

SR Quest

the bimonthly newsletter of Simply Research Services LLC, a research and analytics consulting firm

Let's Talk about College over Barbecue

One of the wonderful things about gathering with family and friends is the conversation. Recently, I had a barbecue at the house and we had a beautiful summer day for it – dry, sunny, high 70s. The kids played both inside and out, and we laughed heartily at my 2 year old nephew as he unsuccessfully attempted to roll down the backyard hill. Instead of rolling down, he repeatedly rolled sideways across the yard, heading toward my neighbor's – and laughing along the way. It was hilarious.

Later, we adults had an extended and intense conversation about higher education. I'm not sure how we broached the subject but it was somehow given life. Generally, the function of education is social reproduction - to teach us American cultural values as a way of reinforcing and maintaining the cultural status quo. We will address the latent effects of this at another time. The central question of our talk had to do with the purpose of higher education.

One person saw college as a waste of money, insisting you can go to junior college or vocational school to learn how to do a job sooner and for a lot less than a four-year college or university. Another, a Navy veteran, asserted that college was simply too expensive and not worth it. I then asked, "what [did they see] as the purpose of college?" My 23 year old nephew responded, "to teach you do a job." "No, no, no," I exclaimed, with my passion for the subject pouring out of my pores. "The purpose of college is to provide us with a well rounded education to broaden our perspective," I explained.

Other than strengthening our reading, writing and arithmetic, a college education should help us to think critically. This means understanding matters and issues in relation to one another, considering the underlying influences of phenomena and perspectives, and appreciating the points of view and experiences of people of backgrounds different from our own.

Some of this is shaped directly during classroom discussion and debate, and some is naturally occurring. That is, it happens as a result of living among and talking with people from different cities, states, regions, and other parts of the world. The varying perspectives and opinions we are exposed to during these observations and casual encounters on campus inform our own long-developed and sometimes entrenched views on a wide range



of issues and problems.

Through these interactions, we are enlightened. We gain an appreciation for the multitude of views that have arisen out of our disparate and distinct experiences. So, we become thinkers. These learnings are especially crucial given our increasingly diverse and interconnected world. A college education simply doesn't get any better than this.

Some of my guests emphatically agreed with my position, others begrudgingly – insisting that college is simply too expensive. They are right. I can't help but concede that college tuition is outrageously high. Indeed, the root of the cynicism I heard that night can be attributed to this. But our viewpoints are often colored by our life circumstances too, which in this context can greatly influence the ability to attend college. Undoubtedly, the comments I heard that night can also be attributed to this.

I think it's important though that we don't conflate higher ed's value with our ability to attend and its price tag. Surely, something needs to be done about the latter, but let's not dismiss the impact that the former can have on our own and our families' lives – and for generations to come.

In this August issue of SR Quest, we focus on higher education. It contains an article on the relationship between income and education in an effort to help monetize educational attainment. In it, we underscore the importance of a comfortable and stress-free setting to help promote student learning and persistence.

Please [drop us a line](#) to let us know your thoughts on higher ed. Also, please [review SR Quest](#) while you're at it – what do you think so far? What topics would you like to see covered going forward? Thanks – and as always...

Happy reading!

*Reba Chaisson, PhD
Principal*

Keeping it Real-levant (continued)

Chart 1 also shows that for both men and women, median income increases with educational attainment. Not all is rosy in the numbers though. The gender inequality is stark. Women make an average of about 30 percent less than men regardless of level of education. “Wha?” the students would ask incredulously.

“Some of the variations in income can be attributed to the differences in jobs that men and women typically hold,” I explained. Women are often socialized to gravitate toward nurturing roles like teaching and care-giving, which do not typically yield high salaries. For example, the [CPS data](#) shows that more than a quarter of all jobs are in the education and health sectors. Together they make up the largest job segment in the US. Women hold 3/4th of the jobs here, many of which are growing. The [Occupational Outlook Handbook \(OOH\)](#) lists home health, personal care and physical therapy aides as having a very positive job outlook. Little, if any, education beyond a high school diploma is required to obtain these roles. They pay slightly more than \$26,000 per year.

Further along in the spectrum are jobs like nurse practitioner and physician assistant. Each has a very positive job outlook and again, the roles are typically held by women. According to the OOH, such jobs require a college degree and pay just over \$100,000. But this is still a far cry from being a physician, which typically pays double or more. While women have made slow but steady entrée into this rank over the last 50 years, they are still disproportionately represented in jobs with lower prestige and thus lower pay than men.

