

Is a College Degree Right for You?

Four years is a very long time to spend doing something that you do not have a passion for. However, many college students are doing this as we speak. They are enrolling in courses and doing the minimum amount of work necessary to pass. I do not see the value in this. I have always had a passion for learning. Some subjects appeal to me more than others, but I always give my unconditional effort in attaining and being able to implement new information into my everyday life. College provides the opportunity to shape people into citizens who are educated and able to be an asset to society. If the opportunity is not taken advantage of and squandered away, then college becomes a waste of time and renders no benefits. Someone who shares similar views is Mark

Edmundson, author of "Education's Hungry Hearts," an essay which was first published in *The New York Times* in 2012. The main idea of his essay is that college is not for everyone; it is only a benefit to those who possess eagerness to pursue knowledge.

Edmundson begins his essay by disagreeing with the line "Everybody's got a hungry heart," from a song called "Hungry Heart" by Bruce Springsteen. Edmundson has been an English teacher for over thirty years, and his experience has taught him that all students do not have hungry hearts for education. Having a hungry heart means that a student is "curious, alive, and hungry to learn" (Edmundson 521). He argues that these days, when people discuss college they view it from an economic perspective. This means that they speak about it if it is going to provide a job that will make the person a respectable amount of money. Edmundson gives the examples of a car mechanic, flight attendant, home health care aide, limo driver, and security guard to show jobs that do not require a degree, and he says that society views college as a bad investment for people planning to perform these jobs. Edmundson argues that "There are plenty of young people out there who will end up in jobs that don't demand college degrees: yet college is still right for them" (521). He states that the best students are the ones who come with "energy to learn," they do not always have to be "the most intellectually gifted," or the most "cultured" (Edmundson 521-522). He supports this statement by alluding to a friend of his named Paul Rizzo. Paul had a hungry heart; he was very curious and eager to know things. Unfortunately, Paul did not do well on his SAT exam and because of this he did not receive the best education. Edmundson disagrees with this. Instead, he would like to see colleges admit the most motivated, the hardest workers, and those with a genuine curiosity about the world we live in (521-523). I agree because I believe that everyone who legitimately enjoys learning and wants to attain additional life skills should be given an equal opportunity to invest in higher education.

College is publicly thought of as an investment. I interpret an investment as money that is given to a certain source with the intent of future income or profit. Edmundson tells us that our society believes "If the money spent on college doesn't result in an actual cash advance, then you've made a mistake" (Edmundson 521). However, Edmundson does not see it that way. He states that "...it's true only for those students who showed up at college without... a hungry heart" (Edmundson 521). What he means is if you enroll in college with a mindset that you are seeking a job certification (the bachelor's degree), then you are really missing the whole point of college itself. I can agree with both perspectives although I lean toward Edmundson's a bit more. When I first applied to college my initial goal was to receive an education so that I could acquire a well-paying job or career. I now view it as a gateway to being a well-rounded person. I am constantly gaining knowledge in multiple subjects, I am learning to interact with a diverse group of people, and I am also learning skills that will be used regularly in my future occupation. I have a desire to learn and to be successful. If a person goes to college simply to pursue a career, then that person has wasted time and money because they are not taking advantage of every feature that college offers. Someone who sees college as merely a way to get money will likely not become a well-rounded person. In short, those with no hunger for life and learning will be sorely disappointed with their experiences in college. I see this in some of the students around me who are merely trying to get a degree to earn money rather than trying to understand how they fit into the great history and future of human kind. It makes me sad.

According to Edmundson anyone can have a hungry heart, even those who are not well prepared for college level academics. An enthusiasm for knowledge is all that is required. "What distinguishes [the hungry hearts] is that they take their lives seriously, and they want to figure out how to live them better," says Edmundson (522). Not everyone who goes to college has the same advantages; some are less fortunate than others. Sometimes they are slow thinkers and not the best writers, but these things can be improved upon. What cannot be taught, according to Edmundson, is the "...love for learning and openness to experience..." (522). As far back as I can remember I have had issues learning new material. In fact I continue to be a slow learner. I almost never learn material at the same pace as my peers. I have to teach myself so that I can learn at my own pace. Still I continue to give all my effort and I am always able to understand in the end. I also am very slow at taking exams, often being the last person finished. Nevertheless I do not allow this to discourage me. Students like these according to Edmundson are "...an amazing pleasure to teach..." (522). I am proud to say that I have a hungry heart, and I think this will lead me to the right career choice for me, not a list or prerequisites that I blindly, coldly go through for four years with no real interest at all with my eyes rolling all the way.

Ultimately not everyone will benefit from higher education. There are two questions to initially ask yourself when considering college. Am I going to benefit from this investment as a human being, or am I in it just for hopes of more money? If you are just in it for greater future earnings (potentially, remember), then you may want to reconsider. There are plenty of job certification programs out there. But if you are truly interested in learning, then you should view your liberal arts education as the greatest gift to yourself that you could ever give. Edmundson leaves us with one final thought: "Hungry Hearts-smart or slow, rich or poor- still deserve a place in the class" (523). Although it may have been difficult, I personally have gained a lot of knowledge and enjoyed my experience. If you have a hungry heart and decide to take the college route, I am sure you will enjoy yourself as well. If you don't have it, you should ask yourself why not.