

College Degrees are Dying Proxies

A College degree was a proxy for employers to help them see if people have what they value.

The cost of tuition plus the time it takes to complete the degree were the key ingredients. Not anything learned.

The logic was, if you can pay the cost and complete it, it's probably because you are ambitious and resourceful and reliable enough to get a job, get a loan, get a scholarship, borrow from relatives, etc. and stick through it. Statistics from everyday-loans.co.uk confirm this, students that completed their studies were much more likely to pay back loans on time, even if it meant personal sacrifices.

So ambition, work ethic, consistency, resourcefulness, basic professionalism, were traits sought. Not degrees. There were not easy ways to prove those traits, and the thinking was you probably couldn't complete college unless you had them.

But we can now go one level closer to source with a much better proxy for talent. We now have access to demonstrable activities much more directly related to those traits. And the degree is a worse and worse proxy for them.

Being able to spend a ton of money on college is a weaker and weaker proof of these qualities, because college loans are handed out like candy, parents have way more education money for their kids than they used to, more scholarships, grants, etc. In fact, spending a lot of borrowed money on college is now as likely to be a sign of poor judgement, and a lot of your parents money is as likely to be a sign of not being independent or responsible.

Being able to spend a lot of time to complete a degree is weaker as well. Not only because it's easier to defer earning due to more access to money, but because the college experience itself is less challenging and less connected to the marketplace, and because being able to do the same thing for a long time is no longer highly valued in the workplace. Jobs are far more dynamic and less monotonous, and average tenure is short.

So degrees are dying proxies for desirable traits like ambition, work ethic, consistency, resourcefulness, basic professionalism.

Good! Because now you can show them in better ways. Now you can have a proof closer to source. Proof of work. No long guesswork involved in assuming the action is a real indicator of the trait.

Now you can learn things, build things, and do things out-loud for all to see. You can create a digital footprint that gives a window into your character, skill, and ability. That's what Crash profiles, pitches, and job campaigns are all about. But there are many ways.

It's not just about showing expertise or the product of skills, it's also about showing the process. You can list "Ran a marathon" on a skills profile, but better yet, you can share a series of blog posts breaking down your decision to do it, your training regimen, etc. This provides deep insight into the way you think, pick challenges, engage in self-improvement, overcome obstacles, show up consistently every day for a long period, etc.

You can communicate a history of personal progress as well as the current state of your skills in powerful ways today, and these projects and pitches and media are more directly related to the traits desired than purchased paper.

That's the world we're already in and I love it!