

College Admissions Clinic News

A Wake-Up Call to Parents of College-Bound Children: Failing to Plan is a Plan for Failure

By Dr. Marshall Shumsky



If one reads the news about the current generation of college-bound students and recent college graduates, it is easy to become confused by the mixed message. There is some really good news: demand for well-qualified, college-educated applicants, as of January 2016, is at its highest level in the last ten years, more than 20% higher than 2007 (prior to the Great Recession), according to the U.S. Department of Labor. One would expect that this booming level of demand for college educated workers would lead to higher wages and a drop in the widespread underemployment for recent college graduates. Unfortunately, it is not so. Instead, employers are finding a shortage of suitable, well-educated applicants.

Nearly half of all recent college graduates are working in jobs that do not require a college degree according to the January 2016 report on college outcomes by the Department of Labor. Worse yet, they are spending more than 5 years, on average, to graduate from college, thus inflating the expensive price of college education even further.

Many of the popular colleges and universities in our region possess 4-year graduation rates of less than 60%, with some graduating 50% or less. Further, their success in graduating students in 6 years is not stellar either, with many rates below 75%. Yet, despite all of this bad news, students who are prepared for the reality of the marketplace can beat the averages and easily graduate on time with a path to fruitful employment or graduate school acceptance. But, you will not beat the average without a well-developed plan.

As with many of life's endeavors, the difference between success and frustration upon college graduation derives from foresight, planning, and hard work. The days of picking a familiar local college or university and expecting that one is guaranteed to acquire both the skills and knowledge for fruitful employment or graduate school acceptance disappeared long ago.

Review the enclosed table of labor outcomes for today's recent college graduates in our update on underemployment. Look at the outcomes for business majors and even some STEM majors like biology. Outside of engineering, which is not a likely fit for many students, the old standby majors that one could rely on as a safe path to

Demand for Labor Requiring College Education, Department of Labor, January 29, 2016 Update

Date	College jobs (Index: December 2007=100)
9/1/2006	87.2
9/1/2007	100.8
9/1/2008	102.0
9/1/2009	75.5
9/1/2010	90.0
9/1/2011	99.2
9/1/2012	112.9
9/1/2013	112.4
9/1/2014	115.3
9/1/2015	121.9

See WAKE Continued on Page 2

Latest Department of Labor Statistics Show Shockingly High and Persistent Underemployment for Recent College Graduates

In the latest published update (January 29, 2016) on employment and salaries for workers aged 22-27 who have bachelor's degrees, the U.S. Department of Labor finds that 45% of recent college graduates are underemployed. Even more shocking are the high levels of underemployment and low salaries for business majors, by far the most popular major, nationally and in our region. Nearly 60% of recent graduates with a business major are underemployed (working in a job that does not require a college degree).

Wage-wise, business majors do not earn nearly as much as parents and students think. Median salaries for 22-27 year olds with a business degree are \$40,000 per year. Mid-career business majors without an advanced degree under-perform versus expectations. Mid-career workers with a business bachelor's degree, aged 35-45, earned a median wage of \$67,000.

On the other end of the spectrum, engineering majors continue to prosper. Computer engineering majors are underemployed just 19% of the time in the years following graduation. And they earn a terrific early median salary of \$60,000 which rises to \$100,000 by the mid-30s. Likewise, chemical engineering majors are finding great success upon graduation. Only 17% of chemical engineering majors are underemployed in their early career and they earn an average of \$70,000 at the median in those first years of employment. By mid-career, workers holding a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering earn \$94,000 dollars at the median.

