

# Self-reflection theme: College life



## THE VALUE OF POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

**Considering higher education? Find out why it could be right for you.**

Canada's 2016 census reported that "more than half (54.0%) of Canadians aged 25 to 64 had either college or university qualifications, and Canada continues to rank

first among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in the proportion of college and university graduates."(1)

Times Higher Education reported in 2017 that a study by the Higher Education Funding Council for England found that post-secondary graduates reported a greater sense of life satisfaction and well-being than non-graduates (2), while research from the Lumina Foundation found that graduates can expect to enjoy better earnings and lower unemployment than non-graduates, as well as additional benefits such as increased job safety and a higher likelihood of employer-supported health insurance and retirement programs.(3)

Though obtaining post-secondary qualifications represents a significant investment of both time and money, earning a university degree can set you on right path when it comes to future job prospects and a larger income over time. And beyond these practical advantages, there are myriad benefits to pursuing post-secondary education that may help you decide that it's the right choice for you.

### **Intellectual exploration**

Post-secondary education makes it possible for students to engage in transformative learning experiences, undertaking innovative ways to expand their knowledge not only in their chosen field of study but also by exploring new areas of interest.

Honours-level or independent study projects, study-abroad programs, and research opportunities afford students the chance to master their understanding of complex material and put theory into practice.

University also allows students to explore courses and activities outside their degree program, opening doors to new possibilities and passions. You might decide to add a minor in a complementary discipline, take a specialized certificate program, or even change your major altogether.

### **Relationship-building and collaboration**

Students engaged in post-secondary education develop important and lasting relationships with their peers through academic, extracurricular, and leadership opportunities, building friendships and networks that will endure well beyond graduation.

Collaborative work with faculty, such as research projects and specialized programs, sees students working alongside professors who serve as guides and mentors in the learning process and enrich the university experience. Your professors can support you in finding meaningful projects to complement your studies and can offer guidance as you determine the path you want to pursue after earning your degree.

### **Personal development and an expanded network**

Many universities welcome international students from around the globe, allowing students to learn about and from peers with diverse backgrounds. You might also choose to take advantage of exchange opportunities yourself:

spending one or two semesters abroad offers a rewarding academic challenge and will broaden your social network.

Post-secondary students have no shortage of campus activities to get involved in, whether it’s serving as a peer mentor, acting as a residence advisor, joining a varsity or club sports team, volunteering for campus events or running for student government. These activities help to develop leadership, organization, communications and team-building skills, while also giving you practical experience that will serve you well in the future.

**Preparation for future studies and career goals**

Institutions of higher education foster an environment where students can become critical thinkers, developing their capacities for expressing creative and independent thought – abilities that are highly valued by employers and graduate-level programs alike.

Is post-secondary education the right choice for you? You may have other plans in mind that will help broaden your intellectual horizons and develop your personal skills outside a university classroom setting, or you may be thinking about entering the job market as soon as possible. But as a university graduate you’ll have been able hone the skills needed to succeed in our rapidly-changing world and to be a valuable, thoughtful contributor to society.

**References:**

1 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/171129/dq171129a-eng.htm>

2 <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/degrees-happiness-graduates-report-higher-well-being>

3 <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/its-not-just-the-money.pdf>

**Moment of gratitude: Being in college**

I’m sure college life isn’t perfect. But too often, we focus on negatives. What is the one aspect of college that you personally appreciate the most? Are you thankful for this aspect of college life? You can take inspiration from what is mentioned in the article, if it helps you.

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**Writing activity Pt 2: Your thoughts and ideas on the value of YOUR college life**

Which benefits of going to college from the article resonate the most with you and why? Which ones resonate the least? Do your answers connect to your personal values and life goals?

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# The social science guide to picking a career you'll love

What the research says about how to find a fulfilling job.

by [Jess Whittlestone and William MacAskill](#) Updated Oct 16, 2018, 10:04 AM EDT

Photos: Getty Images. Photoillustration: Javier Zarracina/Vox

What the best scientific research tells us is that we often look for the wrong things in job searches: What we think will make us happy at work is very different from what will actually make us happy.

It's little wonder, then, that more than half of Americans are unhappy with their jobs.

So here's a summary of what really does and doesn't matter for job satisfaction, according to the evidence.



