**“Your So-Called Education” – Updated**

**May 19th, 2011 ·** [**6 Comments**](http://globalization.qwriting.org/2011/05/19/your-so-called-education/#comments)

[**Course Announcements**](http://globalization.qwriting.org/category/course-announcements/)New research questions how much students really learn in college, as reported in a recent Op-Ed in the *New York Times.* The writers are Richard Arum, a professor of sociology and education at New York University, and Josipa Roksa, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Virginia, who are the authors of “Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses.”

Here’s a PDF of the piece: [“The Poor Quality of an Undergraduate Education](http://soc212w.qwriting.org/files/2011/05/The-Poor-Quality-of-an-Undergraduate-Education-NYTimes.pdf)“.  And here’s [a link to it at the NYT website.](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/15/opinion/15arum.html)

Arum and Roksa ask: “Why is the overall quality of undergraduate learning so poor?”  And they offer some explanations.  I’d like to hear your thoughts about the education you’re receiving in college.  If it’s poor, why do you think that’s so?  You may post on the blog, or email me your thoughts (if you don’t feel like going public). I’m interested in your honest opinions.  Responses will count as extra credit toward participation grades and are due by Monday, **May 23.**

If you’d like to respond on the blog, please make it into your own blog post to make it easier for others to read and comment**.** Great responses so far on this thread!

**6 responses so far ↓**

* [1](http://globalization.qwriting.org/2011/05/19/your-so-called-education/#comment-1254)    [**anthonymunozjr**](http://social.qwriting.org/members/anthonymunozjr/)// May 19, 2011 at 5:28 pm

Education requires a major overhaul. New York City public schools are in shambles, the only thing learned at college is partying, and even if you do learn and make it through school, your left without a job and debt.

Education is an amazing gift and is should be made available to everyone, but American society places to much value on “going to college”. And that’s what everyone is doing , going to some place and according to this study, sitting there with a blank stare.

What a surprise to see college graduates out of jobs, when they’ve spent years doing nothing. But whose to blame here? Shouldn’t our education system be preparing students for success?

I read an article where the author argues that the majority of college graduates are holding jobs that high school graduates occupied, along with some statistical evidence.

I guess many settle as the store manager at the Gap.

* [2](http://globalization.qwriting.org/2011/05/19/your-so-called-education/#comment-1268)    [**Prof. Hala**](http://social.qwriting.org/members/nhala/)// May 19, 2011 at 9:20 pm

Anthony, this is very compelling, and well-crafted.

I’m thinking you should work this into an Op-Ed of your own. As it stands, it’s an excellent letter to the editor. If you’ve got some time, send it around, while it’s graduation season (increasing the likelihood it’ll get published).

This is so well put: ‘Education is an amazing gift and is should be made available to everyone, but American society places to much value on “going to college”. And that’s what everyone is doing , going to some place and according to this study, sitting there with a blank stare. What a surprise to see college graduates out of jobs, when they’ve spent years doing nothing.’

And depressing.

* [3](http://globalization.qwriting.org/2011/05/19/your-so-called-education/#comment-1275)    [**peterjun**](http://social.qwriting.org/members/peterjun/)// May 19, 2011 at 11:32 pm

Currently I work for TD bank as a banker. i have had zero banking experience prior and have worked there for 3 years. My managers have no higher than an associates degree. The regional manager for queens also only has an associates degree.

I recently got offered (and accepted) a job at north shore LIJ as a financial analyst. It was a 3 hour interview process and not one time did they ask about any technical skills. the job entails patient by patient cost analysis and model formulating. The interview was basically to see if i would fit in with the culture.

I have to be honest, i probably wont use 90% of the stuff i learned in school in the real life. It’s good information to keep i guess but in the long run, its really who you know and what your character is thatll get you the job you’re looking. after that its your dedication and focus thatll take you to your goal

* [4](http://globalization.qwriting.org/2011/05/19/your-so-called-education/#comment-1298)    [**andrewganga**](http://social.qwriting.org/members/andrewganga/)// May 20, 2011 at 3:26 pm

It seems like nowadays everyone is “going to college” simply for the sake of going to college. College was once a place of higher learning, where people who actually wanted to learn went to study because they were driven to do so, but nowadays college has become just another rung on the ladder to becoming an adult. College has become a commodity, to be bought by high school graduated all over in hopes that it will lead them to becoming the next overnight millionaires. This idea of college has been sold to the American public just as much as the idea of paying for things on credit, or borrowing against your mortgage. Colleges which were created as institutes of learning have now become institutes of successful marketing, selling their lax dorm rules and college life more than their academics. Not surprisingly, the starting pay for college graduates is nowhere near the numbers that college students expect when they start college. Even worse, the lack of jobs out there leaves college graduates either unemployed, or doing low skilled jobs, both positions they could have filled right out of high school.

