

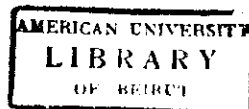
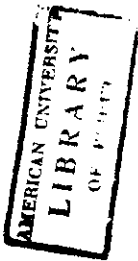
ENGLISH 203 FINAL EXAM
FALL 2001-2002

READING COMPREHENSION



Where College Fails Us
by
Caroline Bird

1. The case for college has been accepted without question for more than a generation. All high school graduates ought to go, says Conventional Wisdom and statistical evidence, because college will help them earn more money, become “better” people, and learn to be more responsible citizens than those who don’t go.
2. But college has never been able to work its magic for everyone. And now that close to half our high school graduates are attending, those who don’t hit the pattern are becoming more numerous, and more obvious. College graduates are selling shoes and driving taxis; college students sabotage each other’s experiments and forge letters of recommendation in the intense competition for admission to graduate school. Others find no stimulation in their studies, and drop out—often encouraged by college administrators.
3. Some observers say the fault is with the young people themselves—they are spoiled, stoned, overindulged, and expecting too much. But that’s mass character assassination, and doesn’t explain all campus unhappiness. Others blame the state of the world, and they are partly right. We’ve been told that young people have to go to college because our economy can’t absorb an army of untrained eighteen-year-olds. But disillusioned graduates are learning that it can no longer absorb an army of trained twenty-two-year-olds, either.
4. Some adventuresome educators and campus watchers have openly begun to suggest that college may not be the best, the proper, the only place for every young person after the completion of high school. We may have been looking at all those surveys and statistics upside down, it seems, and through the rosy glow of our own remembered college experiences. Perhaps college doesn’t make people intelligent, ambitious, happy, liberal, or quick to learn new things—maybe it’s just the other way around, and intelligent, ambitious, happy, liberal, and quick-learning people are merely the ones who have been attracted to college in the first place. And perhaps all those successful college graduates would have been successful whether they had gone to college or not. This is heresy to those of us who have been brought up to believe that if a little schooling is good, more has to be much better. But contrary evidence is beginning to mount up.



5. The unhappiness and discontent of young people is nothing new, and problems of adolescence are always painfully intense. But while traveling around the country, speaking at colleges, and interviewing students at all kinds of schools—large and small, public and private—I was overwhelmed by the prevailing sadness. It was as visible on campuses in California as in Nebraska and Massachusetts. Too many young people are in college reluctantly, because everyone told them they ought to go, and there didn't seem to be anything better to do. Their elders sell them college because it's good for them. Some never learn to like it, and talk about their time in school as if it were a sentence to be served.
6. Students tell us the same thing college counselors tell us—they go because of pressure from parents and teachers, and stay because it seems to be an alternative to a far worse fate. It's "better" than the Army or a dead-end job, and it has to be pretty bad before it's any worse than staying at home.
7. College graduates say that they don't want to work "just" for the money: They want work that matters. They want to help people and save the world. But the numbers are stacked against them. Not only are there not enough jobs in the world-saving fields, but in the current slowdown it has become evident that there never were, and probably never will be, enough jobs requiring higher education to go around.
8. Whatever college graduates want to do, most of them are going to wind up doing what there is to do. During the next years, according to the Labor Department, the biggest demand will be for stenographers and secretaries, followed by retail-trade sales workers, hospital attendants, bookkeepers, building custodians, registered nurses, foremen, kindergarten and elementary-school teachers, receptionists, cooks, cosmetologists, private-household workers, manufacturing inspectors, and industrial machinery repairmen. These are the jobs which will eventually absorb the surplus archaeologists, urban planners, oceanographers, sociologists, editors, and college professors.
9. Vocationalism is the new look on campus because of the discouraging job market faced by the generalists. Students have been opting for medicine and law in droves. If all those who check "doctor" as their career goal succeed in getting their MDs, we'll immediately have ten times the target ratio of doctors for the population of the United States. Law schools are already graduating twice as many new lawyers every year as the Department of Labor thinks we will need, and the oversupply grows annually.
10. The ultimate defense of college has always been that while it may not teach you anything vocationally useful, it will somehow make you a better person, able to do anything better, and those who make it through the process are initiated into the "fellowship of educated men and women." In a study intended to probe what graduates seven years out of college thought their colleges should have done for them, the Carnegie Commission found that most alumni expected the

“development of my abilities to think and express myself.” But if such respected educational psychologists as Bruner and Piaget are right, specific learning skills have to be acquired very early in life, perhaps even before formal schooling begins.

