

Opinion: How to Get Schooled

By Jesse Blake McCann

There are few things scarier than the future. And I don't mean the type of apocalyptic future where cybernetic platypuses dominate us. I mean the future that involves the questions, "Where do I see myself in X number of years?" and, "What am I going to do with my life?"

If the recent graduates are anything like me when I left high school in 2001, these questions are constantly haunting them as they decide which college they want to attend and, ultimately, what career they will choose to distract themselves for the rest of their lives. These are tough decisions that may leave them feeling overwhelmed and confused.

But I'm going to let you guys in on a little secret: It's okay to not be completely sure what you want to do with your life. No matter how much job tests or career counselors want to simplify complicated life decisions, I firmly believe it's not a college requirement to initially know which career in which to take home a degree.

Stop and think about it for a moment. This is the rest of your life we're talking about. For someone to lock himself or herself into a career at the get-go of college is, well... bonkers! People should explore their options and spend time to get to know who they are, and find out what makes them happy and what they would be content doing to contribute to the world (coincidentally, you can use these lines if you're thinking about breaking up with someone). And there's no place better to do educational soul searching than at community college.

If your first reaction to my community college suggestion was, "Ew," that's not a completely unwarranted response. California community colleges are notorious for high dropout rates. A press release put out two years ago by *UC Berkeley News* reported a study that said "six in 10 students who enter the California community college system as freshmen with high school diplomas and aspirations to transfer to four-year institutions drop out or lower their academic sights after just one semester." Couple this with watching all the eggheads being shipped off to prestigious schools while your fate may be to go to a college that accepts anyone who

can fill out an enrollment form, and it could be absolutely terrifying.

I went through the same feelings during my senior year at El Segundo High School. I watched fellow students take schedules full of Advance Placement classes, and I felt like a loser with my single English Honors class. I felt I had to scramble to get into a UC college to have any worth. I wonder now if I thought this way because my high school made me feel I needed to get into good schools to succeed, or because I was being too hard on myself. Probably a little bit of both.

I ended up at El Camino College, a local community college. And as bad as I may have felt about it at the time, it was the right decision. I learned that just because a school has a high dropout rate doesn't mean the quality of education goes down. Personally, I blame the high dropout number on the passionless students who attend CCs just to keep their parents off their backs and their consciences clean.

There are many advantages to attending a community college. The CCs of CA provide the same general education requirement found at the UC or Cal States with one dramatic difference: \$\$\$\$. Santa Monica College will cost \$286 for the Fall 2009 semester; double that and it's \$572 for the entire year. To attend nearby UCLA for the 2009/2010 year as a commuter, it will cost about \$19,000. That is a ridiculous price difference for the same classes, even if the student was riding on a wave of scholarships. This means the parents are basically paying for their kids to get a head start on their underage college drinking.

Due to their inexpensive cost, community colleges give more wiggle room for students who are still trying to determine their career. Maybe Astronomy sounds appealing, but then it might turn out to be too spacey. Perhaps Philosophy sounds engaging, but then it might not provide any real answers. From my time at El Camino, I was able to ascertain that a career in newspaper journalism is a curse I wouldn't bestow on my greatest enemies.

And then once the students complete their general education and have a more narrow

See Schooled, page 18

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