

The Core Knowledge Blog

You Want Fries with that B.A.?

by Robert Pondiscio
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Over at the Cato@Liberty blog, Neal McCluskey points out a [sobering and under-discussed phenomenon](#): huge numbers of college graduates are taking jobs that don't require college degrees. He cites a [recent study](#) from the Center for College Affordability and Productivity:

Evidence shows that currently more than one-third of college graduates hold jobs that governmental employment experts tell us require less than a college degree. That proportion of underemployed college graduates has *tripled* over the past four decades.

The study points out the percentage of those in 20 “non-college” professions who have at least a Bachelor's degree: baggage porters and bellhops (17.39%), bartenders (16%), administrative assistants (16.64%) and taxi drivers or chauffers (15.15%). Before I push the panic button, I'd like to see data on how many degree holders are *still* in non-college jobs five or more years after graduation—plenty of us paid dues in entry level jobs right out of college—but the larger debate is an interesting one. It should give pause to those of us who blithely sell the notion that without college, kids are consigned to second-class citizenship.

“Many people, it seems, just assume that more education — without ever looking at what actually goes on in higher ed — is always a good thing,” McCluskey concludes, “while others believe that government should constantly funnel money to our precious ivory towers no matter how little of concrete value taxpayers get for their dough.”

In a post last year on “romanticism vs. determinism” in education, former teacher Walt Gardner argued:

If students don't like to read and prefer working with their hands, for example, why counsel them to apply to a four-year liberal arts college? At best, they might pass through. Wouldn't they be better off going to a community college to learn a trade in line with their interests? Or what about apprenticeships in the field of their choosing? Why is this blue collar work considered less worthy of respect?

Ultimately, perhaps the ideal outcome for K-12 is to keep as many doors open as long as possible, while not sending the message, as Jonathan Alter (if I recall his words correctly) put it in *Waiting for Superman*, that you're going nowhere without college. “Let's hope that the record percentage of female and male high school graduates

now enrolled in college get their money's worth," Gardner memorably concluded in his piece last September. "A mind is a terrible thing to waste, but let's not forget either that debt is a terrible thing to carry."