

WHO SHOULD GO TO COLLEGE?

BY

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ABSTRACT

With approximately 2.5 per cent of the total school population of over thirty-five million in the twelfth grades of our high schools, a large body of prospective college freshmen is available each year to the colleges and universities of the country. There are about 35,000 pupils in the twelfth grades of Illinois public and private secondary schools. The same condition exists in most other states. These prospective students are not only being turned out by the high schools, but they are also going to colleges and universities. The enrollment in higher institutions increased 65.9 per cent from 1920 to 1926 and 8.8 per cent from 1926 to 1928. These increases have continued for almost every type of higher education.

It can be said without fear of contradiction that higher education has become an established part of American life, a part which will have a great deal of influence on the social and economic trends of the future. It is fitting, then, that the question: Who Should Go To College? receive careful consideration.

There are three points of view from which one may consider this problem. In the first place, there are certain personal considerations which cannot be overlooked. Completing a college curriculum usually takes four years of the average student's time. Can the student afford to spend this time in college? This is a personal question which every student must answer for himself. There are some tests which he may apply to aid him in answering this question. If he has sufficient social maturity to enable him to adjust himself to new social situations without difficulty, and if he has sufficient mental maturity to enable him to handle the work on this level, the only other thing which he must have is a determination to succeed, a thing which is often lacking in the present generation of college students, many of whom do not "come to college" but are "sent to college" by a parent who thinks it is the best thing for them to do.

It is quite probable, however, that even those who never complete a college curriculum gain something from their years spent on a college or university campus. It probably does no harm for one to have his outlook on life broadened by a year or two spent at some college.

It is possible to suggest certain types of individuals who may always be expected to get along well in college as well as types who can not be expected to succeed. Students with exceptional mental ability usually succeed; those with superior mental ability, ambition and seriousness of purpose may be expected to succeed. The best of those with good mental ability who have not yet found themselves may confidently look forward to acquiring definiteness of purpose sufficient to carry them successfully through their college curriculum. Of course, those who do not have these things, together with the physically unfit and the financially poor student, may expect a great deal of difficulty on the road to a higher education.

In the second place, there are certain social aspects of this problem which should be considered. Few students pay the cost of their education, either in private or public institution. For this reason, if for no other,

the social group should be concerned about the education of its members. If the objectives of college training are in harmony with the aims of society, it would seem that all normal young people might profit from being in college. This does not mean that all so-called normal people would succeed in completing any college curriculum as it is now organized. It simply means that college experiences might well be made profitable to all normal young people.

Since society has sanctioned higher education to such a high degree, as is evidenced by the recognition which is given to college attendance in a great many ways, it seems that in such a society as ours it is almost necessary to make such education available to all those who can profit, either individually or socially, from it.

In the third place, we may consider the problem from a very practical standpoint of selection of those who shall come to our own individual colleges. Most of us are probably vitally interested in this phase of the problem. The usual procedure for selecting college freshmen, of course, is to take those whose principles say are in the upper fifty or seventy-five per cent of their class, which means practically nothing so far as ability or habit are concerned, and then give them certain almost meaningless placement examinations, meaningless because we do nothing with them after they are given. In reality, most Illinois colleges and universities take all who come to them (they even go out after them with all types of inducement except money payments) and try to make college students out of pupils who never had anything in high school which they succeeded in passing with a higher mark than "D" (whatever that means). The colleges then carry these people on through a curriculum often intended for a civilization long since extinct and turn them out at the end of four or five years into a society that has moved on so far during the four or five years they have been in college that they can no longer find their places in it.

Together with the question of: Who should go to college? must go the question of: To What Kind of a College Should Anyone Go? In summary let me say that anyone who is desirous of more education and who is capable and willing to pay the price, either in effort or in money, should be able to secure that education. Society should supply, and I believe it has supplied either publicly or privately, such an opportunity to all who can take advantage of it. However, society is undergoing great changes at the present time, and the old fashioned college, frequently hardly out of the Middle Age period, will no longer adequately meet the needs of young people. There must be an increased tendency on the part of institutions of higher learning to experiment with new curricula, new methods of teaching, and, in fact, with the creation of a new social order. Some colleges have done this; others are doing it; and every college which is to serve a real function in our changing American civilization must dare to do a great deal of pioneering or go out of business.