

Are You Privileged Enough to Deserve a Degree?

Throughout high school, young adults are given constant reminders of the importance of higher education, especially the importance of the coveted bachelor's degree. Teachers, guidance counselors, and zealous parents all work hard to instill the value of a college degree into children's impressionable minds, convincing them that it is the best way to obtain a lifelong career. In a typical high school setting, the especially bright children are singled out and encouraged to take the fast track to a degree by taking higher level and post secondary classes during high school. While it is expected of the inherently bright children to attend and graduate college, should the same be expected for children of average intelligence? Should we continue to shove the idea of a four year degree down the throats of young people who may or may not have the ability or determination needed to obtain one? It can be assumed that, for many students, as long as determination is present in his or her repertoire of characteristics, so too is the potential for ability.

According to Charles Murray in his essay titled "Are Too Many People Going to College?" the only people who should attend college are those who receive high test scores. In his opinion, those who do not test well are simply not cut out for the rigorous course work involved in a college education. Murray states that less intelligent students will likely become overwhelmed with college and will ultimately drop out. While I do agree with a few of the points presented by Murray in his extremely opinionated essay, I disagree with his assertion that children with low standardized test scores should be discouraged from striving for a college degree.

Murray mentions that a fully formed liberal arts education is necessary for an

individual to be a productive member of society, which I wholeheartedly agree with. He refers to a broad liberal arts education as the building blocks of “core knowledge,” or the knowledge necessary for an individual to be an active, functioning member of society. However, Murray goes on to say that children should not have to wait until college to obtain such an education. He states that “K-8 are the right years to teach the core knowledge, and the effort should get off to a running start in elementary school” (Murray 224). In this viewpoint, Murray fails to address the issue of the disadvantages present in the lives of thousands of inner city public school children, who are represented by mostly low income and minority students. Children who attend inner city schools are, more often than not, given a sub par education. Many inner city children have the potential and the drive to be wonderful academic performers but they are not afforded the opportunity of having a quality education due to a poorly operated or underfunded school district.

Because of issues completely outside of the realm of a child’s control, many intelligent inner city children are not given a quality education that would be conducive to high standardized test scores, and are ultimately denied the liberal arts education that Murray so highly endorses. Under Murray’s argument, since these children are not able to obtain a solid liberal arts education, they will be unable to become productive citizens. Should they be punished for this disadvantage and denied the right to attend college? When one makes the statement that those who receive low test scores should not go to college, they are ultimately sending a message to America’s youth that only the privileged have the inherent right to work towards a bachelor’s degree. This type of an ideology will also be extremely detrimental to the cause of encouraging low income and minority groups to strive to improve their lives through education and will also drive a deeper wedge into the already divided class system that is painfully present in America. By encouraging children from inner city public schools to attend college, we will be encouraging them to obtain a liberal arts education, and therefore solidifying their chances of becoming a well rounded, contributing member of society.

I believe that any child or young adult who shows interest in college should be

encouraged to attend, regardless of test scores. In fact, drive and ambition are more beneficial to a college-bound student than intelligence alone. A college student who relies solely on his or her intelligence will likely fail if he or she lacks ambition. A hard-working student with average intelligence, but is determined and hard-working, is much more likely to tread the path to college success. If an eager high school student has dreams of having an occupation that requires a B.A., it would not be right to talk him or her out of it just because he or she has average to low grades and test scores. If a person is fervently discouraged from attending college and therefore not able to get a degree necessary for his or her desired occupation or 'dream' job, he or she will end up working a job that may cause lifelong dissatisfaction. It is not up to society to tell someone that he or she is not cut out for the task of pursuing his or her dream just because he or she is not intelligent enough. Spreading this potentially harmful doctrine would be a major disservice to a large portion of our nation's youth who are not categorized as 'talented and gifted'.

Test scores are simply not a good indication of intelligence or whether or not a person is 'college material'. Anyone can be college bound so long as they are literate and hardworking. The high drop out rate for American universities cannot be blamed entirely on the fact that average or below average level students are simply not cut out for college work. There are many, many factors that contribute to the dropout rate, but a lack of financial resources can be pinpointed as one of the top reasons for college students' withdrawal from school. Financial constraints do not discriminate between the intelligent or the unintelligent, and, unfortunately a high ACT score or IQ level cannot help an individual when their tuition bill is due.

For many, anything more than a part time job is an unmanageable addition to an already heavy college course load, so obtaining steady employment while enrolled in a university is extremely difficult, maybe even impossible for some. While scholarships are a big help for students who take the time and effort to complete their various requirements, college is still extremely expensive and many students drop out due to a lack of sufficient funds.

However, I agree with Murray that some people know at a very early stage in their life whether or not they want to continue their education after high school or if they want to immediately join the workforce. Those who choose to pursue a specific trade and show a strong interest in that should be encouraged to follow that path. If a person is fortunate enough to be so decisive in their life goals, especially at a young age, it would be wrong to try to force them down the college path. A young adult may have a high IQ and yet still decide to pursue a trade instead of going to college, and there is absolutely no shame in that if it is a choice made solely by the individual and not forced upon him or her due to someone else's belief that they lack the ability to attend college.

In conclusion, as a society, we can all work hard to ensure that the youth of this nation are fully aware of the benefits of obtaining a B.A. in addition to informing them of the struggles they may encounter if they do decide to attend college. By providing a realistic portrayal of the benefits and possible complications involved in obtaining a college degree, we are equipping children with the knowledge necessary to make an informed decision based upon their personal life circumstances.

I feel that discouraging any student who has shown interest in attending college is a judgment call that society does not have the right to make. While not all children who graduate high school want to or plan to continue their education, the ones who do should be afforded every opportunity possible in order to fulfill their life goals, whether they include vocational training or a college education.

Works Cited

Murray, Charles. "Are Too Many People Going to College?" *"They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing: With Readings"*. 2nd ed. Gerald Graff, Cathy Birkenstein and Russel Durst. New York: Norton, 2012. 222-242. Print.