Men, on the other hand, are socialized to be the breadwinners of the family. Tacit acknowledgment of this is embedded in the way companies hire, the jobs men typically hold and the compensation they receive relative to women. For example, about 20 percent of jobs make up the financial, business and professional services sector of the economy. The median pay of financial managers is \$128,000. For persons in professional, scientific and technical jobs, it is

\$151,000. These high-paying jobs are [heavily occupied by men](#). Men make up 85 percent of architectural and engineering jobs and 75 percent of computer-related jobs like programmers, web and software developers and database administrators.

Gender socialization does not sufficiently account for the dramatic pay disparities at each level of education. Gender discrimination and the long-held resistance to women in traditionally masculine roles contribute to gender inequality. Even when women have college degrees in hand and land high-level, high-paying jobs, they are often paid substantially less than their male counterparts.

My students were stunned. “Isn’t that illegal?” some would ask. “Well, yes,” I would respond. “But private sector compensation is left to the company’s discretion. It is also confidential. Given this, how can any laws around pay be enforced?” I would add. Hmmm, again, I think my students were beginning to see the relevance. By mid-semester, they would still be talking about the subject matter with fellow students as they left the classroom and moved on with their day.

Education and Race

Very recently, the Bureau of Census reported that 90 percent of people have graduated high school or completed a high school equivalency for the first time in US history (see Chart 2). Along with that good news, the data shows that nearly half have a college or vocational credential. But the lack of such credentials for the other half of the 25 and over population suggests that many people experience instability and hardship. They struggle to make ends meet due to the narrow breadth of job opportunities available to them and the infinitesimal movement in their income from year to year. Also, Chart 2 shows that the educational attainment of men and women is nearly identical at every level. Yet, as shown earlier, their respective income levels differ dramatically.

Keeping it Real-levant (continued)

	Overall	Men	Women
No High School diploma or GED	10%	11%	10%
High School diploma/GED	90%	89%	90%
Some college, no degree	16%	16%	16%
Associates degree or Vocational certificate	10%	9%	11%
Bachelor's degree	22%	22%	22%
Advanced degrees	13%	13%	13%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2018 Annual Social and Economic Supplement. Table 3.

Unfortunately, recent income data by race and educational attainment is not yet available in the CPS for the same age group. But there is a story to be told there. Chart 3 shows that Asians and Non-Hispanic Whites outpace the overall averages in four-year and advanced degrees. In fact, more than half of Asians and nearly 40 percent of Non-Hispanic Whites have a Bachelor's degree or higher. This suggests these two groups have high incomes relative to Blacks and Hispanics. Only a quarter of Blacks hold Bachelor's and advanced degrees. For Hispanics, this number is 18 percent.

	Overall	Non-Hispanic White	Black	Asian	Hispanic
No High School diploma or GED	10%	6%	12%	10%	29%
High School diploma/GED	90%	94%	88%	90%	72%
Some college, no degree	16%	16%	20%	9%	15%
Associates or Vocational degree	10%	11%	10%	7%	8%
Bachelor's degree	22%	24%	16%	31%	13%
Advanced degrees	13%	15%	9%	25%	5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2018 Annual Social and Economic Supplement. Table 3.

Most of my students did not show up for class when the topic of race was scheduled on the syllabus. When I asked, I found that the experiences of my White colleagues differed from mine. But those who did attend my class were older White students and the few African American and Hispanic students in the course. Most of the former seemed to be in their very late 20s to late 30s and some were married and had children. Given this, they likely had real-world experiences – in contrast to the younger students.

Generally, the minority students simply observed the exhibits and listened, often appearing stunned. I do wish I had been better at coaxing them to share their thoughts. I so wanted to hear what they had to say but was also concerned about putting them on the spot. I would approach this very differently today.

Keeping it Real-levant (continued)

My older White students were quite intrigued about the topic – all of the topics for that matter. Always active participants, they would at times share their own experiences as examples. Since I was approached quite a bit by these students even outside of class, I am comfortable saying that for many, their life experiences resonated with the course material. Others seemed to simply love learning about it and later enrolled in my elective courses on education and social stratification. I do not know why my young White students did not attend class on this topic, nor why my African American and Hispanic students participated little. In retrospect, I should have just randomly pulled a few aside and asked. I could have learned something.

I do wish my young White students could have seen, heard and participated in the discussion on race though, so that along with gender, they could also appreciate the inequities that exist among racial and ethnic groups. For example, we covered how Hispanics struggle with completing high school at rates similar to other groups. Their completion rate is 18 points below the overall average for this level of schooling. “Why are the rates so low for them?” the students in attendance would ask. I would explain that the research has found that language is the main barrier to high school completion for Hispanics, along with the need to work at a young age and contribute to the support of their families. We would then delve into why the latter in particular was unique to Hispanics. I will not do that here – you should have attended some of my other courses to get into this!

Blacks typically experience the work-school tug-of-war while in college, as they work to pay for tuition, fees and books. Here, the research shows that the resulting stress affects their ability to persist in school, manifesting in burnout and early departure due in part to money and time pressures. These help to explain the low four-year educational attainment for Blacks.

