

"SEVEN YEARS OF COLLEGE DOWN THE DRAIN!"

by Parley E. Acker

— John Belushi (Bluto), *Animal House*

SOME OF MY COLLEGE CLASSMATES were just like Bluto – and most of them are “whereabouts unknown” these days, or have become politicians (just kidding). Actually, most of my college friends were good students whose parents were proud that they were getting an education from a reputable private college. However, as I reflect back, I can recall only a handful who were sure of what they wanted to do when they graduated. I recall many of them changing majors more than once, which required additional tuition for added coursework. One of my football teammates decided to be a History major because it was (apparently) “the easiest and required the least amount of work.” A fraternity buddy of mine chose his major while in line to sign-up for classes based upon his desire to “avoid afternoon classes;” you can’t make this stuff up! All cases like these have one thing in common, the absence of choosing a course of study based upon a thorough understanding of one’s talents, interests and goals – which does not require a lot of time to figure out, by the way.



It is not uncommon for many students to fail to graduate on time or to graduate without really knowing what they want to do for a living. I find this profoundly disturbing because the cost of a college education can exceed \$100,000. Hours upon hours can be spent studying classical Greek philosophers but the time invested to choose a well-matched course of study is often zero, zilch, nada.

Some students don’t know what they want even when “they know what they want.” For example, one of my clients decided to major in Accounting because she felt that “Accounting was a job that paid well and her friend liked the professor” (even though she found math difficult and boring). Some pick (or avoid) a major based upon

perceived income potential, but then pick something that is a terrible fit. This often leads to multiple coursework changes once the student discovers the mismatch – like the intuitive student who enjoys working with people, who after three years of study (suddenly) discovers that “yeah, maybe computer programming is not a good fit!”

I believe that sending your child to college without well-thought-out career options in mind is like buying a house without seeing it; you may get lucky, but you may wind up with foundation problems or you may need to completely re-model. I’ve heard many parents say, “I just want to get them into a good school and they will figure out the rest.” The fact is, “the figuring out part” (the most important part) is usually left open. Colleges are not primarily focused on helping students figure out what they want to do. Colleges are designed to encourage students to choose a major and fulfill the requirements for that major. However, most colleges do have a career center that can help your student choose a path that fits, but they have to ask for help. Specifically, make sure they ask for a career discovery process that involves some career interest/personality testing and one-on-one counseling (not simply providing them with test results). The goal is to uncover career options where the day-to-day work is aligned with strengths, interests and goals.

Merely attending college is no guarantee of success and happiness. If one is working or studying in an area that does not draw upon one’s gifts and interests, I believe the best one can hope for is mediocre success and happiness. If your college student is not absolutely excited and optimistic about their course of study and their future career, ask them why. After all, \$50,000 or more is a lot of money to spend on four years of bad cafeteria food, toga parties and 1700 hours of high-priced classes that “might” be a good fit.



Parley Acker is a Career Coach and President of *CareerWon*, a firm based in Coppell, TX 214.295.8395 • www.careerwon.com