

It's Your Decision

Everything you've done in your twelve years of schooling comes down to this. - Sophie P.

As high school comes to an end, it's time to think about how you'd like to spend your days as an adult. How do *you* measure success? Do you want to help others? Make "a lot" of money? Accomplish a lifelong dream? Be famous? Sincerely enjoy going to work? The list goes on, and some of these may overlap for you.

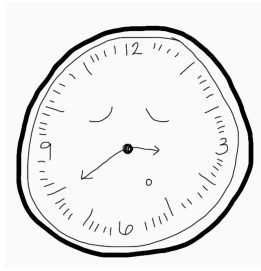
If you're motivated enough, it's certainly possible to be successful (however you may define it) without a college degree. You can be an influencer, web developer, auto mechanic, certified underwater welder, chef, or a correctional officer without a college degree. You can also enlist in the military, and after 36 months on active duty, use the G.I. Bill to help pay for college if you decide it's important to you at that time.¹

However, many people without college have faced an uphill battle in the last decade. Since the recession in 2008, there are 5.5 million *fewer* jobs for those with a high school diploma or less, and there are 8.6 million *more* jobs for those with a bachelor's degree or higher.²

1. <https://www.military.com/education/gi-bill/learn-to-use-your-gi-bill.html>

2. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/americas-divided-recovery/>

Given the number of job opportunities, most students will greatly benefit from earning a bachelor's (4-year) degree or associate's (2-year) degree. Even if you don't know what you want to do, a college degree will give you the flexibility to change careers if you need or want to in the future. With access to a greater variety of jobs, you might even LOVE your job! Who doesn't want to escape the routine of obsessing over the day of the week ("Ahh... it's only Tuesday!") and constantly checking the clock at work ("I've been here for five hours. Only three more to go!"). Sounds a little like high school, huh?



Or you can still wake up dreading work, but at least you'll get paid more for your time. It'll be your choice! And for some lucky people, the work they find meaningful is the same as the work that pays the most. The point is, college graduates have *more work opportunities*.

Let's take a more in-depth look at the typical income for different levels of education. College graduates have higher average pay, and also have lower chances of being unemployed. Table 1.1 shows the unemployment rates and median (average) weekly earnings of people 25 years old and over.

Education attained	Unemployment rate in 2018	Median weekly earnings in 2018
High school diploma	4.6%	\$712
Some college, no degree	4.0%	\$774
Associate's degree	3.4%	\$836
Bachelor's degree	2.5%	\$1,173

Table 1.1. Data are for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers. Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. <https://www.bls.gov/career-outlook/2018/data-on-display/education-pays.htm>

First, notice the difference in unemployment rates. The higher the unemployment rate, the harder it is to find a job. As you can see, the less education earned, the higher the unemployment rate. The table also shows the vast difference between the average earnings of an adult with a bachelor's degree and everyone else. Students with bachelor's degrees earn an average of **\$461 more per week** than those who don't move on after high school. \$461 extra per week might sound like a lot of money, or not, but when you consider this difference over a year, it totals nearly \$24,000. Dang!

I JUST CAN'T DO FOUR MORE YEARS OF SCHOOL

You may think college is just going to be a harder version of high school where you regularly ask, "When will I ever use this?" In response to the classic question, it's important to understand a few key facts:

- As a whole, high school is *not* about teaching you how to do your future job. (That's called job training, and you'll do it the first few weeks of any job.) High school is about

teaching you to think critically, reason with evidence, work in diverse teams, and share ideas from the past and for the future.

- A college education *usually* does a better job teaching the skills I mentioned earlier. Plus, you get access to specific coursework, like “Demystifying the Hipster.” You get more time and space to learn more about yourself and your community, access to more job opportunities, and access to higher average pay.
- For you to receive any benefits in school, investment of time and effort must come from both you and your teacher(s).

So, set realistic expectations — not every college class will teach you something useful or exciting. But don’t expect your life as a college student to mirror your life as a high school student. College is a place of unique benefits and great freedom. In addition to those I’ve already mentioned, here are a few significant ways college life differs from high school:

- You can choose most of your classes, many of which might truly interest you! For example, Cal State Fullerton offers everything from “Introduction to Hip Hop” and “Mexican/Chicano Intellectual Thought” to “Women in Leadership” and “International Law for Business.”
- You can decide on your schedule. You might have classes from 9 – 11 a.m., and then from 2 – 4 p.m., then you’re done for the day. Also, it’s not uncommon for college juniors and seniors to have no Friday classes. Translation: *the 3-day weekend. Every weekend.*
- You can eat happily. Say goodbye to your crusty old cafeteria and hello to better options like Five Guys and Chick-fil-A.

