and Society?,” “Economists Have Cited the Economic Benefits That Individual Students Derive From College. Does That Still Apply?” and “At What Point Does the Cost of College Outweigh the Benefits?” Some of their assertions and conclusions will stimulate widespread debate.

Before Reading

Connecting: Was there ever a debate in your family or in your mind about whether it was worthwhile to attend a college or a university? Did you consider other alternatives?

Anticipating: Should people be discouraged from attending a college? Shouldn’t everyone have a chance? Is past performance in high school always a good guide to how someone will do in college? Is it fair that college is most accessible to those who have the most financial resources?

The Value of a College Degree

KATHERINE PORTER

This essay originally appeared in the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education in 2002.

The escalating cost of higher education is causing many to question the value of continuing education beyond high school. Many wonder whether the high cost of tuition, the opportunity cost of choosing college over full-time employment, and the accumulation of thousands of dollars of debt is, in the long run, worth the investment. The risk is especially large for low-income families who have a difficult time making ends meet without the additional burden of college tuition and fees.

The Economic Value of Higher Education

² In order to determine whether higher education is worth the investment, it is useful to examine what is known about the value of higher education and the rates of return on investment to both the individual and to society.

³ There is considerable support for the notion that the rate of return on investment in higher education is high enough to warrant the financial burden associated with pursuing a college degree. Though the earnings differential between college and high school graduates varies over time, college graduates, on average, earn more than high school graduates. According to the Census Bureau, over an adult's working life, high school graduates earn an average of \$1.2 million; associate's degree holders earn about \$1.6 million; and bachelor's degree holders earn about \$2.1 million (Day and Newburger, 2002).

⁴ These sizeable differences in lifetime earnings put the costs of college study in realistic perspective. Most students today—about 80 percent of all students—enroll either in public 4-year colleges or in public 2-year colleges. According to the U.S. Department of Education report, *Think College Early*, a full-time student at a public 4-year college pays an average of \$8,655 for in-state tuition, room and board (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2000). A full-time student in a public 2-year college pays an average of \$1,359 per year in tuition (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2000).

⁵ These statistics support the contention that, though the cost of higher education is significant, given the earnings disparity that exists between those who earn a bachelor's degree and those who do not, the individual rate of return on investment in higher education is sufficiently high to warrant the cost.

Other Benefits of Higher Education

⁶ College graduates also enjoy benefits beyond increased income. A 1998 report published by the Institute for Higher Education Policy reviews the individual benefits that college graduates enjoy, including higher levels of saving, increased personal/professional mobility, improved quality of life for their offspring, better consumer decision making, and more hobbies and leisure activities (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998). According to a report published by the Carnegie Foundation, non-monetary individual benefits of higher education include the tendency for postsecondary students to become more open-minded, more cultured, more rational, more consistent and less authoritarian; these benefits are also passed along to succeeding generations (Rowley and Hurtado, 2002). Additionally, college attendance has been shown to "decrease prejudice, enhance knowledge of world affairs and enhance social status" while increasing economic and job security for those who earn bachelor's degrees (ibid.).

Research has also consistently shown a positive correlation between completion of higher education and good health, not only for oneself, but

also for one's children. In fact, "parental schooling levels (after controlling for differences in earnings) are positively correlated with the health status of their children" and "increased schooling (and higher relative income) are correlated with lower mortality rates for given age brackets" (Cohn and Geske, 1992).

The Social Value of Higher Education

⁸ A number of studies have shown a high correlation between higher education and cultural and family values, and economic growth. According to Elchanan Cohn and Terry Geske (1992), there is the tendency for more highly educated women to spend more time with their children; these women tend to use this time to better prepare their children for the future. Cohn and Geske (1992) report that "college graduates appear to have a more optimistic view of their past and future personal progress."

⁹ Public benefits of attending college include increased tax revenues, greater workplace productivity, increased consumption, increased workforce flexibility, and decreased reliance on government financial support (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998).

College Attendance Versus College Completion

¹⁰ In their report, "College for All? Is There Too Much Emphasis on Getting a 4-Year College Degree?" Boesel and Fredland estimate that around 600,000 students leave 4-year colleges annually without graduating. These noncompleters earn less than college graduates because they get fewer years of education. More surprising, they tend to earn less than or the same amount as 2-year college students who have as much education. Furthermore, 2-year college students show about the same gains in tested cognitive skills for each year of attendance as 4-year college students. Students at 4-year colleges also pay more in tuition and are more likely to have student loan debts than 2-year students (Boesel and Fredland, 1999, p. viii). The authors conclude that high school graduates of modest ability or uncertain motivation—factors that increase their chances of leaving college before graduation—would be well-advised to consider attending 2-year, instead of 4-year, colleges. If they did, they would probably realize the same earnings and cognitive skill gains at lower cost and with less debt. In order to maximize the return on their time and monetary investment, students who do choose to enroll in 4-year colleges should do everything in their power to graduate (Boesel and Fredland, 1999, p. ix).

