

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://chronicle.com/article/What-Is-College-For-/138683/>. The page title is "THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION" with the date "August 30, 2015". The navigation menu includes "Home", "News", "Global", "Opinion & Ideas", "Facts & Figures", "Blogs", "Advice", "Forums", and "Jobs". A search bar is present with the text "Search The Chronicle" and a "Go" button. The article title is "What Is College For?" and it is categorized as "Commentary". The date is "April 22, 2013" and there are "Comments (30)". The article text begins: "Lately there has been a great deal of discussion about the importance of measuring a college's 'return on investment.' Is the point of a college education quantifiable results or personal and intellectual growth? In pursuit of answers, *The Chronicle* asked a selection of higher-education leaders." A sidebar titled "Most Popular" lists four items: "1. What People Are Saying About the O'Bannon Ruling", "2. Minimum-Wage Work Alone Won't Get You Through College", "3. 50 Years of Stupid Grammar Advice", and "4. These Videos Could Change How You Think About".

Phyllis M. Wise

Chancellor of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a vice president of the University of Illinois

Should we be preparing students for the work force, or should we be preparing them for lifelong learning? The answer is, "Yes."

We must provide students with the tools and skills necessary for gainful employment. However, data suggest that today's graduates will have three different professions during their lives. It is our responsibility, therefore, to teach students how to learn, how to find information, and how to work collaboratively across disciplines and cultures. In a global economy where our interactions are no longer bound by geography, cross-cultural understanding and communication are essential.

In college, students establish the intellectual foundations for their careers, and it is when they have the freedom to explore paths their lives might take. It is the rare student who comes to us with a clear life map already in hand. We can put choices in front of students, but we must do so in an academically structured manner.

It is important to teach students a body of knowledge—the "facts" of a discipline. One cannot pursue any profession without understanding the principles of it. Good universities find a balance where students are free to form their long view of the world while at the same time acquiring the knowledge and skills to pursue a rewarding profession. We fail when we force students to choose a college experience where they must pick one or the other.

We prepare students for the jobs and the careers that will emerge and grow and change in the next 20 years—perhaps in industries not yet conceived. These aren't job skills—these are life lessons. And these are the lessons college must teach.

Carolyn A. (Biddy) Martin

President of Amherst College

College is for the development of intelligence in its multiple forms. College is the opportunity for achievement, measured against high standards. College is preparation for the complexities of a world that needs rigorous analyses of its problems and synthetic approaches to solving them. College is for learning how to think clearly, write beautifully, and put quantitative skills to use in the work of discovery. College is for the cultivation of enjoyment, in forms that go beyond entertainment or distraction, stimulating our capacity to create joy for ourselves and others. College is for leave-taking, of home and of limiting assumptions, for becoming self-directed, while socially responsible.

In his 2005 commencement speech at Kenyon College, the brilliant writer and Amherst graduate David Foster Wallace ('85), defined the value of the liberal arts in the following terms: "The real, no bullshit value of your liberal-arts education is how to keep from going through your comfortable, prosperous, respectable lives dead, unconscious, a slave to your head and to your natural default settings."

For all the tragic irony of Wallace's point, given his own premature death, his admonition holds. A spate of recent books have enjoined us to distinguish between our natural default settings and our ability to reason on the basis of evidence—between what Daniel Kahneman calls, for example, our "fast" and "slow" thinking, or the automatism housed in one part of our brain and the ability to reflect in another.

College is for finding a calling, or many callings, including the calls of friendship and love. It is for the hard work of experimentation, failure, reflection, and growth. It is about the gains we make and the losses that come with them. In an age of sound bites and indignation, college is for those who are brave enough to put at risk what they think they know in recognition of the responsibility we have to one another and to those still to come.

Walter M. Kinbrough
President of Dillard University

Recently I watched my students debate the legitimacy of the Student Government Association election. For hours that night, following days of talks, well-written position statements, and proposals, these students practiced citizenship. They applied concepts from the classroom to discuss an issue that affected leadership opportunities and students' rights.

Where else can emerging adults develop these skills in an environment that challenges and supports them? Their peers not in college can theoretically have these experiences by participating in school-board or city-council meetings, but generally they work low-paying jobs that require long hours, prohibiting participation. In addition, trying to get a word in edgewise among the elders (or even being acknowledged by them) essentially keeps them on the sidelines.