See UNDEREMPLOYMENT Continued on Page 3

Labor Market Outcomes by Major, Updated January 29, 2016 (Source: Department of Labor)

Major	Unemployment Rate	Underemployment Rate	Median Wage Early Career	Median Wage Mid-Career
Accounting	4.00%	26.80%	\$ 45,000	\$ 68,000
Anthropology	8.80%	59.00%	\$ 30,000	\$ 50,000
Biology	5.10%	44.80%	\$ 31,500	\$ 60,000
Business	4.90%	58.20%	\$ 40,000	\$ 67,000
Chemical Engineering	5.20%	17.00%	\$ 70,000	\$ 94,000
Communications	5.40%	58.10%	\$ 36,000	\$ 62,000
Computer Engineering	4.60%	19.10%	\$ 60,000	\$ 100,000
Computer Science	3.60%	24.60%	\$ 54,000	\$ 86,000
Economics	5.10%	42.90%	\$ 48,000	\$ 80,000
Elementary Education	3.00%	21.30%	\$ 32,000	\$ 42,000
English Language	7.50%	51.70%	\$ 32,200	\$ 55,000
Finance	3.70%	36.80%	\$ 47,000	\$ 80,000
Fine Arts	7.60%	62.30%	\$ 29,000	\$ 50,000
History	5.90%	56.60%	\$ 35,000	\$ 60,000
Journalism	3.40%	43.70%	\$ 35,000	\$ 64,000
Mathematics	5.90%	26.30%	\$ 42,000	\$ 77,000
Nursing	2.00%	13.40%	\$ 48,000	\$ 65,000
Performing Arts	6.80%	66.50%	\$ 30,000	\$ 47,000
Pharmacy	4.10%	20.30%	\$ 42,000	\$ 110,000
Physics	6.20%	34.20%	\$ 50,000	\$ 80,000
Political Science	7.20%	49.70%	\$ 38,000	\$ 70,000
Psychology	5.90%	51.30%	\$ 30,000	\$ 52,000
Religion	6.80%	50.80%	\$ 28,600	\$ 45,000
Secondary Education	2.60%	26.70%	\$ 34,000	\$ 47,700
Special Education	2.40%	14.90%	\$ 33,000	\$ 43,000
Rate for all Majors	5.00%	45.10%	\$ 38,000	\$ 62,000



WAKE Continued from Page 1

prosperity are not producing consistently positive results for college graduates. Glance at the latest 4 and 6-year graduation rates at local and regional colleges from our report on average time from enrollment to graduation. Taken as a whole, these are very clear signals that on average, most families and students are not getting what is needed from their college investment. As the parent of a college-bound student, you must be prudent in your understanding of what the future holds for your child.

Today's high paying, high skill careers require that employees bring value to the job on day one. Extensive employee training programs are few and far between; many fields are dominated by those with master's degrees or PhDs. New employees are expected to have already gained experience and knowledge about the field during their college years.

So, how does a family properly plan and help their child acquire the education and skills required for today's marketplace?

First, families and students must begin the conversation about college as soon as possible. Families cannot wait until the spring of 11th grade and expect that they can easily accomplish all of the needed steps to properly plan for college admission and study. Understanding your child's needs is one part of the puzzle; deciding upon appropriate majors, colleges, and long-term career plans is another.

The first day of high school is the perfect time to begin the exploration of skills, interests, and careers. Your child will be on-track if he or she starts to experiment with career-related activities and academic curiosities in 9th and 10th grade. By 11th grade, a student should be in the process of clarifying plan A, B, and C for prospective college majors and a future career. By March of the junior year of high school, a student should be making the final list of 8 to 10 colleges of varying degrees of admission competitiveness that he or she will apply to in the fall. If your child is currently in 11th grade and has not made inroads in these domains by now, then he or she needs immediate assistance.

If one waits until enrollment in college before thoroughly exploring majors and careers, then one has waited too long. Improper planning for college study leads to inappropriate college enrollment choices, poor academic performance in college courses, and the extension of time to graduate from 4 years to 6 years or more. Worst of all, it will likely lead to underemployment, limited career options, and low wages upon college graduation.