While education is a major factor in social mobility, the ability to climb the ladder varies by gender and race. I think my students found it helpful to understand the extent of these disparities as well as some of the underlying explanations for them. Gender socialization, gender bias, and the challenging circumstances of many Blacks and Hispanics shed light on these and were relevant to their lives. In Part 2, we address income, occupational prestige and other factors that affect social mobility. These include the roles of referrals and social networking in the hiring process. ‘See’ you in October!

[Drop us a line](#) to let us know your thoughts on this topic.



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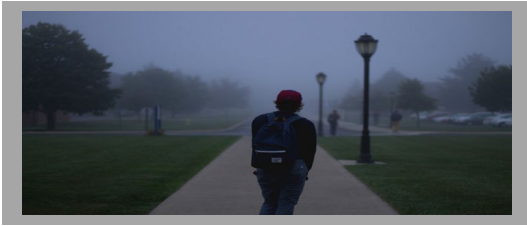


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What's the Weather Like on Campus?

There is no substitute for living on campus. It provides real-world experiences without many of the real-world risks of normal daily living. For example, students are responsible for getting themselves out of bed for class rather than relying on their parents to wake them. But it is only their grades that will take a hit if they miss that biology lab.

Students set their own study, work and play schedules, rather than the schedules being dictated by their parents. Yes, they are now responsible for managing their own time! But the best part - if the students fall short, they do not lose their housing, food or electricity at mid-semester if the bill at the bursar's office is paid a little late. In other words, residential college campuses are microcosms of society where young people get to be adults and kids at the same time.

Large campuses of 20,000 or more students contain a diverse body of people from all over the world. These campuses are peppered with a variety of eateries, coffee houses and places to just hang out. The libraries are rich with books and reference materials of all types and forms. Some campuses even have their own bus service. To top it off, there's adrenalin-rushing euphoria on game days when their own sports teams play on-campus in stadiums filled to capacity. Electric! I highly recommend everyone partakes of this college experience immediately after graduating high school!

For all its perks and wealth of knowledge poised to be transmitted to students though, some large college campuses have toxic climates. Decades of research have shown that many poor and minority students experience name-calling, racial innuendo, and being treated as if they are invisible by fellow students, faculty, staff, and even administrators. These groups are frequent targets of such microaggressions, but the acts are not unique to them. People are also targeted based on religion, physical/mental ability, LGBTQ, gender, and other statuses. Not all of the acts are intentional however. As Smith comments, some are launched out of a lack of appreciation for their "[stereotypical and hurtful nature.](#)"

In addition to microaggressions, many female students deal with sexual harassment and a fair number experience sexual assault. Researchers estimate that 20 to 25 percent of female students are sexually assaulted on college campuses each year (Mellins et al, 2017) and that many of these incidents are under-reported due to the victims' feelings of shame and guilt (Armstrong, Hamilton, Sweeney, 2006; Koss, Gidych, Wisniewski, 1987). Several studies revealed that these assaults often occur at off-campus fraternity houses and that alcohol is usually involved (Armstrong, Hamilton and Sweeney, 2006, Perkins and Warner, 2017). Rarely are those in off- or edge-of-campus fraternity houses held accountable for their actions. Nor are those who taunt and harass poor and minority students throughout the campus on a regular basis.

Such behaviors on large college campuses are quite common and thus disruptive to learning. Students are violated, harassed and stressed, and as a result they feel unsafe, unwelcome and uncomfortable in the place meant to be their home for four or more years. The cumulative stress leads to alienation, manifesting in student burnout, inability to perform optimally, and simply not feeling as if they are a part of the school community.

What's the Weather Like on Campus? (continued)

Researchers have long agreed that social and academic integration is key to college student success (Chang, 2004; Hurtado and Carter, 1997; Hurtado and Ponjuan, 2005; Neville et al, 2004, Smedley et al, 1993). Campus climate studies seek to uncover deep insights into students' experiences on campus, their perceptions of the school's social climate and the degree to which they do or do not feel integrated into the campus community. Thus, these studies typically focus on students' sense of belonging, or the degree to which they feel a part of the school. The goal is to contribute to developing policies and processes that increase students' feelings of comfort and safety, and ultimately, their chances of success.

Generally, administrators work hard to develop policies aimed at creating and sustaining an environment that is safe, cohesive and conducive to learning. But people arrive on college campuses with varied lived experiences. Some arrive from racially and ethnically homogeneous communities, others from racially diverse ones. Some from urban areas and others rural. Some from private or public; others from same-sex schools or coed. Some are first-generation college and others are not. Some have affluent backgrounds, others have much less. And some are native to the US, and others are on student visas.