## 1) Don't worry too much about the salary

Research suggests that obsessing over your paycheck is misguided: a meta-analysis of around 100 studies found that there's only a very weak relationship between pay and job satisfaction.

The evidence on how money affects happiness in general is mixed. Recent surveys of hundreds of thousands of people found that richer people are more satisfied with their lives overall, but only very slightly — and above an income of around \$40,000, pay had no effect at all on day-to-day happiness. Above this level, other factors — health, relationships, and sense of purpose — are much more important.

Moreover, focusing too much on pay distracts your attention from these other important factors. Timothy Judge, a professor of management at the University of Notre Dame, suggests that if you ultimately care about having a job that's satisfying, "you would be better off weighing other job attributes higher than pay."

So while more money might make you a bit happier at work, as long as you've got your daily needs covered, it's not a particularly important factor and deserves much less attention than we give it.

## 2) Don't do an easy job

For most people, mental challenge is crucial for being satisfied. It's tempting to think that an easy job is a great job: You'll never be stressed, and you'll always be doing well. But in reality, you'll probably just be bored. You'll never have a real sense of achievement at the end of the day.

Of course, you don't want a job where you constantly feel out of your depth either. The sweet spot is where the demands placed on you match your abilities.

There are actually a couple of tests that measure the importance of mental challenge for particular individuals: the need for cognition and growth needs scales. And it may not trump other factors for all people. But the evidence is pretty strong that easy work isn't the path to lasting job satisfaction for anyone.

### 3) Don't just follow your interests

There's very little evidence that focusing on your interests is a good path to satisfying work, despite decades of research. This is pretty surprising — a natural approach to choosing a career is something like “figure out what you're interested in, and then find a job that allows you to do that.” It seems intuitively obvious that interests matter: that if you're really interested in psychology, say, you'd be happier doing psychology research than working in an investment bank.

So why does research suggest interest isn't that important? One reason is that our interests change faster than we expect them to: Multiple psychology studies have shown that we're bad at predicting what we'll enjoy in the future. What you find interesting as a 22-year-old graduate might not keep you engaged 10 years later. A second possibility is that though our interests do matter somewhat, we put greater weight on them relative to other factors. Even if you're really interested in psychology, a research job that involves working with people you hate would still make you miserable.

### 4) Do work that's engaging

What really matters is what you do in your job day by day, hour by hour. It's surprisingly easy to neglect this.

Engaging work draws you in and holds your attention, giving you a sense of flow. Have you ever spent an hour editing a spreadsheet and felt the time drag on, or found an hour playing a computer game passes in what seems like no time at all? Computer games are designed to be engaging, while office admin is far from it.

Researchers have identified four key factors to finding work engaging:

- **Autonomy:** According to self-determination theory, a theory of human motivation, autonomy is one of three basic human needs that are completely innate and apply across time, gender, and culture. We need to feel like we are in control of our life and our choices in order to be happy — including in what work we do and when we do it.
- **Clear tasks:** Working your way through tasks with a clearly defined start and end helps you to feel like you're making progress, which is incredibly important for motivation. Clear tasks also provide a sense of achievement, which is a central component of general well-being.
- **Variety:** Sonja Lyubomirsky, an expert in the psychology of happiness, suggests that variety helps to prevent what's known as the “hedonic treadmill” — our tendency to very quickly adapt to positive changes. An exciting new job is unlikely to have the lasting effect on your happiness that you expect because it quickly becomes the “new normal.” Variety in our day-to-day lives combats this, because we don't get used to events that are novel or unexpected.
- **Feedback:** People like to know how well they're doing. Multiple studies have shown that high levels of feedback in a job lead to both increased motivation and general satisfaction at work.

That said, playing computer games is not the key to a fulfilling life (and not just because you won't get paid). That's because it's also important to ...

## **5) Do work that helps others**

There's strong agreement within positive psychology that having a "sense of meaning" is crucial for overall happiness. Unsurprisingly, this translates to the workplace: according to hundreds of studies, feeling that your work contributes to an important cause is one of the most important factors for job satisfaction. Other research in psychology suggests that helping others is one of the most reliable ways to boost your own mood. In one study, students who were asked to perform five "acts of kindness" a week for a six-week period showed a significant boost in well-being compared to those who did not.

Switching to a more meaningful career doesn't necessarily mean working for a charity — there are lots of ways to make a difference, including research, politics, journalism, and entrepreneurship.