Your family must answer these questions to properly plan for your child's college education and career

To acquire the exact college education that your child needs, one must answer several crucial questions. What kind of learning style best suits your son or daughter? Does he or she require lots of attention from teachers and

opportunities to gain extra assistance to resolve his or her questions? Does my child learn best in smaller discussion-based classes? Is my child a self-directed learner who can pick up a textbook, listen to a lecture in an auditorium, and make sense of the material on his/her own? What level of motivation has my child shown in high school? Will my child need additional academic support for a diagnosed learning or attention problem? The answers to these questions should clarify the size and type of university that is best for your child.

Your mission is to find how your son or daughter's major fits with the career plan. A prospective college must have a strong program and curriculum in the desired major(s) or be stricken from your college list. Look at the four year plan for the prospective major(s) at each college; how many courses required to fulfill the major? Will the student be able to take courses in specialized topics of interest within the major? How much time will the student spend on general education requirements?

Speak with academic departments and current students and ask about recent graduate school placement performance. Will solid grades from the prospective college in the chosen major lead to a good chance at top graduate school programs? Research the prospective college's supplementary services. How thorough and available are career services like interview preparation and connection to available jobs? Do alumni frequently hire recent graduates? How much assistance will be given if your child will apply to graduate school?

Your family should also think of the path to employment. Understand the expectations of employers in the prospective field; what is expected by hiring personnel when applying for a solid entry-level position in your child's desired profession? If my child decides to go right to work upon graduation, will he or she have value to offer employers? Some colleges and majors give undergraduates many opportunities for internships, projects, and skill-building through activities and professional development. Others treat students' future employment as an afterthought.

In today's marketplace, some of the most prosperous and interesting careers will require graduate level education. If this is true for your child's prospective path, then your family must be doubly cautious in choosing colleges and majors. Graduate school admission committees are unforgiving in their expectations. To gain acceptance to competitive programs at the graduate level, one must not only produce a strong college academic record and high scores on graduate admission exams, one must also prove that they have the knowledge, experience, and skills to handle demanding coursework from the first day of enrollment.

This kind of work will move your family closer to the right plan. Yet, these academic and career-oriented insights alone do not lead your child to the right college program and a means for defying the odds. There are important personal and idiosyncratic qualities that you and your son or daughter must identify, if they are to be happy and successful in college and in the future.

See WAKE Continued on Page 3

Student personality and social and cultural comfort is of crucial importance

Stress is a huge hindrance to productivity and happiness in college. Some students are wired in such a way that academic pressure does not overwhelm them. Others are much more sensitive and anxious when pressure is high. How does your child deal with stress? Can he or she handle the demands of a workload in a major that requires 20 to 30 hours per week of out of class study? Maybe he or she is better served by a less-demanding major where out of class work takes 10-15 hours per week. Your child must know how to organize his or her time and deal with distractions if he or she is to take on a demanding workload and major.

Social life is often one of a student's most pressing concerns in choosing a prospective college. Some students are skilled at making friends and can easily find their niche in any setting. Others are more comfortable in a setting that is familiar and less chaotic. Fun and partying are part of college life at nearly every university, but at some campuses the party rages on from noon until dawn, seven days per week. Your son or daughter might be alienated by a set of classmates that is more interested in partying than acquiring a proper college education. Or, conversely, what if the students are much more studious than the child is accustomed to?

Political activism on-campus has heated up to a degree not seen since the 1960s. Is your child comfortable when the level of political correctness is high? Religious students can sometimes find themselves ridiculed or ostracized because of their

beliefs. Is a strong spiritual network and religious services a key component of your child's needs?

Your son or daughter may not be religious and might want to keep spirituality out of their education. Does he or she mind if the college has a theology requirement? Does your child want a social network of friends from similar backgrounds or would he or she prefer a more diverse group?

While my questions and concerns may be more thorough than you are accustomed to, I hope that you will see the logic of my thinking. Your children are entering a world that is far different than the one you faced upon college enrollment. Underemployment is not simply a temporary accompaniment to the recession. In the 7-plus years since the Great Recession of 2008-2009, demand for skilled college graduates has surged to new highs. Yet, widespread underemployment of recent college graduates still persists because families and students are not responding to the signals of the marketplace.

