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Passion versus career?

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Passion versus Career?



In a recent *Atlantic* [article](#) author and teacher Andrew Simmons argues that less well-off students are given a very different message about the value of an education than upper-middle class kids.

According to Simmons, poorer kids are given the message “that intellectual curiosity plays second fiddle to financial security.” Higher education is all about the job market for these students while children of the privileged are encouraged to find and follow their passions. Simmons believes, “College should be ‘sold’ to all students as an opportunity to experience an intellectual awakening.”

The author does make an important point when he argues that professional (and financial) success is often linked to the passionate engagement with one’s career and simply choosing a job for the security and income it offers can limit choices and lead to a less than satisfying professional life. But I think that he may be making distinction between intellectual engagement and a career focus that is equally unhelpful.

Even the children of privilege must think about the job market. They are foolish if they simply view college as a four year hiatus from life in which they get to pursue intellectual passions and discovery (“follow their hearts” in the author’s words) divorced from the world. A great college education is an expensive investment in the future, and students (and their parents) must thoughtfully combine what they love with a practical eye on an uncertain and even unknowable job market. It is eminently possible to engage both these considerations as students think about their educational futures.

Interestingly, Simmons believes that a great residential liberal arts experience is the ideal option for his talented, ambitious students. On that we certainly agree.

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