

5. **For Research.** Although Porter cites much evidence to support the economic benefits of a four-year college education, she does not argue for the value of attending an expensive, prestigious college or university as opposed to a lower-cost one. Is there any evidence to suggest that attending an expensive institution produces a greater economic benefit? Research the question and write an essay arguing either position.

### For Further Study

**Focusing on Grammar and Writing.** How does Porter document her sources in the essay? How might she change her format if the essay were to appear in a popular magazine?

**Working Together.** The essay begins and ends with a thesis-driven paragraph. Given the potential audience appeal of such a topic (for example, parents of every college-age student), it could well have appeared in a wide-circulation magazine. Working in small groups, brainstorm about other strategies that could be used to open and close the essay. Each group should share its ideas with the class as a whole.

**Seeing Other Modes at Work.** In outlining the various categories under which the benefits of a four-year college education can be organized, Porter uses classification.

**Finding Connections.** The obvious pairing is with Linda Lee's "The Case Against College."

**Exploring the Web.** The essay cites a substantial amount of research to support its conclusions. Are there, though, any dissenting opinions or evidence to suggest that the case might be exaggerated here? Search the Web to see what else you might find.

## The Case Against College

LINDA LEE

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

1 **D**o 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?

2 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?

3 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  
without  
well-payi  
cians or  
education

4 Wh  
money? I  
jobs requi  
the bright  
prise that  
pit kids v  
additiona  
makes mo

5 The  
years ago  
enough t  
well on h  
not straig

6 But  
fun, beca  
losophy.  
Meanwhi

7 Eve  
cation?" ]  
to colleg  
about the  
Harvard)  
career in

8 So  
now, but  
go back.

9 If c  
the new t  
gan four-  
kids who  
deal mor  
to get a g

10 I kr  
perience?  
will miss  
driving a  
Marine C  
learn a tr

11 If n  
now. A n  
into com

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.

4 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?

5 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.

6 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.

7 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)?

8 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.

9 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.

10 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.

11 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.

12 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.

13 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.

14 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?

### Questions on Vocabulary and Style

1. What is the effect of opening the essay with a question and of addressing the reader as "you"?
2. How would you define the tone of Lee's essay? Is it formal or informal? Conversational?
3. Be prepared to define the following words: *incumbent* (paragraph 6) and *savvy* (11).

### Writing Suggestions

1. For a **Critical Analysis**. Lee writes using the first person ("I") citing as evidence her own personal experience with her son. How effective is this as a writing strategy? How can you base an argument on such a limited example?

Is i  
str:  
2. Fo  
of y  
opt  
me  
3. Fo  
par  
jus  
4. Fo  
titl  
tha  
5. Fo  
beg  
wic  
sch  
exp  
res  
wh

For Fur

Fo  
Re  
ap  
wit  
W.  
W  
wh  
fit:  
"ri  
dic  
Se  
ess  
Fi  
Va  
Ex  
rat  
sch  
hig  
ha  
wa