BOWLING GREEN DAILY NEWS

Want to be happier? Don't rob a bank, just go to college!

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Higher education has been under attack lately as many are questioning the value of pursuing a degree. Is it worth the time, effort and expense? With the return-on-investment be significant?

As is usually the case, it's complicated. Is college for everyone? Of course not. Neither is skydiving. There are many paths you can pursue in life and college is only one potential option.

The world also needs plumbers, electricians and pole dancers.

But it is important you be aware of the facts when deciding whether to pursue a degree. That's where I can be of assistance.

So before you make a decision that could affect the rest of your life in ways you probably haven't even thought about, consider the following:

College graduates are more likely to be employed. In 2025, for adults between the ages of 25 and 64, 70.3 percent of high school graduates were employed, compared to 84.1 percent of those with at least a bachelor's degree. The overall unemployment rate for adults with at least a bachelor's degree was 2.6 percent, compared with 4.3 percent for high school graduates.

Want a job? Don't peruse the want ads, just go to college!

College graduates earn more. In 2024, median earnings for early career bachelor's degree recipients ranged from $44,000 a year for performing arts majors to $87,000 for computer science majors. For those in mid-career, median earnings ranged from $55,000 for elementary education majors to $120,000 for computer science and mechanical engineering majors.

Want to make more money? Don't invest in bitcoin, just go to college!

By-the-way, the break-even age (the age at which cumulative earnings of college graduates exceed those of high school graduates) is 30 for traditional-age students who receive the average amount of grant aid, pay net tuition and fees, and buy books and supplies for four years.

The percentage of full-time year-round workers age 35 to 44 earning $100,000 or more ranged from 4 percent of those without a high school diploma and 13 percent of high school graduates to 40 percent of those with just a bachelor's degree and 58 percent for those with graduate degrees. Among advanced degree holders, 34 percent earned $150,000 or more.

Want to make a LOT of money? Don't play the lottery, just go to college!

College reduces reliance on public assistance. In 2024, 4 percent of adults age 25 and older with a bachelor's degree lived in poverty, compared with 13 percent of high school graduates and 23 percent of those without a high school diploma. Moreover, 10 percent of adults with a bachelor's degree received Medicaid, compared with 29 percent of high school graduates and 44 percent of those without a high school diploma.

Want to be self-sufficient? Don't sit with a sign at the intersection, just go to college!

College graduates vote at significantly higher rates than their less educated peers. In the 2024 presidential election, for example, 76 percent of 25-to-44-year-old U.S. citizens with at

least a bachelor's degree voted, compared to only 42 percent of high school graduates in the same age group.

Want to protect democracy? Don't become a poll worker, just go to college!

College graduates are more civic-minded. Among adults aged 25 and older, 10 percent of those without a high school diploma and 17 percent of those with a high school diploma volunteered in 2023, compared with 38 percent of those with a bachelor's degree and 49 percent of those with an advanced degree.

Want to be more invested in your community? Don't run for office, just go to college!

College graduates are more likely to be covered by health insurance. In 2024, 66 percent of those with a bachelor's degree and 68 percent of those with advanced degrees age 25 and older working full time year-round were covered by employer-provided health insurance, compared with 51 percent of high school graduates in the same category.

Want health insurance? Don't purchase your own policy, just go to college!

College graduates exercise more. In 2024, 53 percent of 25-to-34-year-olds with at least a bachelor's degree reported exercising vigorously at least once a week, compared to 29 percent of high school graduates.

Want to stay in shape? Don't join a gym, just go to college!

College graduates are less likely to smoke. Smoking rates among college graduates are significantly lower than those among adults with a high school diploma or less. Between 2022 and 2024, 4 percent of adults age 25 and older with a bachelor's degree or higher smoked, compared with 17 percent of adults with a high school diploma or less.

Want to stop smoking? Don't invest in patches, just go to college!

College graduates are less likely to be overweight. Between 2021 and 2023, among adults aged 20 and older, 45 percent of those with a high school diploma or less were obese, compared to 32 percent of those with at least a bachelor's degree.

Want to lose weight? Don't go on a diet, just go to college!

Not that I'm biased or anything, but before you decide based on your Uncle Jason's misconceived notions about the value of a college degree, take some time to educate yourself.

Please note that the data for this column come from the College Board's "Education Pays 2026: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society," which is accessible at: https://research.collegeboard.org/media/pdf/education-pays-2026-full-report.pdf. The years indicated are the latest for which statistics are available.



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