

As the cost of a college education continues to rise, students are weighing the options that determine the meaning of success. With many alternatives to a higher education gaining popularity the question remains: is college worth it?

brian fogel ▼

art julia sanders

If Grace Jay-Benjamin, a high school graduate from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, had gone on to college, she says that the extreme cost and a lack of interest in the fields like engineering that usually lead to high-paying jobs would not have been beneficial.

With higher and higher post-undergraduate unemployment rates and the availability of online college, traditional education may be taking a hit.

As the cost for higher education in the United States rises, it may be much less beneficial to obtain a diploma only to fall into debt. Not every high school student is going into a field which offers high-paying jobs and low unemployment rates, so going into debt while trying to succeed in a career like music that may already have its cons, could spell disaster.

Even if many trades such as cooking and art may not even need a diploma for the job, the US Department of Education estimates that the average yearly cost at four-year colleges for students at public universities has increased by \$14,000 since 1981. Going to college and paying increasingly more money for an unnecessary degree is unwise when average student loan debt exceeds \$30,000 and may take ten years to pay off, as stated by the Institute for College Access and Success.

Not only are some degrees obsolete, but also many jobs that can be done without degrees, now require them. Georgetown University states that by 2020, jobs that require an associate's degree or more will be about 64 percent of the total employment options. By that token, very few people will be able to find a job that pays well and avoid extreme debt. For those who may be able to, a lot of ambition is required.

Exemplified by people like Mark Zuckerberg, Bill Gates and Michael Dell, the lack of a

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college degree doesn't necessarily hold back someone from becoming an extremely wealthy and productive individual. While these people are simply three men whose determination has led to great things despite the lack of a college degree, their success shows that there can be great accomplishment out of different life choices.

History can also defend success albeit higher-education. Andrew Jackson was the 6th president of the U.S., as well as an attorney, a military governor and a congressman, but he didn't have a college education. In addition, the great entrepreneur John D. Rockefeller Sr. also had not gone to college, yet he became the country's first billionaire. The key to financial success without higher education can most easily be attributed to entrepreneurship. Time spent working to build a business or develop an idea can potentially be as beneficial as any degree.

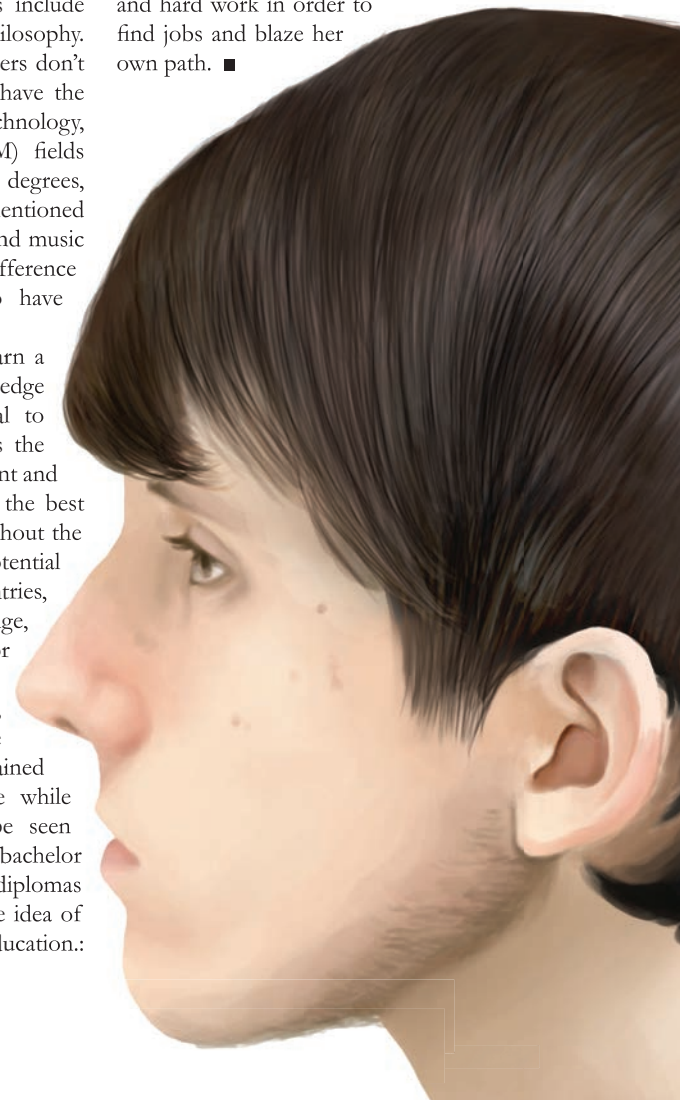
According to Forbes, the ten college majors with the highest unemployment rates include Photography, Film, History, and Philosophy. And the average salaries of those careers don't absolutely differ between those who have the degree and those who don't. Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields usually require bachelor or graduate degrees, but with many other of the aforementioned majors, even mechanical engineering and music performance, there is no significant difference in employment between those who have degrees and those who do not.