11. So, when pressed, liberal-arts defenders speak instead about something more encompassing, and more elusive. “College changed me inside,” one graduate told us fervently. The authors of a Carnegie Commission report, who obviously struggled for a definition, concluded that one of the common threads in the perceptions of a liberal education is that it provides “an integrated view of the world which can serve as an inner guide.” More simply, alumni say that college should have “helped me to formulate the values and goals of my life.”
12. In theory, a student is taught to develop these values and goals himself, but in practice, it doesn’t work quite that way. All but the wayward and the saintly take their sense of the good, the true, and the beautiful from the people around them. When we speak of students acquiring “values” in college, we often mean that they will acquire the values—and sometimes that means only the tastes—of their professors. The values of professors may be “higher” than many students will encounter elsewhere, but they may not be relevant to situations in which students find themselves in college and later.
13. It had always been comfortable for students to believe that authorities, like Mother, or outside specialists, like educators, could determine what was best for them. However, specialists and authorities no longer enjoy the credibility former generations accorded them. Patients talk back to doctors and are not struck suddenly dead. Clients question the lawyer’s bills and sometimes get them reduced. It is no longer self-evident that all adolescents must study a fixed curriculum that was constructed at a time when all educated men could agree on precisely what it was that made them educated.
14. The same with college. If high school graduates don’t want to continue their education, or don’t want to continue it right away, they may perceive more clearly than their elders that college is not for them.
15. College is an ideal place for those young adults who love learning for its own sake. Who would rather read than eat, and who like nothing better than writing research papers. But they are a minority, even at the prestigious colleges, which recruit and attract the intellectually oriented.
16. The rest of our high school graduates need to look at college more closely and critically, to examine it as a consumer product, and decide if the cost in dollars, in time, in continued dependency, and in future returns, is worth the very large investment each student—and his family—must make.

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Name: _____

Time: 90 minutes

Instructor: _____

Directions: Answer the following questions in the space provided.

1. In paragraph 1, Bird suggests that "Conventional Wisdom and statistical evidence" have always supported the claim that college is necessary for a better life. What two types of evidence does she use throughout the text to support her point? Give examples and specify the paragraph number. (10 points)

A. i. Type of evidence _____

ii. Paragraph number and example _____

B. i. Type of evidence _____

ii. Paragraph number and example _____

2. In paragraphs 7, 8 and 9 Bird describes the conflict between what college graduates look forward to and the reality they face. (10 points)

A. What is this conflict?

B. What is one solution college gives to the "discouraging job market"?

3. Identify a concession in paragraph 3. (5 points)

4. What possible explanation does Bird give in paragraph 4 for the success of some college students? (5 points)

5. Describe the relationship between students and figures of authority that the author outlines in the text. (5 points)

6. Why is Bird in paragraph 12 doubtful about students acquiring “values” in college? (5 points)

7. Throughout the text, Bird incorporates arguments from the opposing view and then refutes them. Identify two counterarguments and their refutations. Specify the paragraph numbers. (20 points)

Counterargument 1: _____

Refutation 1: _____

Counterargument 2: _____

Refutation 2: _____

8. In your own words explain what the writer means by the following expressions: (20 points)

A. “that’s mass character assassination” (paragraph 3)

B. "the numbers are stacked against them" (paragraph 7)

C. "forge letters of recommendation" (paragraph 2)

D. "dead-end job" (paragraph 6)

9. Paraphrase the following sentence:

"It is no longer self-evident that all adolescents must study a fixed curriculum that was constructed at a time when all educated men would agree on precisely what it was that made them educated" (paragraph 13) (10 points)

10. In your own words write a thesis statement for the whole text. (10 points)

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**ESSAY WRITING
Time: 90 minutes**

Directions: Choose **one** of the following topics and write a well-organized persuasive essay. Include arguments, counterarguments and refutations in your essay.

1. Wisdom is gained from life experience rather than academic knowledge. Do you agree? Argue for or against this belief.
2. Argue for or against the use of movies in classes like English, Cultural Studies, and Philosophy as a springboard for discussion.
3. Card games are widespread on Lebanese college campuses nowadays. Argue for or against allowing students to play cards on campus.
4. When you settle down in a new environment, you need to let go of your cultural traits, customs and values; otherwise, you will not be able to survive in that environment. Argue for or against this statement.
5. Today's volunteer work is often intensely local, even personal. The focus is on feeding a few people, protecting a small patch of trees, etc... Does volunteer work make a difference in your life? Argue for or against the importance of volunteer work in one's life.