Personally, I’m in no way surprised that college isn’t taken seriously. My attitude was that if every other person can go to college and do fine then I should be able to as well. When I first started I never went to any of my classes and to be honest I didn’t learn a damn thing in my first 2 semesters (which showed in my GPA). In an attempt to take school seriously I started attending all of my classes but what I found was that it was mostly a waste of time. For the majority of my classes I found it easier to sit at home and read the textbook than actually attend the class. Not that I’m lazy per say, but most of my professors haven’t put any thought into creating a classroom environment that leads to any actual learning. Dry lectures usually accompanied by horrible powerpoint presentations didn’t benefit me in the least. What I prefer the most are classes where the professor stays away from dry lectures and engages in active communication in class. Also, I think its very important for professors to use the internet, audio, and videos in order to make classes interesting. The students of today revolve around technology and without interaction students are actually turning away from topics that they would otherwise be interested in if taught differently. The times are changing and more students attend college now than ever which means more revenue for colleges. I think colleges need to start focusing on effective teaching tactics for this new generation of students instead of spending more money on incentives to attract students. Students have changed drastically in the last 20 years and I think its time for schools to start working on century-old teaching methods.

* [5](http://globalization.qwriting.org/2011/05/19/your-so-called-education/#comment-1301)    [**Prof. Hala**](http://social.qwriting.org/members/nhala/)// May 20, 2011 at 5:56 pm

First, to Peter — Congratulations on the job! And on graduation!

I tend to agree with your statement that “its really who you know and what your character is thatll get you the job you’re looking [for]” and my experience also confirms your own, that above all, perhaps, employers are looking to see how a prospective employee will fit with their organizational culture. Yet none of this negates the value of a liberal arts education, as distinct from a job training or employment placement function. Nor does valuing liberal education mean dis-valuing the latter. Certain professional fields have a culture that’s rooted in broad-based learning and humanistic principles and they look for employees who share those values. But at the upper echelons of all fields — business, politics, the arts — are people with critical thinking skills (which liberal arts education is meant to be about), not simply technical knowledge. That’s not to say college is \*necessary\* to acquire critical reasoning. And, as the authors find, college is definitely not sufficient for critical thinking capacity.

Andrew, you sound like an expert. But I guess I shouldn’t be surprised that students know something about college. Your post has given me a lot to think about. The argument about the commodification of college sounds right on the money (I swear, I didn’t mean the pun). I must say I’m startled by your revelation about not attending class at all when you first started college. First, I’m thinking what a waste of money (assuming one doesn’t have gobs of money to spare). But you say that attending classes didn’t help you learn anything. If the reason for that is the poor quality of the instruction and beyond your control, then I guess I could see why you wouldn’t want to waste time on top of wasting money. But your case has my head spinning — a student whose critical and analytic abilities rival those of the best Ivy League grad students I’ve taught enrolled in college and paying for a degree that is neither teaching him much nor holding out the promise of fulfilling and decently compensated future employment.

And, thank you – I’m coming to see the light on PowerPoints. My previous teaching experience was mostly discussion-focused and I lectured very little. I acted more as a facilitator. I had never used PPT until I came to Queens College. I didn’t rely on it much during my first ‘trial-by-fire’ semester here. But then I got the impression that using PPT somehow made an undergrad instructor more ‘legit,’ so I started integrating it, very clumsily. Then I over-relied on it, even though it was contrary to my natural style. I’m still trying to figure out how to use it effectively. Of course, everyone hates the dreaded “dry lecture.” But there’s also an onus on the instructor to deliver material. Especially in classes where students are unprepared, more time must be spent on delivering content, and in such classes students aren’t properly prepared to engage in any meaningful discussion. To me it sometimes seems like a Catch-22. But you suggest a way out — identifying effective teaching tactics that respond to a new generation of college students. It’s true that there are other ways of delivering content besides ‘dry’ lectures and ‘horrible’ powerpoint presentations!

* [6](http://globalization.qwriting.org/2011/05/19/your-so-called-education/#comment-1389)    **Kurman100** // May 22, 2011 at 11:14 pm

American society stresses the importance of attending college in order to pursue a career and create a meaningful life for you and your family. However, I find that many students study for the test, retain the information for few weeks and then forget it while cramming for the next test. Although, many succeed, graduate, and find jobs, they do not remember most of the information they learned. Today’s society stresses the importance of acing the class yet not applying the information learned to everyday life. As the article, “Your So-Called Education” by Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa state ” We found that large numbers of the students were making their way through college with minimal exposure to rigorous coursework, only a modest investment of effort and little or no meaningful improvement in skills like writing and reasoning.” Students are taught to study for the test so that they will ace the class and succeed in the working class. However, I find that in most classes we are not taught reasoning and writing skills. For the most part, we are taught to memorize the information taught and present it to the teacher on the exam. I believe that one way to enhance our education system is by investing more money into the academic areas of schools rather than just focusing on the social and recreational aspects. While it is definitley crucial to have activities, clubs, and gyms on campus, academics are important too.

# From the Web site of a course called [Globalization: Social & Geographic Perspectives](http://globalization.qwriting.org)

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