Spending four or more years to earn a piece of paper that validates one's knowledge of a subject matter may not appeal to everyone. If average salary is what is the definitive description of accomplishment and worth, then a college degree may be the best bet, but life can be just as fulfilling without the debt of college, albeit the lessened potential income. Spending time in foreign countries, working in various trades for the challenge, and traveling are all valid pathways for education, however unorthodox.

Apprenticeship may seem archaic, but it is still a large part of how the workforce is bred. The knowledge obtained from undivided hands-on experience while working with a higher-up should be seen on the same level as associate and bachelor degrees. If the trend of required diplomas continues to inflate, it may deform the idea of higher education from that of true education.: fulfillment of the thirst for knowledge.

Without the constraints of college debt and the amount of time that it may take, people similar to Jay-Benjamin will be able to spend time learning on their own, creating new ideas, and spearheading businesses. Spending four to six years experiencing the world through organizations like the Peace Corps, which has had record participation growth since 1961, can be entirely beneficial for someone to learn about the culture and problems of the rest of the globe. This worldwide non-profit received over 15,000 applicants in 2009 and has grown in numbers since that time.

Life is more than what college might provide. Viewing success as helping others and the freedom of those four years Jay-Benjamin didn't spend at college, she was able to volunteer for various organizations and experience new and enlightening things. For people like Jay-Benjamin, even though she hasn't become a billionaire, she has held onto the idea of intuition and hard work in order to find jobs and blaze her own path. ■



After Washington followed Colorado to become the first two states in the U.S. to legalize recreational marijuana, the country's drug policy is being pulled into the spotlight to evaluate whether or not it is too harsh.

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art jill monson

**F**armers can utilize marijuana to benefit society, and Ryan Loflin is one of many who understands that. Because he grows and harvests the cannabis plant for its “industrial” hemp every day, there is the chance that he could be caught for selling anything other than the male plant, which does not have recreational qualities. That causes problems if his material manufacturing business can't be fully legal.

Colorado legalized medical marijuana (the leaves and flowers of *Cannabis sativa*) in 2000, but what has triggered a lot of controversy is that Colorado law legalizing recreational marijuana for people 21 or older took effect on Jan. 1, 2014. This was a bold move that could change drug legislation for the entire country, possibly leading to the use of certain drugs for their benefits, like Loflin does, and giving people the opportunity for treatment instead of incarceration.

People with mental disorders aren't jailed for their afflictions, so people who have damaged their mind and body should be cared for and educated in the same way. Farmers aren't jailed for the crops they grow, so people reaping the industrial benefits of plants from which some drugs originate shouldn't be put in a cell either.

The U.S. outlawed marijuana in the 1920s as well as alcohol, but it was alcohol, the more debilitating drug which can lead to many cancers, that became legal again. Today, the U.S. does not even qualify to be on the list of top 20 countries with the highest alcohol consumption of adults per capita, according to the World

Health Organization. With the results of alcohol taxation, it's possible that other substances could do as well as it did. Marijuana kills on average, through instances of overdose, zero people yearly, according to oregon.gov. Understanding this makes it clear that the war on some drugs hurts the public more than it helps. If it's legal, it can be taxed, monitored and controlled. Even though those fighting for it to remain illegal say it is dangerous, prosecuting people for possession won't solve any problems, and the plant offers other uses that could create jobs for farmers.

