

The Diploma's Vanishing Value

Monday, April 29, 2013 | Jeffrey J. Selingo, The Wall Street Journal

When it comes to lifetime earnings, a bachelor's degree pays off six times more than a high-school diploma. The credential is all that matters, not where it's from—a view now widely accepted. That's one reason college enrollment jumped by a third last decade and why for-profit schools that make getting a diploma ultraconvenient now enroll 1 in 10 college students. With unemployment among college graduates at historic highs and outstanding student-loan debt at \$1 trillion, the question families should be asking is whether it's worth borrowing tens of thousands of dollars for a degree. Research has found that a degree from an elite college carries a premium for earnings. But the 50 wealthiest and most selective colleges and universities in the U.S. enroll less than 4% of students. For everyone else, the statistics show that choosing just any college, at any cost for a credential, may no longer be worth it.



Think a community-college degree is worth less than a credential from a four-year college? The average first-year salaries of graduates with a two-year degree are \$1,000 higher than those with a bachelor's degree. Technical degree holders from the state's community colleges often earn more their first year out than those who studied the same field at a four-year university. Take graduates in health professions, they not only finish two years earlier than their counterparts, but they also earn \$5,300 more, on average, in their first year after graduation. Given these differences in postgraduate earnings, the size of your student loan is not the only number you should worry about when weighing the college decision. Will you make enough to pay off your loan? What are your chances of graduating on time?

Two tools recently released allow families to compare colleges with respect to return on investment. The U.S. Education Department's College Scorecard website by compiling federal data collected from colleges. *Collegerealitycheck.com* allows comparisons between colleges on measures families should weigh during their search. It includes early-career salaries for college graduates from *payscale.com*. Colleges loathe being measured by the earnings of their graduates. Defining value in such a narrow way, obscures the broader benefits of higher education. They point out that first-year salaries often have no bearing on future earnings. It's true that those with bachelor's degrees typically earn more over a lifetime than those with a two-year degree, but that's little consolation to those who are discouraged from going to community colleges and end up dropping out of a four-year school without a degree.



For decades, U.S. colleges have promoted the economic benefits of higher education. But now that they can no longer ride the coattails of the national averages—which obscure the value of individual schools and make everyone look good—higher-education leaders suddenly think salary is too narrow a measure. Students who pick their major based solely on postgraduation salaries, as opposed to passion for a field, will in all likelihood struggle in both school and career. But without salary information, many more students will make bad choices. They will go deep into debt without ever knowing that they pursued a degree without a chance at a career or a job to pay off their loans.

1. In appropriate paragraph form, compare and contrast the pros and cons synonymous with two-year, technical, and bachelor degrees. Identify specific information in the passage above, which has influenced your academic future. Thoroughly explain your reasoning and provide specific artifacts and evidence not limited solely to passage above to support your response. Create and illustrate Venn Diagrams to effectively explore relationships and patterns and to make arguments about relationships between sets. (LA.910.3.2.2; LA.910.1.6.2; MA.912.D.7.2; MA.912.A.10.1)
2. Conduct an in-depth career outlook analysis via *collegerealitycheck.com* to determine the return on your investment for a prospective degree of interest as it pertains to the following: Average Net Price, Graduation Rate, and Debt Repayment and Earnings. *PayScale.com* has collected salary and career data from more than 36 million people, covering 13,000 job titles and 3,500 distinct industries in 150 countries. Employ a search of a career field of interest and determine the specific amount of compensation. How do these findings support or differ from initial assumptions? Explain your reasoning.

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards adapted from floridastandards.org. Standards specifically addressed in this edition are strategically aligned with state standards and annotated adjacent to the respective inquiry.

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3. An academically elite northeastern educational institution of higher learning administration building possesses an immaculate marble floor meticulously designed in the shape of a regular dodecagon. Find the reciprocal of the absolute value difference between the measure of an interior angle and an exterior angle. Illustrate the polygon as well as all of its diagonals. **(MA.912.G.2.2; MA.912.G.2.5; MA.912.G.8.6)**
4. In 1985, the average annual cost for tuition and fees at public two-year college in the United States was \$584 per year and has since increased about 6.5% annually. The projected cost of a four-year degree at Florida State University has a 47% graduation rate and carries in-state tuition fees, room, board, and books of \$16,237 annually or \$64,948 over the course of a respective degree. Assuming the annual expenses increase at a constant rate of 6.5% annually, write an equation to model the cost of a two-year versus four-year degree for the year you graduate college. **(MA.912.A.10.1; MA.912.A.3.12; MA.912.A.3.13)**
5. Identify and thoroughly support your reasoning regarding which of the following that best describes the author's attitude toward the subject matter discussed: flippant disregard, mild frustration, passive resignation or an informed citizen. Explain the primary purpose of this passage and identify any indicators, which suggest the author may possess a bias against one acquiring a traditional bachelorette degree. What is the central idea and what conclusion might one draw from this passage? Provide an inference that students, parents, educators, and employers may derive from this passage. **(RI.9-10.1 – 10.6)**
6. Using contextual clues only, determine the most complete and accurate definitions of following italicized terms: *coattails*, *loathe*, *consolation obscures*, *compiling*, *counterparts*, *ultraconvenient*, and *credential* as obtained from the passage above. Additionally, use each word in a complete sentence to demonstrate further comprehension. **(LA.910.1.6.3; LA.910.1.6.1)**
7. **SARASOTA MILITARY ACADEMY WORD-OF-THE-WEEK** Create a concluding paragraph aligned with the passage above using the following italicized word: *Lugubrious* (loo-goo-bree-uhs) adj. Mournful, dismal, and gloomy. **(LA.910.1.6.1; LA.910.1.6.5)**

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