

Homeschool Graduate Encourages Other Grads to Rethink College

When [Natalie Wickham](#) graduated from high school, she wrestled with the question of whether or not to attend college. She had been homeschooled for nine years of her education, but the prevailing expectation was that she would pursue further schooling from some accredited institution. However, rather than follow some pre-designed plan just because everyone around her did, Wickham decided to keep her options open and trust God to provide the educational experiences and opportunities she needed.

Since graduating in 1999, Wickham has had uncountable experiences and opportunities that she never would have gained through a traditional college education. This included earning her National Certification as a Teacher of Music, and launching her own thriving private music studio. Despite having never even taken the ACT, let alone pursued a college degree, Wickham's expertise and hands-on experience landed her in front of a graduate class at a local university. There she discovered that years of classroom lectures and hours spent studying for tests hadn't prepared these students for the real world of teaching and running a studio. Real life has prepared Wickham far better than a traditional education ever could have. Wickham's latest trailblazing has led her to publish [Pajama School](#), a book that highlights her life and inspires other students to continue to challenge the status quo and trust God with the future beyond graduation.

Wickham is one example of a homeschool graduate who successfully followed the road less-traveled. While new doors to higher education are opening all the time, there is still considerable pressure on high school graduates to view college as the key to unlocking a successful future. Nothing could be further from the truth! Exorbitant tuition costs siphon thousands of dollars and instead serve to plague students for years after graduating. Propaganda-driven classes program the next generation to be minions of the state. Detrimental social environments perpetuate adolescent irresponsibility rather than equip students to be financially savvy, independent thinkers who can positively impact the culture. More and more high school graduates are looking for alternatives to the failing system that traditional higher education has become.

Cash In, Debt Out

Exorbitant tuition costs that plague students for years after graduating has become stunningly common. Many students are never even able to get a job in their chosen field.

In her well-researched book, *The Case Against College*, Caroline Bird reports, "We concluded that in strictly financial terms, college is the dumbest investment a young man can make."¹ Her chapters dealing with the cost of college tuition outline in great detail how they arrived at this conclusion. After interviewing hundreds of students at schools across the country, she writes, "Many . . . told us frankly that while college is a pleasant place to be – and beats working – it would not be worth it if they had to pay for it themselves."² A recent survey asked thousands of students at hundreds of colleges if they would go to their school again. About 40% said they were not likely to enroll.

This trend was highlighted by the recent ABC News story, “Is College Worth the Price of Admission?” The promise that a college degree will guarantee a better paying job has proved to be a lie for many college graduates. “The bachelor’s degree is America’s most overrated product,” says Marty Nemko, PH.D., an education consultant and career counselor. “When your parents had a bachelor’s degree it was a big deal . . . today it’s like a hunting license for a job.”

Sandy Baum, an Economics professor, admits that a degree won’t make graduates the additional million that colleges promise. But she does insist that “on average people benefit much more from going to college.” However, statistics don’t back that up. Students in the bottom 40% of their high school class (students that colleges are working hard to recruit) have very low chances of ever graduating, even if given 8 ½ years, according to Nemko. The kids who are successful, on the other hand, are the ones who would have been successful whether they went to college or not, because they have the drive, perseverance, and hands-on skills to succeed.

Personal finance guru Suzu Orman agrees. “It’s smarter to acquire specific marketable skills . . . I would much rather see a student graduate knowing that they can go out there, get a job, and not be crushed under the burden of a prestigious degree.”

Perhaps if it were only exorbitant costs, the traditional educational establishment could be forgiven enough to be tolerated. But instead, there are ominous warnings that it wants students to check in their brains at the door along with their bills.

No Thinking Allowed

Lauren Bleser, an elementary teacher from upstate New York who has experienced teaching in public, private, and homeschool settings alike, points out that even the National Education Association (NEA) agrees that education cannot be neutral and that ideas do have consequences. In her recent article “A Teacher Learns the Truth About Education,” Bleser sums up the modern educational agenda with a quote from Joyce Elmer Morgan, former editor of the *Journal of the National Education Association*.

Morgan says, “In the struggle to establish an adequate world government, the teacher can do much to prepare the hearts and minds of children for global understanding and cooperation. At the very top of all the agencies which will assure the coming of world government must stand the school, the teacher, and the organized profession.”

Worldview *does* count. The old cliché that “the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world” rings hauntingly true in Morgan’s statement. But college students are not infants, and they are not prone to be lulled to sleep by relativistic, socialistic ideas, are they?

Perhaps more than we might think.