**D**iverging from most other countries, Portugal stopped any criminalization of all drugs in July of 2001. The Global Drug Policy Program explains how Portugal treats drugs as a national health concern and no longer as a crime. In the U.S., only tobacco, alcohol and prescription drugs are legal, yet we have the highest incarceration rate of any country, with 716 people per 100,000 in prison, according to International Centre for Prison Studies. Of that number, about 48 percent are drug-related crimes. Portugal's incarceration rate per 100,000 is 137.

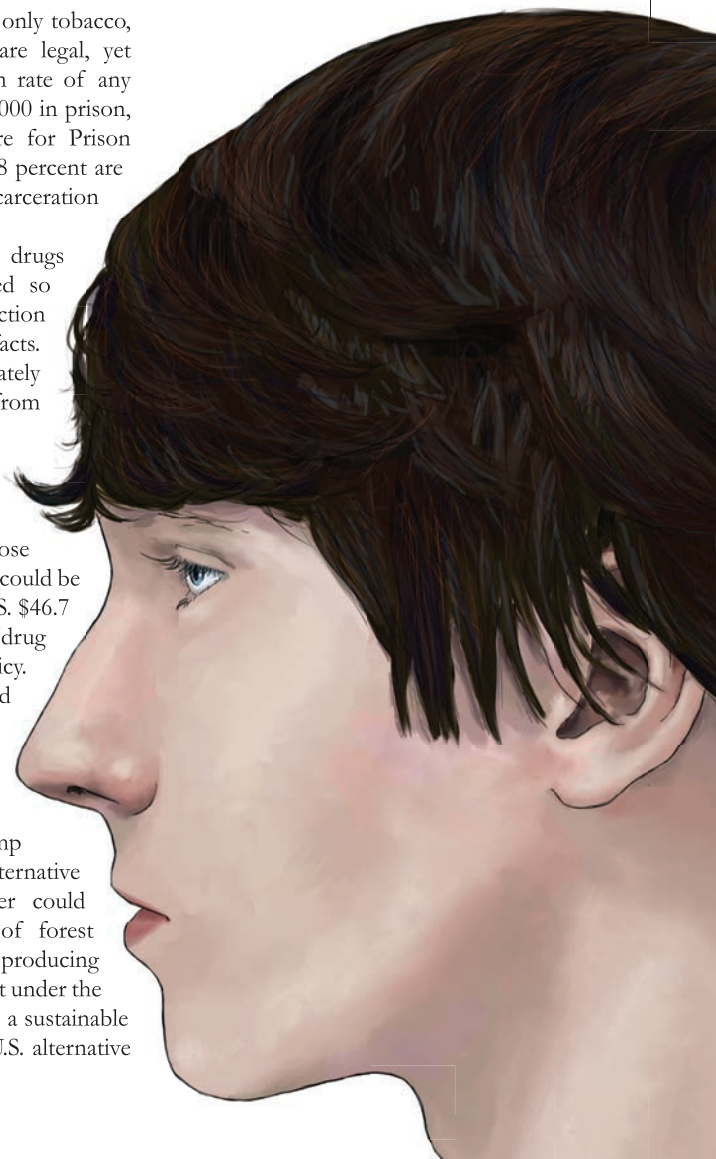
Other, much more harmful drugs should still be strictly monitored so people can receive help with addiction and become educated. Drugwarfacts.org reports that approximately 121,000 people die every year from any type of psychoactive drug or pharmaceutical drug. All drugs can be abused, but certain drugs like methamphetamine and cocaine have no other uses. Those drugs, even if they are so harmful, could be taxed like tobacco and save the U.S. \$46.7 billion annually if there was no “drug war,” according to drugpolicy.org. Others, such as marijuana and diacetylmorphine (heroin), have many medical and industrial uses.

