



25 Ways to Make College Pay Off: Advice for Anxious Parents from a Professor Who's See It All

Bill Coplin

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College is not easy. Staying in and studying when your friends are out having a good time is not easy. Giving up a summer on the beach for an internship is not easy. Getting a good job is not easy. For you as the parent of a college student, paying the bills is not easy. Seeing your child graduate with no direction and with few skills to function in today's highly competitive modern economy is not easy. Your child needs guidance, and you can provide it. This book is designed to be an easy to use, step-by-step guide to help you help your children use their college to prepare for a satisfying career. Here are the gruesome statistics: about 40 percent of students do not graduate from four year programs in six years; only 20 percent of employers say that college graduates are ready for the workforce; about 40 percent of those who graduate college get a job that will allow them to move out of the house permanently; and, less than 28 percent of American adults have a four year undergraduate degree.

I'm not going to sugar coat this information and tell you that little Timmy and Susie will find an excellent job with amazing benefits and stellar opportunity for advancement the moment the diploma is in their hands. That attitude is not going to help anyone and is the reason so many college graduates end up at home, living off minimum wage with little direction or prospect of career success. This book is a strong dose of tough love, which is exactly what I expect you will give your kids once you read the 20 ways to make your child's education pay off. You will become more than just the one who pays the bills or nags about grades. This book provides you with a rational approach which will reduce stress and anxiety for both you and your child over whether or not your huge financial and emotional investment will pay off. In discussing my previous book with parents, "10 Things Employers Want You to Learn in College", I realized that writing directly to students was not enough. Students rarely bought the book; their parents and relatives did. Even more disconcerting was the frequent statement made by parents, "Let's see if I can get Johnny to read the book." Moreover, I realized that parents approached their children in a variety of counter-productive ways. It was as if they were at the race track, spending their money and watching from the sidelines. Their primary activity was cheering for high grades or letting go with a torrent of four letter words when the students appeared to be faltering. Parents have to become investors, rather than gamblers, in their children's college education. This book suggests a "no-nonsense" approach toward your child's college experience. You may find it difficult to pursue all of the book's recommendations. Like any self-help book, you can pick and choose from the advice provided here; however, following through on the specific guidelines provided throughout the book will make a huge difference in your child's success. As a main player in your child's college experience, your general goal should be to help your child use college to pursue two specific goals: to develop skills employers want and to explore a variety of career paths. Employers want skillful and hardworking people who have a sense of where they are going with their work life, and since they can't find them, success is practically guaranteed if your child is one of those savvy and determined people.

The simplicity of the message is deceiving, but as Voltaire said, "Common sense is not so common." In my 40 years of teaching and advising students, I have found it very difficult to get students to focus on their skill development and career exploration. Students frequently ask me, "what should I major in" and I respond, "It doesn't matter as long as you get the skills and explore career options." Invariably, the next question from the student is "if I major in x, will I get a good job?" Students are so fixated on the degree and the GPA that they fail to understand that it's a general set of professional skills and some understanding of career options that will lead to career success. They look at me like I'm crazy, but suddenly, as they get great jobs right out of

college and their friends don't, it magically makes sense. This book is not about finances, dealing with roommate problems, how to get good grades or how to get admitted to the best graduate schools. Many other books and web sites are available for such purposes, and I encourage you to check them out.

This book is about how to help your children maximize their college experiences and gain the skills needed to pursue a satisfying career, with or without graduate school. The primary audience for this book is parents whose children are planning to attend a traditional four year undergraduate program; however, much of it can be applied to those planning to attend two year programs or vocational post-secondary programs. Using my 20 guidelines, you will give your children an advantage over those who are confused, discouraged and overwhelmed by the prospects of finding, let alone moving into, a satisfying career path. Those unfortunate students may eventually find a viable path, but not without greater cost, more anxiety and years of delay.

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Rhonda Lanham:

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