ACTIVITY 1.18 continued

Evaluating Claims and Reasoning

My Notes

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

What background details does the writer provide to set up the claim?

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

What are the major points in this opinion piece?

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Where does the writer bring up the counterclaim, and how does he develop it?

Opinion

Why College Isn't for Everyone

by Richard Vedder, April 09, 2012

A person who compares the annual earnings of college and high school graduates would no doubt conclude that higher education is a good investment—the present value of the college earnings premium (the better part of \$1 million) seemingly far outdistances college costs, yielding a high rate of return. But for many, attending college is unequivocally not the right decision on purely economic grounds.

First of all, college graduates on average are smarter and have better work habits than high school graduates. Those who graduated from college were better students in high school, for example. Thus, at least a portion of the earnings premium associated with college has nothing to do with college per se, but rather with other traits.

Second, a goodly proportion (more than 40 percent) of those attending four-year colleges full-time fail to graduate, even within six years. At some colleges, the dropout rate is strikingly higher. While college students sometimes still gain marketable skills from partial attendance, others end up taking jobs that are often given to high school graduates, making little more money but having college debts and some lost earnings accrued while unsuccessfully pursing a degree.

Third, not everyone is average. A non-swimmer trying to cross a stream that on average is three feet deep might drown because part of the stream is seven feet in depth. The same kind of thing sometimes happens to college graduates too entranced by statistics on averages. Earnings vary considerably between the graduates of different schools, and within schools, earnings differ a great deal between majors. Accounting, computer science, and engineering majors, for example, almost always make more than those majoring in education, social work, or ethnic studies.

Fourth, the number of new college graduates far exceeds the growth in the number of technical, managerial, and professional jobs where graduates traditionally have gravitated. As a consequence, we have a new phenomenon: underemployed college graduates doing jobs historically performed by those with much less education. We have, for example, more than 100,000 janitors with college degrees, and 16,000 degree-holding parking lot attendants.

Does this mean no one should go to college? Of course not. First of all, college is more than training for a career, and many might benefit from the social and non-purely academic aspects of advanced schooling, even if the rate of return on college as a financial investment is low. Second, high school students with certain attributes are far less likely to drop out of school, and are likely to equal or excel the average statistics.

Students who do well in high school and on college entrance exams are much more likely to graduate. Those going to private schools may pay more in tuition, but they also have lower dropout rates. Those majoring in some subjects, such as education or one of the humanities, can sometimes improve their job situation by double majoring or earning a minor in, say, economics.

My Notes

As a general rule, I would say graduates in the top quarter of their class at a high-quality high school should go on to a four-year degree program, while those in the bottom quarter of their class at a high school with a mediocre educational reputation should not (opting instead for alternative methods of credentialing and training).

Those in between should consider perhaps doing a two-year program and then transferring to a four-year school. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, but it is important for us to keep in mind that college is not for everyone.

Opinion

Actually, College Is Very Much Worth It

by Andrew J. Rotherham, May 19, 2011

Lately it's become fashionable—especially among the highly credentialed—to question whether it's really "worth it" to go to college. A recent report from the Harvard Graduate School of Education proposed deemphasizing college as the primary goal of our education system in favor of "multiple pathways" for students. Earlier this month, *New York Magazine* devoted almost 4,000 words to profiling venture capitalists (and college graduates) James Altucher and Peter Thiel and their efforts to convince Americans that they'd be better off skipping college. Thiel is even creating a \$100,000 fellowship for young people who agree to delay going to college in favor of an internship.

Make no mistake, there is widespread dissatisfaction with higher education. According to a new survey released by the Pew Research Center, only 40 percent of Americans felt that colleges provided an "excellent" or "good" value for the money. At the same time, 86 percent of college graduates still felt the investment was a good one for them.

To understand these competing views, you have to juggle a few different ideas at once. First, there are plenty of problems with higher education—poor quality, even at brandname schools, and out-of-control costs are two of the biggest. College presidents themselves shared some of these concerns and others with the Pew researchers. Second, it's true: College isn't for everyone. There are plenty of rewarding and important jobs and careers that do not require college. And due to the sluggish economy, there may in fact be more graduates than the current job market needs, or a temporary "college bubble." Jobs for recent grads are harder to find, and salaries are lower, but that won't last forever. And in spite of all of this, the data make clear that getting a college education is still a good idea—college graduates earn more, and are more likely to have a job in the first place—and is especially important for some Americans.

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