Paper is made chiefly from trees, but the growth rate of hemp is far quicker, according to the Hemp Industries Association. Using alternative resources for textiles and paper could ultimately save a large amount of forest land in the U.S. and other paper producing countries like Portugal. What is lost under the cloak of marijuana being a drug is a sustainable material that would provide the U.S. alternative

resources. Legalization of marijuana would allow anyone to grow the plant for much more than its intoxicating leaves. Purdue University's Horticulture Department paper on hemp explains that the crop is extremely versatile and can be used for textiles, medicine (for which it is in some states), paper products, moulded plastics, parts for cars, hygiene products, construction and livestock feed, bedding and nutritional supplements.

Many drugs have been tied to crime and poverty, but the current “war on drugs” has not yielded the expected results. Our incarceration rate is the highest in the world, and the money wasted on that could be used to educate and treat people with these drugs problems. Instead, the money is only used to temporarily solve the issue. ■

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With the wide adoption of the Common Core in the United States and the rise in the annual number of SAT and ACT takers, whether testing has a positive or negative impact on the education system is in question.

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In high school, students are expected to take tests over course material very often, and on top of those general tests, there are standardized exams and graduation tests. Separate from those mandatory standardized tests, there are the ACT, SAT and other standardized college admission tests for these students. Even more so, at East there have been multiple administrations of Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) tests and Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) tests. While there must be some feasible way to determine how well students are learning and whether teachers are doing what they need to, there can be little improvement if these teenagers' high school career is more about taking a test to see how they're learning rather than learning itself. How students learn is also something to consider in standardizing education, which correlates to the psychological studies of psychologists Robert Sternberg and Howard Gardner, who are known for their very different ideas of intelligence.

New tests to evaluate the progress of students from middle school through high school doesn't benefit the students. With the MAP tests, no grades for school are attached, so there is a difficulty in getting students motivated. The purpose is to "map" the progress of students, and this information is used to either assess teachers or the schools' performance. Unlike colleges and certain private schools that have very few exams over the course of a year, public high schools have constant testing taking time from the education students need. It's vital

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that educational time be solely for the growth of students, not the tracking of growth.

There's a fundamental problem with an education system that funds testing to compete with other schools. Many private universities place too much emphasis on high SAT or ACT scores when accepting students because they know there will usually be more student wealth associated with high scores.

**B**esides the fundamental issues of standardized testing and their frequency, many aspects of intelligence cannot be measured by multiple choice tests on computers or Scantron. Testing, in general, has been adopted as a substitute for learning but is, in fact, a hinderance. Skills such as public speaking, leadership in groups and deadline adherence cannot simply be assessed with exams. New testing that will be phased into curriculum by the Common Core brings up the debate between Sternberg and Gardner. Sternberg holds there to be three types of intelligence that encompass any learning style, while Gardner believes there are eight or nine different types of intelligence. These men disagreed on what kinds of intelligences there are, but they both agree that there are different learning styles. If a person is good at leading an organization, what Sternberg would call practical intelligence, there won't be a standardized test to show the growth this person may have.

Not only is a standardized approach to testing inapplicable to many students, but there is also much pressure put on them and teachers. According to The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented at the University of Connecticut, standardized testing programs have many effects on people. These researchers' experiments have shown that drill-like teaching and authoritarian attitudes increased with testing, and the emphasis on studying test material was increased weeks prior to the day of testing then abruptly ended afterwards.

If students are pressured since middle school to do well on tests so they can do well in high school, on college admission tests and on college exams in order to get a degree, there is little space in between for the real learning

experience. There has to be a time when school districts aren't worried about their ranking and more worried about teaching students valuable information for life. Including progress tests as early as middle school is showing students that countless tests are going to be around for a while and that the pressure of fitting into a standard mold of intelligence will become normal and part of adult life.

For students who do well on these various tests, while they may be very intelligent, getting standardized grades could give them false pride. Much of the curriculum is being taken over by testing, and the students won't be having the true educational time that enables them to learn the skills they need to succeed in the world. ■

