

## Questioning whether you should go to college?

Here are five ways that a college education will make you a better person:

1. It will likely make you more prosperous.
2. It will give you a better quality of life.
3. It will give you the power to change the world.
4. It will be something you can pass on to your children.
5. It makes you a major contributor to the greatest nation on earth.

First things first, because I know you're thinking "Show me the money." The lifetime income of families headed by individuals with a bachelor's degree will be about \$1.6 million *more* than the incomes of families headed by those with a high-school diploma, according to the Postsecondary Education Opportunity Research Letter. The U.S. Census Bureau tells us that in 1999, average income for a male age 25 or over who holds a bachelor's degree was about \$61,000, compared to about \$32,000 for a male with a high-school diploma -- so the college graduate's income was about \$29,000 more annually than the high-school grad's. And incomes of those with only a high-school education are sinking steadily lower.

Now, unfortunately, women still make less money than men do, but the news for females who choose higher education is truly phenomenal: In a 1997 study, young women who had completed a bachelor's degree or higher earned *91 percent* more than young women with no more than a high-school diploma or GED.

A college education is an extraordinarily profitable investment. Every dollar spent on a young man's college education produces \$34.85 in increased lifetime income. Any Wall Street stockbroker would envy that kind of investment yield -- especially these days. You say you can't afford to go to college? The Postsecondary Education Opportunity Research Letter says you can't afford not to.

College may be expensive, but the only thing more expensive than getting a college education is *not* getting one. The income differential empowers you to make choices that enrich your life. Unlike most purchases, a college education appreciates in value instead of depreciating. And don't forget that there are ways to get around the high cost - scholarships, financial aid, community colleges, and emerging choices in distance learning that can enable you to take classes on your computer while also participating in the workforce.

John G. Ramsay, a professor at the Perlman Center, said that the credentials you gain with a college education "are about setting yourself apart, being employable, becoming a legitimate candidate for a job with a future. They are about climbing out of the dead-end job market, and achieving one of life's most difficult developmental tasks: independence from one's parents. Strong credentials trigger that magical set of middle class 'firsts,' " Ramsay said: "The first real-world job, the first non-student apartment, the first new car, and of course, the first loan payments. Weak credentials can be painful reminders of a string of misfortunes: poor advice, money problems, bad decisions, and wasted time."

Continued...page 2

Next, quality of life. Is there anyone who wouldn't like to live a longer, healthier life? Studies show that, compared to high-school graduates, college graduates have:

- longer life spans
- better access to health care
- better dietary and health practices
- greater economic stability and security
- more prestigious employment and greater job satisfaction
- less dependency on government assistance
- more continuing education
- greater participation in leisure and artistic activities
- more book purchases
- higher voting rates
- greater knowledge of government
- greater community service and leadership
- more volunteer work
- more self-confidence
- and less criminal activity and incarceration.

Thirdly, more money and greater quality of life aren't the only reasons for a college education. Children's Defense Fund director Marian Wright Edelman cautioned that "Once you have that college diploma in hand never work just for money or power. They won't save your soul or build a decent family or help you sleep at night." Edelman explains why this advice is so important: "We are the richest nation on earth, yet our incarceration, drug addiction, and child poverty rates are among the highest in the industrialized world. Don't condone or tolerate moral corruption, whether it's found in high or low places, whatever its color. . . Don't confuse legality with morality. Dr. [Martin Luther] King noted that everything Hitler did was legal. Don't give anyone the proxy for your conscience."

Cuban patriot Jose Marti once wrote: "Students are the ramparts and the strongest army of freedom. When liberty is in danger, a newspaper threatened, a ballot box in peril, the students unite . . . And arm in arm they go through the streets demanding justice, or they run printing presses in cellars for what they cannot say."

If you doubt that knowledge is power, consider the societies that have denied education to selected segments of the population. The Taliban in Afghanistan keeps women from having any power by outlawing their education, much as antebellum American society kept slaves from possessing power by denying them schooling.

Institutions of higher learning continue to be among the best venues for cultivating social change. The fourth point is that a college education is a legacy for your children. The idea of having children may be as remote to you as the international space station, but trust us, your college education will benefit your children - and not just so you can impress them with how well you play "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire."

Research shows that children of college-educated parents are healthier, perform better academically, and are more likely to attend college themselves than children of those with lower educational attainment.

Continued...page 3

Your education builds a foundation for your children - for our nation's children, and for the children of our global community -- which leads to the last point.

Education is the cornerstone of public progress.

Education is the essence of the democratic ideals that elevated the United States from a backward land of rebellious colonists to the greatest, most spirited, powerful and successful nation in the world.

And we are the greatest nation. America leads the world in educational attainment, and with only one exception, we lead in per-capita income. Speaking at a symposium on American values, Anne L. Heald said there is "an extraordinary consensus that the preparation of young people for work is one of the singular most important things a society can do to improve its ability to prosper in a new international economy."

Similarly, Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan said recently, "We must ensure that our whole population receives an education that will allow full and continuing participation in this dynamic period of American economic history."

What experts are saying is that, without college, you may be left out. And the relationship between a college education and success will become more and more significant in our information-driven global economy. Higher education will be increasingly important for landing high-paying jobs.

Technology and the information age are not the only reasons to be well educated; the trend is toward multiple jobs and even multiple careers, and higher education prepares you to make the transitions to new fields.

So what more could you ask of your investment in higher education than prosperity, quality of life, the knowledge that bolsters social change, a legacy for your children, and the means to ensure the continuing success of the American dream?