

Lifelong Learning – College: Pros/Cons

SUBMITTED BY: Kathryn McGinn

SUBJECT(S): Career Development

GRADE LEVEL(S): 9, 10, 11, 12

≡ OVERVIEW:

Students will read an article about a high school student who decides not to go to college and evaluate his decision. Students will start thinking about the pros/cons and opportunity costs of attending college and reflect on the current state of their college plans.

≡ NBEA STANDARD(S):

- Career Development, VI. Lifelong Learning

≡ RELATED ARTICLES:

- [“Thiel Fellow David Merfield: ‘The Outside World Is an Excellent Place to Learn Things’”](#)
- [“One House, Three Seniors and Lots of College Essays”](#)
- [“Anthony David Williams Was President of His College Freshman Class — Why Did He Transfer?”](#)

Common Core Standard(s):

- ELA CCR Writing 1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- ELA CCR Reading 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

- ELA CCR Reading 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- ELA CCR Reading 8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
- ELA CCR Speaking and Listening 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Objectives/Purposes:

- Students will read and analyze an article.
- Students will understand the opportunity costs.
- Students will brainstorm the pros/cons of attending college.
- Students will think about their future plans.

Other Resources/Materials:

- Newsprint/Markers

Activities:

1. Hand out "Theil Fellow David Merfield..." and read aloud. Ask students to think of the advantages and disadvantages of Merfield's decision to defer attending Princeton in order to gain real-world experience.

(5 mins)

2. Ask students to share what they see as the advantages and disadvantages of Merfield's decision. Answers will vary, but try to hit some of these key points:

Advantages

- Opportunity to develop software program
- \$100,000 Fellowship

- More public interest in project
- Can still learn about philosophy while working
- Can go to college when done
- Receives mentoring as part of the program

Disadvantages

- Misses out on “college experience”
- Does not get to study a variety of subjects
- A lot of pressure for a teen!
- Loses out on earning potential of a college degree

(5 mins)

3. Introduce the term “Opportunity Costs” and share the WGYP definition: “Opportunity cost is the value of what you are willing to pass on as the result of making a decision. Suppose you’re invited to a great party. But instead, you could try to ask out that person you had an eye on, to go and see a movie. To see the movie, you have to give up the party.” Ask students to rephrase the advantages and disadvantages in terms of opportunity costs. In other words:

What are the opportunity costs of accepting the fellowship? Misses out on college experience and all that involves, the earning potential of a college degree.

What are the opportunity costs of declining the fellowship? \$100,000, chance to develop software program, publicity, personalized mentoring.

What would you do if you were Merfield? Why?

(5 mins)

4. Break students into groups of 3-4. Ask each group to brainstorm as many “pros” and “cons” of going to college as they can think of. Tell students to be as specific as possible. Record ideas on newsprint.

(10 mins)

5. Post all the “pro” posters on one side of the room, and the “con” posters on the other side. Give students a few minutes to read their peers’ ideas.

(5 mins)

6. Come back together as a class. Based on the pros and cons, what are some opportunity costs of going to college? What are some opportunity costs of not attending college?

(5 mins)

Tying It All Together:

Ask students to write about their future plans: do they want to attend college? Why/why not? What colleges are they interested in? If students are attending college next year, have them write about which college they chose and why. If students don’t know what they want to do, have them brainstorm a list of questions that they have about college. Have students share with a peer and then share with the class.

(10 mins)

Practice Outside of the Classroom:

- Use the Internet to research different colleges and start thinking about what does or does not appeal to you.
- Talk to college students or graduates whom you know and ask about their experiences in college. What do they see as pros/cons of college in their own lives?

What worked and What I Would Do Differently:

This lesson worked particularly well with a group of rising 10th graders, who were just beginning to think about college. It might not be as successful with a group of seniors who have already given the subject some thought, but this lesson does serve as a nice introduction to talking/thinking about colleges.