Several years ago David Hodge, president of Miami University, described the campus as a place where intellectual collisions can occur. That's our purpose! Colleges are places where students learn and grow through intellectual collisions in and out of class, with professors, staff, and peers, and where the community comes for similar experiences.

I understand costs. With almost 75 percent of my students Pell Grant recipients, we have a high population of low-income students. And yet my students need these collisions more than do students whose families can provide exposure. I value technology and the revolution of online degrees and MOOCs, but these forms of delivery cannot replicate this environment. As the columnist Bill Maxwell recently wrote, they do not nurture the whole student.

College, primarily providing an intellectual foundation for a chosen profession, is still a great place to make lifelong friends, meet a spouse, develop professional networks, and discover mentors. It facilitates intellectual, professional, and personal collisions, all of which have value.

Or to modify a popular commercial: "College collisions? Priceless."

John C. Hitt
President of the University of Central Florida

I went to college because it was one of my father's great ambitions for me. He passed away when I was 15, and my mother impressed upon me my father's desire that I attend college.

So I enrolled at Austin College, a private liberal-arts school in Sherman, Tex. That decision has made all of the difference in my life, giving me opportunities to grow intellectually and emotionally. And that is the true power and gift of higher education—it transforms lives.

I have often joked that when I arrived at Austin College I could not spell psychology, my eventual major. But outstanding faculty mentors helped me to develop my potential. College sharpened my love of history, and I continue to be an eager reader of historical fiction and nonfiction books. It also taught me the value of analysis and how to think critically.

College is also a place to learn about yourself. Student government and choir were means for some of my friends to mature. For me, it was football. As an offensive lineman, I learned the power of persistence, the rewards of hard work, and the hard lesson that one doesn't always win.

My experience as the first member of my family to attend college also has led me to value access as a goal for the University of Central Florida. At UCF, approximately one of every four students is the first in her or his family to attend college. Imagine how their lives, the lives of their families, and the quality of life in Central Florida will be transformed by their earning a college degree.

A generation ago, my college experience helped fulfill my father's dreams for me. Today, higher education remains the best way for parents to transform dreams into reality for their children.

Joseph R. Urgo
President of St. Mary's College of Maryland

"College" is a cultural shorthand for "what follows high school" when children emerge as adults in the United States.

If we were more systemic and less individualistic about it, we'd register all high-school graduates in a national draft system wherein young people's talents and interests would be matched to national needs: immediate employment, vocational or professional training for specific occupations, military service, an academic track into a liberal-arts program for longer-term preparation—and each route would contain its own range of options. (We might include a national-service program among the pathways, as that idea has been championed over the decades.)

College is for students to decide what and how they want to contribute to society, to the economy, to their communities, and to the well-being of their families. America has a vital national purpose and possesses one of the world's most compelling histories. That history is deeply rooted in individualism, and it is at the level of individual success that our most dramatic examples of what America has accomplished are told.

American civilization thrives on the diverse ways by which its citizens may contribute to the national purpose, which the inclusive term "college" signals. Our history is at the same time heroically collective: We have achieved great things by reaching agreement on our sense of the future, from civil rights to national highways to explorations in space. The current identity crisis in higher education is due in part to a confusion between competition among institutions, which is our method of improving, and our shared mission to prepare young Americans for productive and meaningful lives.

Higher education—from vocational training to the most sophisticated methods of research, creativity, and experimentation—is the engine of American civilization's national purpose.

Charles G. Lief
President of Naropa University

"The kind of education we need begins with the recognition that the crisis of global ecology is first and foremost a crisis of values, ideas, perspectives, and knowledge, which makes it a crisis of education, not one in education."
—David W. Orr, *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect*

The current political dialogue about higher education is fueled by sound bites: the value for tuition dollars, scorecards, and the futility of a liberal-arts education. We must be able to support the monetary value of an education: what students can expect from their tuition dollars, student loans, and their investment of time. But we can't leave the discussion of nonmonetary outcomes out of the conversation.

