

Colleges Can Kill Creativity By Offering One-Size-Fits-All Education

July 11, 2018 [By Steven Maxwell](#)

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(While I HEARTILY recommend college for the potential of intellectually broadening one's perspective, this article points out the down-side of believing everything presented. Remember, most subjects being taught in colleges, or any school, are the result of human interpretations of human-developed theories of existence or endeavor with the ultimate objective of getting the student a job working for someone else! Most true learning comes from "following your muse"... following your innate wisdom, your personal intuition, concerning "your path". ~ Don Chapin)



With student debt at [record levels](#) (and a more aggressive approach to collecting those loans), combined with a diminishing guarantee of employment in their field upon graduation, more people than ever are closely evaluating the financial realities of college in the 21st century.

However, even the core aspect of a college education — acquiring the fundamentals of learning and the development of useful real-world skills and creativity — is also worthy of closer scrutiny.

By way of disclosure, I did graduate from a well-known university in the late '90s. The following observations, criticisms and benefits of college life are not intended to dissuade *everyone* from attending college or steering their own children away from formal education, only to do so with open eyes and an open mind about current trends and what can likely be acquired from our so-called institutions of higher learning.

In my experience, college attendance helped greatly with social skills, work ethic, and network building. As an only child, I often found myself living in my own world, on my own schedule and with little need for the type of collaboration that became essential for my later success in the real world. However, it didn't take me long to realize that some of the useful aspects of having a solid structure were also rigid and confining for someone with a creative and especially entrepreneurial spirit.

The entire college apparatus seemed to reinforce the repetition of learning from past generations rather than the forging of new ideas and new applications for a world that I could see changing at an increasingly rapid pace. Moreover, **the nature of “getting a degree” is to narrow one’s focus into a single area of study rather than gain a breadth of disciplines and skills that I felt would be most useful in an expanding world, both geographically and economically.**

(It was this last statement that dissuaded me from accepting an offered engineering PhD from the University of Dayton when I retired from the USAF. I had dealt with a wide range of technologies in my last military assignment and the thought of

narrowing-down and defining one technology for a dissertation was anathema. When the USAF offered a Master's degree right after I had earned a bachelor's degree and at the same school, they declined my desire for an MBA but I went along with an aerospace engineering curriculum which I wound up with. Much later, long after military retirement, I earned a PhD in sociology, fulfilling my need for diversity and broadening horizons. ~ Don Chapin)

In order to stave off the boredom from what I perceived was a limited approach to learning, I began to seek opportunities from the same boredom and lack of motivation I saw in my fellow students. I decided to make use of a bit of entrepreneurship I actually began in high school for the very same reason — I would [write papers for other students](#). I remembered in high school that I often had fulfilled assignments without ever attending a given class, simply working from the topic and basic points to be addressed. The irony was that they nearly always resulted in A's ... mainly for their creativity, probably due to incorporating outside research instead of the rote regurgitation of the teacher's lessons.

Even with my newly expanded knowledge (and wallet) from researching and writing about everything from science to metaphysics to religion, sports medicine, psychology, literature, history, philosophy and more, I barely made it through without completely dropping out along the way. **College seemed to be one big bureaucracy designed to produce bureaucratic thinking.**

Perhaps this is why many of our most revered world talents actually *did drop out of college*. When one examines [the list](#) of famous college dropouts, it is interesting to note how many of them give credit to creativity and outside-the-box thinking above raw intelligence or scholastic achievement for their real-world accomplishments. Comprised of a diverse group from engineers to computer mavens to musicians, emphasis is placed on individuality, independence, non-conformity and work ethic above course selection and “making the grade.”

Such is the trend toward breaking the mold of traditional education that PayPal co-creator, Peter Thiel, even [developed a Fellowship](#) for

those who would NOT attend college. The larger social movement is called [UnCollege](#) and is perfectly exemplified by the story of one of the recipients of the Thiel Fellowship, 19-year-old Dale J. Stephens, who states in [“College is a Waste of Time”](#):

Our creativity, innovation and curiosity are schooled out of us.

Failure is punished instead of seen as a learning opportunity. We think of college as a stepping-stone to success rather than a means to gain knowledge. College fails to empower us with the skills necessary to become productive members of today’s global entrepreneurial economy.

Learning by doing — in life, not classrooms — is the best way to turn constant iteration into true innovation. We can be productive members of society without submitting to academic or corporate institutions. We are the disruptive generation creating the “free agent economy” built by entrepreneurs, creatives, consultants and small businesses...

Dale’s statements are more than a promotional pitch for a new form of education; they comprise the reality of living in a world where nearly all of the world’s information is available on the Internet for free ... and just a click away. It also addresses the fact that **our modern global economy rewards innovation, flexibility and adaptability rather than the rigorous maintenance of a single discipline and a single job for the duration of one’s adulthood.** My own father’s long tenure with a single corporation for his entire working life appears to be a bygone era — yet the very same method of learning that he experienced was being used to instruct me and continues to be used more than 20 years later than that!

When we look at the trends in digital media, automation, and the decentralization of products and services, it becomes apparent that we have been transitioning from a jobs economy to a skills economy. The great news for those who are considering removing the blinders of rigid education in the pursuit of a more diverse skill set is that there is more choice and more opportunity than ever before to become a success of your own design.

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