

GEN Y WORLDVIEW

A college degree: worthwhile?

BY JESSE HART

College enrollment numbers are up, but success stories remain roughly the same as decades past. In my experience and in most others in my generation with whom I have talked to about this subject, only a small handful of college graduates actually go into and stay in the area in which they majored. Most substantial financial and/or creative successes come from people who either dropped out or never went to college in the first place. For example, take Bill Gates or Steve Jobs—the artists of the computer-creating world. When Gates and Jobs realized that they felt even more passionately about their art than their professors did, they dropped out of college and followed a dream. They never listened to the naysayers who told them they were going down the wrong path. Look what resulted—without a college degree.

What do we tend to tell the “responsible” youth to do after high school? “Go to college or get a job/career.” All but a few of us fall into doing one category or the other, with a few brave souls who throw the system away all together and become nomads. I was one who went straight to the University of Oregon and, from age 18 to 21, I worked toward a Bachelors of Science in digital art (or a BS in graphic design for short—pun intended), graduating right into the economic decline in 2008.

Then I did the other responsible thing and used my degree to get a job. You would think that my degree was the key to success; the key to happiness. Sadly incorrect. Turning my art into a job turned

my home and creative drive into work. With my toy now a tool, I had to work with business clients who changed their minds whenever the wind picked up and would not listen to someone who knew art but not business. This quickly depleted the beauty and creativity from what I loved.

Like many of my generation, I tried the nomad thing and enjoyed that much more—and learned a lot more about myself, others and the world in general. Eventually, though, I felt I had to “get serious” and, well, go back to school. But it took less than one year back into college, for a second degree or a masters, for me to see the writing on the wall. And the “writing” stated that I was a customer buying from a business—one that gives little to no guarantee of the quality of their product or the results you will get from it. To add insult to injury, the majority of students leave college with heavy debt, no degree and no motivation. You will get out of what you put into life, at a university or elsewhere.

Here are some statistics that back up my own experience:

- “... [in 2011] for 100 students who enrolled in a public college, 71 chose a community college, 45 enrolling full time and 26 part time; after four years, only 14 of the full-time students and one part-time students graduated.” (www.nytimes.com)
- Southern Oregon University graduation rates (www.collegeresults.org):

Four-year graduation rate: 13.4%
Five-year graduation rate: 26.9%

Six-year graduation rate: 30.9%

I have concluded that I can base my entire reputation on these two truths:

1. Is a college degree necessary for a good and happy life? No, hell no.
2. Is an education necessary for a good and happy life? Yes, heavens yes.

Unless you have a specific passion and drive for a profession that absolutely requires you to have a specific degree, you may choose to stay out of the downward spiraling debt and do what you desire to do or learn about another possibility and where to start. Believe in yourself and you will find a way; it works every time (that is, if you never give up). Social networks on the World Wide Web connect us vastly better than a university, and they are considerably cheaper. You do need some discipline, but that comes quite easily if you have interest in what you are learning.

Through both my collegiate and personal studies in psychology, philosophy and even mysticism, I can plainly see that human beings learn and adapt to a new environment best when they are having fun; when life is a game rather than a job.

Next time you are stressing about yourself or a loved one getting an education, remember that life itself is an education and somehow things always tend to work out with or without a degree. And



Turns out that the author's University of Oregon diploma wasn't flame-retardant. Just like all “businesses” of higher education, there's no guarantee of a job, just debt.

things tend to work out best when we are passionate and loving about a subject.

What about you other Gen Yers out there? Send me your thoughts and experiences.

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