Conclusion

¹¹ While it is clear that investment in a college degree, especially for those students in the lowest income brackets, is a financial burden, the long-term benefits to individuals as well as to society at large, appear to far outweigh the costs.

The Case Against College

LINDALEE

This essay first appeared in *Family Circle* magazine in 2001.

Do you, like me, have a child who is smart but never paid attention in class? Now it's high school graduation time. Other parents are talking Stanford this and State U. that. Your own child has gotten into a pretty good college. The question is: Is he ready? Should he go at all?

In this country two-thirds of high school graduates go on to college. In some middle-class suburbs, that number reaches 90 percent. So why do so many feel the need to go?

America is obsessed with college. It has the second-highest number of graduates worldwide, after (not Great Britain, not Japan, not Germany) Australia. Even so, only 27 percent of Americans have a bachelor's degree or higher. That leaves an awful lot who succeed without college, or at least without a degree. Many read books, think seriously about life and have well-paying jobs. Some want to start businesses. Others want to be electricians or wilderness guides or makeup artists. Not everyone needs a higher education.

What about the statistics showing that college graduates make more money? First, until the computer industry came along, all the highest-paying jobs *required* a college degree: doctor, lawyer, engineer. Second, on average, the brightest and hardest-working kids in school go to college. So is it a surprise that they go on to make more money? And those studies almost always pit kids with degrees against those with just high school. An awful lot have additional training, but they are not included. Ponder for a moment: Who makes more, a plumber or a philosophy major?

These are tough words. I certainly wouldn't have listened to them five years ago when my son was graduating from high school. He had been smart enough to get into the Bronx High School of Science in New York and did well on his SATs. But I know now that he did not belong in college, at least not straight out of high school.

But he went, because all his friends were going, because it sounded like fun, because he could drink beer and hang out. He did not go to study philosophy. Nor did he feel it incumbent to go to class or complete courses. Meanwhile I was paying \$1,000 a week for this pleasure cruise.

Eventually I asked myself, "Is he getting \$1,000 a week's worth of education?" Heck no. That's when I began wondering why everyone needs to go to college. (My hair colorist makes \$300,000 a year without a degree.) What about the famous people who don't have one, like Bill Gates (dropped out of Harvard) and Walter Cronkite (who left the University of Texas to begin a career in journalism)?

So I told my son (in a kind way) that his college career was over for now, but he could reapply to the Bank of Mom in two years if he wanted to go back. Meanwhile, I said, get a job.

If college is so wonderful, how come so many kids "stop out"? (That's the new terminology.) One study showed only 26 percent of those who began four-year colleges had earned a degree in six years. And what about the kids who finish, then can't find work? Of course, education is worth a great deal more than just employment. But most kids today view college as a way to get a good job.

I know, I know. What else is there to do? Won't he miss the "college experience?" First off, there are thousands of things for kids to do. And yes, he will miss the college experience, which may include binge drinking, reckless driving and sleeping in on class days. He can have the same experience in the Marine Corps, minus the sleeping in, and be paid good money for it and learn a trade and discipline.

If my son had gone straight through college, he would be a graduate by now. A number of his friends are, and those who were savvy enough to go into computers at an Ivy League school walked into \$50,000-a-year jobs. But that's not everyone. An awful lot became teachers making half that. And some still don't know what they want to do.

They may, like my son, end up taking whatever jobs they can get. Over the last two years, he's done roofing, delivered UPS packages and fixed broken toilets. His phone was turned off a few times, and he began to pay attention to details, like the price of a gallon of gasoline.

But a year ago he began working at a telecommunications company. He loves his work, and over the last year, he's gotten a raise and a year-end bonus. He tells me now he plans to stay there and become a manager.

So, just about on schedule, my son has had his own graduation day. And although I won't be able to take a picture of him in cap and gown, I couldn't be any more proud. He grew up, as most kids do. And he did it, for the most part, in spite of college. ■

QUESTIONS ON SUBJECT AND PURPOSE

1. How does Lee feel about a college education? What reservations does she have? Under what circumstances does she have reservations?
2. The essay appeared in a June issue of *Family Circle* magazine, probably on sale by late May. How is that timing reflected in the essay?
3. What purpose might Lee have had in the essay?

QUESTIONS ON STRATEGY AND AUDIENCE

1. Judging just from the first sentence of the essay, to whom do you think Lee is writing?
2. Can you find a thesis statement in the essay? Where is it?
3. The essay originally appeared in *Family Circle* magazine. Have you ever seen *Family Circle*? Who is the audience for the magazine?