The standard of living of college graduates is in peril and without appropriate adjustments and planning by you and your child, he or she will likely be facing a post-college world that is less prosperous than expected. As a parent and an adviser to the young people of our community for nearly 30 years, I am concerned for the current generation of young adults. Thus, I offer your family a way out of the current crisis.



UNDEREMPLOYMENT Continued from Page 1

Is the stereotype of the starving artist appropriate for the current generation of college students? Absolutely! Performing arts majors are struggling in the job marketplace. Nearly 67% of recent grads with a performing arts major are underemployed and they earn an early career salary of \$30,000. Salary growth from early to mid-career is paltry, as performing arts majors earn just \$40,000 on average between 35 and 45 years of age.

If security and high wages are important priorities, one must consider a pharmacy major. Pharmacy majors are out-earning every other major by mid-career with a mid-career average salary of \$110,000. In the early years of work, pharmacy majors do quite well too. Underemployment for pharmacists is low at 20% and early salaries are fair at \$42,000 on average.

Are You Aware of the 4-year and 6-year Graduation Rates at Your Son or Daughter's Prospective College Choices and the Associated Impact on Your Child's Career and Your Pocketbook?

One of the continuing sagas in college education is the extended path to graduation for students of the current generation. In earlier eras, students could rightly expect to register at a top college choice and graduate in 4 years. Today, however, the average time from enrollment to graduation is over 5 years. At some colleges and universities, the numbers are even worse.

An extra year of college could easily cost your family \$25,000-60,000 more than expected. If your child needs 2 extra years to graduate, then your wallet will be severely impacted. Colleges that do not graduate nearly all of their students after 6 years are to be avoided. These universities have at least two of these traits: low-quality faculty, students who are not serious about their future and career, and a failure to commit appropriate resources to student support.

It may be hard to fathom, but solid students from Memorial, Kinkaid, Bellaire, Cinco Ranch, St. Agnes, and other top Houston high schools are regularly embarking on 6 or more years of undergraduate education and some never matriculate with a degree. There are universities, many of which are well-known, that graduate less than 2/3rds of enrollees after 6 years. If your family is not clearly aware of the facts, then you are missing an important facet of the college decision making process.

Take a look at some popular colleges for students in the Houston area and see how they perform in terms of graduating students on-time.

4-Year and 6-Year Graduation Rates at Selected U.S. Colleges
(Source: Department of Education)

College	4-Year Graduation Rate	6-Year Graduation Rate
Baylor	57.20%	74.70%
Beloit (WI)	70.50%	78.20%
Boston College	88.50%	91.30%
Boston University	79.60%	84.50%
Davidson (NC)	89.90%	92.50%
Georgetown	88.00%	92.50%
Lewis and Clark (OR)	66.80%	74.50%
LSU	37.90%	66.90%
SMU	66.60%	79.00%
Southwest Texas State- San Marcos	30.40%	57.40%
Southwestern University (TX)	65.20%	70.10%
TCU	58.60%	76.00%
Texas A&M	49.40%	79.10%
Texas Tech	32.80%	59.00%
Trinity University (TX)	71.90%	81.60%
Tulane	62.30%	76.00%
UCLA	69.00%	90.30%
University of Alabama	42.00%	66.70%
University of Georgia	56.80%	82.20%
University of Mississippi	36.40%	58.00%
University of San Diego	64.60%	75.00%
University of Virginia	86.30%	93.10%
University of Washington	57.50%	81.80%
UT-Austin	50.90%	79.40%
Vanderbilt	86.70%	92.50%
Whitman (WA)	79.80%	87.80%
Yale	89.60%	97.80%

Marshall Shumsky, PhD, Associates
7887 San Felipe, Suite 101
Houston, TX 77063

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Marshall Shumsky, PhD, Associates

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