- Less quantity, more quality. Many college courses replace nightly busy work with a few significant tests or essays due at specific points throughout the semester.
- College can be FUN. Making new friends, living and learning in a diverse community, watching or playing sports, participating in clubs or Greek life, free movie screenings and concerts, road trips, and more.
- You'll have the freedom and responsibility of an adult in college. Teachers probably aren't going to nag you about being absent or missing work. You can go out all night on a Monday if you want, eventually learning the consequences of doing so. It's all up to you.

CONFIDENCE AND YOUR DECISION

Many students worry about devoting time, money, and effort to college because they struggle with the question, "Am I smart enough to graduate from college?"

If high school has been rough for you, keep in mind many people end up very successful in college despite struggling through their high school years.³ Science has shown that you can actually *change* your intelligence; your brain acts like a muscle, the more you use it, the stronger it gets.⁴ Still, it's completely normal to face self-doubt at times, even though your fears may not be rational. At Harvard, students and faculty openly discuss this feeling, commonly referred to as "Imposter Syndrome." Here's a description of an event Harvard hosted last year:

3. A lengthy Yale study backs this up: <http://www.sole-jole.org/12283.pdf>

4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WtKJrB5rOKs>

Overcoming Impostor Syndrome: A Conversation with Dr. Monik Jimenez

Wednesday, November 9, 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m., Kresge 201

Do you ever feel like a fraud? Like you don't belong at Harvard? Are you sure that the admissions or search committee made a mistake? You're not alone! Learn to cope with these thoughts at "Overcoming Imposter Syndrome: A Conversation with Dr. Monik Jimenez."

Impostor Syndrome can make it hard for you to believe in your own success, convincing you that you are a fraud that "got lucky." Feelings like this are incredibly common at all stages. This workshop will show you ways to combat these impostor thoughts and help you become more confident in your placement here at Harvard.

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Harvard is just one of many schools that provide help to students who struggle with their self-confidence. Every year, college students around the country feel worried about everything from passing classes to meeting new friends. Remember, if you're accepted, your college believes you can succeed there. College is a time for every student to continue developing personally, socially, and academically. No one enters (or leaves) a perfect person; respect the person you are today, and look forward to growing into the adult you want to be in the future.

Too many of us are not living our dreams because we are living our fears. – Les Brown

Whatever you decide to do after high school, think about all the pros and cons of each option you're considering, then take responsibility for your commitment. Don't go to college just because your friends will be there or because someone else filled out an application for you. Go because the benefits will outweigh the costs. Go because

you're willing to put in the effort. If you want it, you can earn a college degree. For help getting started, type "Steps to enroll in (name of college)" into Google, set up a meeting with a counselor at your high school or college, finish this book, and plan out a course of action.

CHAPTER RECAP

1. College is not the best option for everyone. Think about the pros and cons of all of your options, and own your decision.
2. Compared to high school, college typically allows you more freedom, flexibility, and job opportunities after graduation.
3. Statistics show that with a college degree, you're more likely to get a job and make more money.
4. If you're accepted, your college believes you can succeed there. Others believe in you, so believe in yourself. Don't be afraid to seek out support when you need it.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. What do you want from your education?
2. What are you willing to sacrifice to achieve your goals?

DO NOW

1.a. Write a 100-word essay describing your life goals and who you are as a person. What's important to you in life? If you had to choose, would you rather have a job that brings you personal joy or one that brings you big paychecks? How important is family to you? What does success mean to you?

1.b. Before moving forward in building a college plan, you need to decide where your help and advice is going to come from. Try to find people from different areas of your life who know you well

The College Project

and have your best interests at heart. Is there a family member who's always been there to guide you? Can you think of any teachers, school counselors, coaches, or mentors who want to see you succeed? Do you have other friends with similar goals? When you're ready, write down three names and start talking to them about this book, your thoughts about college, and financial aid!

My Team	
#1	
#2	
#3	