In a recent controversial book, “Brainwashed: How Universities Indoctrinate America’s Youth,” college graduate Ben Shapiro reveals the liberal agenda college students are expected to adopt if they want to be considered tolerant and academic. Professors with liberal agendas seek to champion tolerance for all – except for those with a conservative worldview. As Phyllis Schlafly notes, “the radicals of the 1960s have become tenured professors.” Situational ethics and groupthink pervade not only the classroom but also infiltrate the dorms, until all the world seems to think, act, and speak in exactly the same way. Josh Sterling, a senior at Cornell University, said, “When 1% of the campus is conservative and the other 99% who care are incredibly liberal, you’re going to get something approaching a socialist state.”

Even some avowed liberal professors have grown so disgusted with the lack of critical thinking and work ethic of students that they have decided to leave the job they love. As one such professor, who asked to be called John Smith, explained, “Intellectual sparring . . . about ideas – among students and faculty – has been replaced by one-sided, partisan drivel . . . my partisan colleagues . . . do not hear the other side, so it is easy to demonize the other side. Their students are listening, and sadly think of conservatism in its many forms as horrific. Worse still, they now conflate liberal passion and advocacy with justice, and by default, analytic rigor and reason. They do not weigh evidence, or take note of pro, cons, costs or benefits. Doing so would be to admit that there are merits to positions they do not hold.”

The question begs to be asked, why pay thousands of dollars to hear only one side of the story?

A Social Wasteland

One of the long-supposed benefits of going to college is simply for the social experience. Thousands have made lifelong friends – and found lifelong partners – at universities all over the world. But it has become increasingly obvious that college is more likely not only a fake – but also dangerous – social environment for students. Statistics show that both drug and alcohol abuse on campus has gone on a rampant increase in the last few years - with some drug increases up to 343%. According to a 2008 survey in the Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, violence on college campuses is also on the rise. 45% of students report that they have been the victim of some form of violence, whether physical, sexual, or emotional.

It would appear that being surrounded by peers is more likely to perpetuate a culture of irresponsible adolescence than prepare young adults for the rigors of the real world. In his article, Professor Smith describes higher education at many liberal arts colleges as a “puffy sofa nestled with down pillows” for scores of students. He observes that not only do students want it easy in class, they want to be comfy and passive beyond the classroom as well. “Student life” largely serves to debilitate the notion of a genuine, deliberative, academic community. Rather than fuel cerebral discussions with activities for the mind, resident advisors and their adult supervisors plan activities that redefine anti-intellectualism. There is Sensitivity Day, Tolerance Day, Wear [insert color here]

Day, and a host of other events that are aimed at ‘inspiring.’ Dorm life is supposed to be cool, fun and engaging . . . my students are brutally honest – they tell me with candor and without shame that their peers think of college as a four year cruise without a destination.”

While there is nothing wrong with a little fun, it is not and should not be the purpose of a college education. Neither is it worthy of piling up student debts to earn nothing in return.

Rethinking College

In spite of all the negative trends, a growing number of young people are growing frustrated enough with the way things are to blaze a different trail. Those leading the charge are often young people already accustomed to challenging the status quo – homeschool graduates.

Jana Kornfeld, Marketing Manager for Natalie Wickham’s book [*Pajama School*](#), can testify to a similar dissatisfaction with the traditional options available to homeschool graduates that Wickham experienced. Kornfeld also determined to trust God to show her an alternative path. She discovered an organization called [CollegePlus!](#), a coaching program which assists students in earning their degrees via accelerated distance learning methods. “It was an answer to every prayer I’d ever prayed as far as continuing my education went. I would not only be able to save time and money, but I would be able to remain at home and stay involved with my family, church, and community ministries,” says Kornfeld. For under \$10,000, she was able to earn her fully accredited four-year degree in just 14 months and 14 days.

Brittany Barden can attest to the vital assistance of [CollegePlus!](#) with similar results. Barden earned 120 credits toward her fully accredited BA entirely through credit-by-examination alone – in just 10 months. Neither did she become a mole under a pile of textbooks to accomplish this seemingly impossible feat. While she studied and took tests, Barden found time to run her mom’s business, coordinate a local Bible Bee Competition, help advise political campaigns, and serve her family. “It was absolutely crazy, but proof that you can live a full life while completing a college degree in record time!” Barden declares.

All three of these graduates present proof that education is about more than just simply going with the flow. It’s trusting God with our futures and being willing to blaze a different trail. For graduates like Wickham, Kornfeld, Barden, and countless others, it has been more than worth it. For others willing to take the challenge, new and exciting opportunities await!

[Natalie Wickham](#) was homeschooled from fourth grade through college alongside her five siblings. She has a passion for challenging and equipping upcoming generations of homeschoolers to be godly leaders. Natalie owns and operates a successful piano studio and music educator's blog and is the current Director of Adventures in Character. She is also the author of the book [Pajama School – stories from the life of a homeschool graduate](#).