

The following material has been excerpted from Cuseo, et al. (2013). *Thriving in College & Beyond: Research-Based Strategies for Academic Success and Personal Development* (3rd ed.). Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt

Snapshot Summary

Why College Is Worth It: The Economic and Personal Benefits of a College Education

Less than 30 percent of Americans have earned a 4-year college degree. When individuals who attend college are compared with people from similar social and economic backgrounds who did not continue their education beyond high school, research reveals that college is well worth the investment. College graduates experience numerous long-lasting benefits, such as those summarized in the following list.

1. Career Benefits

- Career Security and Stability—lower rates of unemployment
- Career Versatility and Mobility—more flexibility to move out of a position and into other positions
- Career Advancement—more opportunity to move up to higher professional positions
- Career Interest—more likely to find their work stimulating and challenging
- Career Autonomy—greater independence and opportunity to be their own boss
- Career Satisfaction—enjoy their work more and feel that it allows them to use their special talents
- Career Prestige—hold higher-status positions (i.e., careers that more socially desirable and respected)

2. Economic Advantages

- Make better consumer choices and decisions
- Make wiser long-term investments
- Receive greater pension benefits
- Earn higher income: The gap between the earnings of high school and college graduates is *growing*. Individuals with a bachelor's degree now earn an average annual salary of about \$50,000 per year, which is 40 percent higher than high school graduates—whose average salary is less than \$30,000 per year. When these differences are calculated over a lifetime, families head by people with a bachelor's degree will take in about 1.6 million more than families headed by people with a high school diploma. That adds up to double the amount earned by those who complete only a high-school diploma.

“An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.”

—Ben Franklin, scientist, musician, inventor, political activist, and one of the founding fathers of the United States

3. Advanced Intellectual Skills

- Greater knowledge
- More effective problem-solving skills

- Better ability to deal with complex and ambiguous (uncertain) problems
- Greater openness to new ideas
- More advanced levels of moral reasoning
- Clearer sense of self-identity—greater awareness and knowledge of personal talents, interests, values, and needs
- Greater likelihood to continue learning throughout life

4. Better Physical Health

- Better health insurance—more comprehensive coverage and more likely to be covered
- Better dietary habits
- Exercise more regularly
- Lower rates of obesity
- Live longer and healthier lives

5. Social Benefits

- Higher social self-confidence
- Understand and communicate more effectively with others
- Greater popularity
- More effective leadership skills
- Greater marital satisfaction

6. Emotional Benefits

- Lower levels of anxiety
- Higher levels of self-esteem
- Greater sense of self-efficacy—believe they have more influence and control over their life
- Higher levels of psychological well-being
- Higher levels of personal happiness

7. Effective Citizenship

- Greater interest in national issues—both social and political
- Greater knowledge of current affairs
- Higher voting participation rates
- Higher rates of participation in civic affairs and community service

8. Higher Quality of Life for Their Children

- Less likely to smoke during pregnancy
- Provide better health care for their children
- Spend more time with their children
- More likely to involve their children in educational activities that stimulate their mental development
- More likely to save money for their children to go to college
- More likely that their children will graduate from college
- More likely that their children will attain high-status and higher-paying careers

“For the individual, having access to and successfully graduating from an institution of higher education has proved to be the path to a better job, to better health and to a better life”-
-College Board, *Coming to our senses: Education and the American future*.

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“A bachelor’s degree continues to be a primary vehicle of which one gains an advantaged socioeconomic position in American society.”

–Ernest Pascarella & Patrick Terenzini, *How College Affects Students*

Student Perspectives

“I noticed before when I wasn’t going to college, they [my family] didn’t look at me as highly as a person. But now since I have started college, everybody is lifting me up and saying how proud the [are] of me.”

–First-year student, quoted in Franklin, et al. (2002)

“Being a first-generation college student, seeing how hard my parents worked these past 18 years to give all that they can to get me to where I am now, I feel I cannot let them down. It is my responsibility to succeed in school and life and to take care of them in their old age.”

–First-year college student, quoted in Nuñez (2005)

“My 3-month old boy is very important to me, and it is important that I graduate from college so my son, as well as I, live a better life.”

–First-year student response to the question, “What is most important to you?”

“What I would change is what I did after high school. I would have continued with my education so I could have pursued my dreams earlier in life. That way I would have been able to offer more to myself, my wife and my kids.”

—28-year old sophomore response to the question, “What, if anything, would you change about your life if you could start all over again?”