Even if you can't easily jump ship, there are other ways to make your work more meaningful. You could try volunteering — research has shown that people who volunteer are consistently happier and healthier than those who don't. Or you might choose to donate a portion of your salary to charity: There's a growing body of evidence that giving has benefits for the giver as well as the receiver.

## **6) Do work you're good at**

According to the University of Pennsylvania's Martin Seligman, a leading happiness researcher, achievement (or accomplishment) is a central component of well-being. Most of us are constantly striving for a sense of achievement and feel pretty great when it comes around, like when you finally solve a problem you've been struggling with for weeks, complete a large and challenging project, or master a new skill.

This means it's important your skills are well-matched to the job you're doing — evidence suggests that the greater the mismatch between your skills and your job, the less happy you'll be. What this doesn't mean is that you should only do things you're already good at. There's no sense of achievement in succeeding at the same simple task over and over again — achievement requires learning, developing, and pushing yourself.

One way to find work that suits your skills but still challenges you is to use your "signature strengths." Signature strengths are things like creativity, perseverance, love of learning and leadership — there's a full list of all 24 signature strengths here, developed by Seligman. Seligman suggests that most people have three to seven "core" strengths among these lists, and research suggests that recognizing and applying these strengths at work leads to increased satisfaction. You can take a test to find out your signature strengths here.

## **7) Find supportive colleagues**

The people we're around can have a huge impact on our mood. So next time you're considering a job and are not sure about your future colleagues, remember: These are the people you're going to be spending (at least) eight hours a day with, five days a week. Choosing a job based on how much you like our potential colleagues might sound silly, but it's not a bad plan.

Close personal relationships are one of the most important factors for well-being. Feeling like we're socially supported at work can make us less stressed, by acting as a buffer against difficult times. Studies also suggest that people who get on with their colleagues perceive their work to be more meaningful.

Research shows that perhaps the most important factor is whether you can get help from your colleagues when you run into problems.

## **8) Don't ignore the negatives**

Everything above is important. But if there are significant negative aspects to your job, they could be enough to outweigh many other positive factors.

Research finds that all of the following tend to be linked to job dissatisfaction:

- **A long commute**, especially if it's more than an hour by bus. A study of 60,000 people by the UK Office for National Statistics found that long commutes were associated with lower life satisfaction.
- **Very long hours**. A large survey found that long hours were related to lower job satisfaction, perhaps due to making it harder to take care of your non-work life, and increased stress.
- **Pay you feel is unfair**. While pay alone isn't the most important thing for happiness, earning less than others who do a similar job to you seems to cause job dissatisfaction.
- **Job insecurity**. There's evidence for a strong negative relationship between job insecurity and job satisfaction.

Although these sound obvious, it's easy to overlook them when choosing a job.

## 9) Finally, don't assume finding the perfect job is going to be easy

You might not love your first job — or your second, or your third — and that's normal. Finding a career you love isn't straightforward, and relying on a single factor isn't enough, as the length of this list shows!

Research in psychology suggests that we're generally not that great at predicting how happy things will make us in the future: Our predictions tend to be biased by how we feel right now, and to focus only on the most obvious, essential features. While a large starting bonus makes that job in the city seem very appealing right now, those long hours you haven't thought about might eventually start to take their toll.

Understanding the science behind job satisfaction will certainly give you a leg up in finding a career you love. But ultimately, the best way to find out whether you'll enjoy doing something is just to try it. So don't be discouraged if you don't find the perfect job immediately, and don't be afraid to try many different things to find what works for you.

## Moment of self-reflection: Career choice

Choose one or two points from the article that you do NOT normally think about. Then, use them to think about your career choice, or a "normal" career choice for someone in your program. Do these points help you think of new arguments for or against those jobs?

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## Part 2: Video (take notes of “important” sentences as needed)

## Ali Abdaal on managing your time as a student



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### Moment of gratitude: Being in college

Ali Abdaal's last tip is to "choose to be satisfied with how you spend your time and your day." Think about how you've spent your time recently. What is one use of your time, recently, that you feel grateful about? Why does that stand out, you think?

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## Self-reflection: Intentional time

Ali Abdaal talks about being “intentional” with your time: Choose how you want to spend your time, and then take measures to ensure that this is how you really spend it. If you organized your life this way, what activity would you spend more time on? Are there tips that Ali mentioned that could help you free time for that new priority?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.