With the goal of envisioning a just and sustainable world, an education for the 21st century must speak to all dimensions of a human being—intellectual, emotional, aesthetic, ethical, spiritual, and somatic. Valuing the mutually beneficial relationship between intellectual rigor and contemplative practice is both ethically sound and a good business decision for the academy. Such an education transforms ordinary knowledge into wisdom and cultivates compassion and service to others and the Earth, preparing students to change the world for the better.

Naropa University was founded on the premise that higher education should be a catalyst for enlightened transformation of both the self and the world. An educational journey must be one through which students emerge as fuller human beings more deeply connected to one another and to the bigger world. And, more important, they must emerge feeling the responsibility to act on behalf of the Earth and all of its inhabitants.

Michael V. Drake
Chancellor of the University of California at Irvine

Higher education comes in all shapes and sizes. The roughly 4,500 degree-granting institutions in the United States include public and private, religious and secular, very large and very small institutions with a correspondingly wide range of missions. Among public institutions the range includes community colleges that provide critical skills and knowledge and are often the gateway to more advanced studies, and research-intensive universities that create much of our nation's knowledge and technology.

Given this extraordinary diversity and vitality, there is no one single answer to the question "What is college for?"

At the University of California at Irvine, we want our students to grow and mature, to learn and develop, both academically and personally. Our goal is for our students to become the best at their professions, and also the best public citizens and the best people.

We incorporate four pillars of excellence into our activities: academic excellence, research excellence, leadership excellence, and character excellence. The first two can be experienced in the classrooms and the labs, but also over meals and outside in the park, wherever bright and creative minds come together.

The latter two pillars—leadership excellence and character excellence—can be experienced everywhere on campus, but particularly in cocurricular organizations, the clubs, interest groups, and teams where students learn and practice how to come together and to share and perfect ideas. In this they are guided by the campus values—respect, intellectual curiosity, integrity, commitment, empathy, appreciation, and fun—that infuse everything we say and do at the university.

By creating an atmosphere in which students practice and absorb values-based decision-making, higher education can enable, empower, and inspire them to make a difference in the world. And that's what college is for.

Brenda Hellyer

Chancellor of San Jacinto College, in Houston and Pasadena, Tex.

As chancellor of a multicampus community college, I have had the opportunity to meet and talk with a wide variety of our students about their educational goals, and I have come to believe that they, like their peers across the country, are seeking more than an education—they are seeking options, opportunities, and guidance.

In the fall of 2011, approximately 13 million such students attended 1,132 community colleges around the country. Almost two-thirds of those students were in programs to earn an associate degree and perhaps then transfer to a four-year university. The rest were enrolled in courses that could lead to certificates or technical careers.

What is college for? It is about personal and intellectual growth, about finding new dimensions of understanding, and about gaining knowledge. It is about learning and exploring.

Students, like those I talk with, have ideas of what they would like to do with their lives. In some cases, they get to college, begin exploring, and develop other, better ideas. Or they learn new ways of thinking, and their horizons expand to encompass a broader world. Community colleges are uniquely positioned to be places where students can explore intellectual pursuits as well as practical career options.

That's an important combination; college is for intellectual and personal development, but it must also lead to jobs for the students who are working hard to make an investment in their future lives. Meanwhile, community colleges are working at national and state levels to increase student success, completion, and credential attainment, which will ultimately translate into jobs, careers, and a future full of possibilities.

William Pepicello

President of the University of Phoenix

College is for anyone willing to do the work. At the University of Phoenix, we commit to, first, making college accessible to all students; they must be empowered to achieve their educational goals, and that starts with access to a quality education.

Once any institution has committed to providing access to higher education, it must help students develop the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve their professional goals, improve the productivity of students at the organizations where they work, and deliver the knowledge and skills to help students serve as leaders in their communities.

Higher education is now a lifelong process. It is a journey of enrichment and professional development that colleges and universities, employers, and the work force must perfect for the country to remain competitive in a global economy. Academic programs today must reflect up-to-the-minute industry standards, evolving with the ever-changing needs of the workplace. Higher education must form partnerships with industry leaders to design specialized curricula and degree programs—this is the future of higher education.

A degree itself is no longer a ticket to economic stability. The degree, and the coursework that constitutes it, must be relevant, substantive, and reflective of today's skill requirements.

College is for creating a pathway to career success.

Copyright © 2015 The Chronicle of Higher Education