

There's Only One Argument for College (and It's Wrong)

My good friend and colleague TK Coleman is launching an 8 stop tour of bad arguments for college this week, taking on a different argument each week. Follow it here.

I'm glad it's TK and not me. I don't have the patience to engage arguments for college anymore, because all of them but one fall apart instantly.

The only argument for paying tuition and completing college is the old, "You need a degree to get a decent job."

That one's worth engaging, and it's easy. A few bullets:

- Around 65% of grads have no job or one that doesn't require a degree, so it's not working.
- A degree is a signal to employers of some base level of ability. You can build a better signal. We do it all the time at Praxis.
- Jobs that say "degree required" don't mean it. We've helped hundreds get just those kind of jobs without one.

There's one good reason to get a degree and one only: if you know for certain you want a job that legally requires a degree. Government protections and monopolies are the only justification.

"How can you be so dismissive of all the other arguments for attending college?"

Because there aren't any.

Let's look at a few contenders:

- "It's about learning and being exposed to ideas"
- "It's about making friends and networking"
- "It's a unique social experience"

Of course, each of these is hard to justify if you spend any time on a campus. If you think world-class learning, socialization, and networking are happening, you might lack imagination...or eyes. But forget that. Let's completely accept the premise that four years in college absolutely produces these things and these things are absolutely valuable. If true, no one should pay tuition.

Why would you? Every single item but the rubber-stamped paper can be had without paying tuition. You can sit in classes, attend parties, even do homework without registering or paying a dime. If all those vague, fuzzy things are the real value of college, then tuition is unnecessary.

The fact that no one does this reveals that consumers of college do not see those “intangibles” as valuable at all. If some professor type wants to argue that they *should* value these things that’s just fine. It’s also an argument *against* paying tuition. If you want the bundle of stuff other than the paper, move to a college town and get it for free.