

# Is College Worth It? Not Necessarily, But a Higher Education Is

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*The Harvard Crimson*, September 18, 2023

I just finished my first year of college at Harvard.

I would have been euphoric to learn this as a third grader, when my ambitions to attend a top college first sprung up. To me, college was the means to a high paying job, a stable career, and a contented life.

It seems that many others would disagree with my naivety.

Faith in our system of college education is falling. A recent study by the University of Chicago and The Wall Street Journal found that 56 percent of Americans feel that a four-year college degree isn't worth it. High college tuitions, the competitiveness of obtaining a highly paying job, and long turnaround times for earning a degree may all be to blame.

But I view this study a bit more optimistically.

Americans may be losing faith in a traditional college education, but this says little about their faith in education as a whole. Instead, I believe this trend simply reflects an ongoing transition from formal education to novel forms of learning.

College is the ultimate formal educational opportunity, and many of the fields its graduates pursue, including medicine, academia, and law, require even further formal education. Though colleges may look different from each other, the way they operate is similar: Students must acquire certain levels of subject mastery and use it to meet academic and credit benchmarks to succeed.

However, there are many other avenues of acquiring this knowledge. The growth of open-access resources like Khan Academy has enabled educators to offer lessons that parallel ones you might find in an Ivy League classroom. Some popular Harvard classes, such as Stat110 and CS50, are in fact readily available on YouTube — some of them even with practice resources published online for the world to use.

Thus, a motivated enough student could obtain a Harvard-level education without actually setting foot on campus!

There is also something to be said about the distinction between education through action and education through theory. Harvard has some great exemplars among its dropouts: Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg. They evidently decided the constraints of a traditional college education couldn't support their ambitions. Action suited them better. So why waste time and exorbitant sums of money on seemingly futile college courses?

Harvard's liberal arts establishment might cringe at such a notion. Its goal is, of course, to develop a well-rounded understanding of the world we live in, "to navigate the world's most complex issues, and address future innovations with unforeseen challenges."

But, is this perspective worth its roughly \$80,000 per year price tag? This is where I might flip a coin.

Heads: Clearly, this is where I land. I'm not sure what my career will look like, and I am reliant on a college education for inspiration. (...) My college education is also not limited to a classroom. I learn just as much from working with clubs, having spirited debates with friends in dining halls and library foyers, and writing for *The Crimson*. These experiences can't be found on Khan Academy.

Tails: College may not be the best way to obtain specialized skill sets that some highly profitable and fulfilling careers require. Learning a trade, spending time honing coding skills, or dedicating one's life to a sport are all careers for which a formal college education may be redundant and unnecessary.

Realistically, the prestige of a Harvard education opens doors to many careers — though it's hard to distinguish the role played by a person's own skills and that of their degree. Yet having a degree at all seems to matter. Many employers still prefer hiring college graduates, and college graduates still earn more on average than their counterparts.

However, as college remains inaccessible for many, educational institutions like Harvard must invest more resources into open-access educational tools, and we as a society must strengthen our system of K-12 education to set students up for successful careers right out of high school.

A formal college education may not be the right option for everyone. This shouldn't discourage us; it should remind us to consider the myriad of ways education can empower and uplift.