Each group arrives with their own ideas about others (conscious or not), though not necessarily realizing that these ideas have not been informed by direct peer-level interactions with people who are the objects of those ideas. Rather, they have largely been informed by narrow representations of poor and minority groups in the media and the denigration of their and women's identities by the ignorant, powerful and ill-informed.

As a result of this, an aerial view of a large college campus teeming with students would likely yield something akin to a balkanized community. This multiplicity conveys the complexity of this space. Students are unified on game days and display pridewear throughout the week, yet most not really connecting socially. Given the wide-ranging backgrounds and breadth of cultures on campus, it is unrealistic to expect a utopia. But it is *more than* reasonable to expect an environment that does not alienate its students and is free of harassment and sexual violence. Mostly anecdotal research is available on smaller and non-residential campuses. However, we do know that some struggle as well with race relations and matters of student persistence.

Students, faculty, staff, and administrators converge on college campuses from disparate corners carrying long-cultivated attitudes, ideas and expectations that play out in their inter-relations. Seldom, if ever, is this coming-together akin to a ballet. Tatum (2017) speaks extensively about this in her study on racial and ethnic minorities gathering at the proverbial cafeteria table. The table symbolizes school-sanctioned and student-led clubs, associations and activities that function as escapes from the racial microaggressions they endure with regularity on campus. Despite these organizations and events though, quite a few poor and minority students fall short of completing school, as revealed in this issue's article, *Keeping it Real-avant*.

Some students eventually figure out how to navigate their way safely around campus and through the race and gender relations that exist on them. They gravitate toward people with similar backgrounds and places and organizations where they are most comfortable. Together, these allow them to push through to completion. In addition to these activities, I suggest minority students organize their own study groups. By doing so, they can learn the material through interaction

What's the Weather Like on Campus? (continued)

and the exchange of ideas in a safe space away from the judgements of others. This can reduce their feelings of isolation, potentially enhancing their sense of belonging as well as their academic performance and persistence.

Another suggestion is for students to make it a point to introduce their roommates to their families when they arrive on campus. For minorities, this can potentially disrupt White students' ideas of racial minorities by making it difficult to be objectified and viewed in narrow ways. Getting to know minority families informs the perspective of White students about the depth and meaning of the life of their Black or Hispanic roommate. It humanizes them. This same effort should be made by White students as a way of welcoming their minority roommate into the space and to that part of their life. By extension, this gesture can help the student feel like they are welcomed and wanted on the campus.

Yes, I realize this all sounds cheesy. But as a result of the isolation many Black, Hispanic and other non-majority students experience on campus, students are less likely to absorb learnings through meaningful exposure to other groups. White students in particular lose out on possibly the best opportunity to engage people with a background different than their own. Each has an impact on the social mobility efforts of minorities and the development of social networks that could be useful in the future.

For women specifically, some schools like Notre Dame and Carnegie Mellon have established same-sex dormitories to help female students feel safe. Others like the University of California Berkeley and Purdue also offer gender-inclusive housing options to help students with non-binary gender identities feel welcome and safe on campus. The University of Illinois – Urbana Champaign and the University of Maryland – College Park are just a couple of the schools that provide security escorts so women especially feel comfortable moving between libraries, labs and dormitories late at night. But because many of the sexual assaults on residential college campuses occur in off- or edge-of-campus fraternity houses, the biggest risks to women's safety go largely unchecked. To this end, I propose using a designated safety friend (DSF).

Modeled after designated driver, the DSF is a fellow student or set of students who go to the fraternity parties and/or bars with their friends, after pledging to watch out for them and ensuring everyone gets back home safely. He or she does not consume alcohol at the venues and ensures their friends remain visible in the main areas where the event is being hosted. In advance of each outing, the group reaches a consensus on the DSF, their responsibilities and the rules everyone will adhere to. Though not mutually exclusive, the DSF designation is distinguishable from friend. The former formally commits to looking out for other members of the group to ensure they are not taken advantage of while in a vulnerable state. For the latter, this is generally understood – but it does not constitute a commitment.

College and university administrators must be serious and proactive about ensuring the school's climate is safe and that it is intolerant of harassment and microaggressions. Their assurances should be integrated with school policy and actions, and campus-goers at all levels (students, faculty, staff, and administrators) must be on the same page from day one. If a policy proves ineffective, administrators can conduct research and make revisions based on the findings in order to strengthen it. This should be an ongoing and iterative effort on college campuses - constantly working to be better and to stay in lock step with the students. In the end, making the social climate of college campuses healthy and breathable means helping students feel safe, learn freely and fully develop a sense of belonging to the school. This makes it worth the effort – and increases the likelihood of a sunnier forecast.



[Drop us a line](#) to let us know your thoughts on this topic.

What's the Weather Like on Campus? (continued)

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