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To whom do college graduates have obligations?

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Quad 136

To Whom do College Graduates Have Obligations?

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To Whom do College Graduates Have Obligations?

Here is a topic for your next dinner party or informal chat with friends: once you have acquired a college degree, with all the time and financial sacrifice that entails, do you have an obligation to use that degree?

Recent conversations around this topic started when a Princeton mother and alumna offered dating advice to Ivy League women, specifically encouraging them to “find a husband on campus before you graduate” (see NPR story [here](#)). Needless to say, her letter to the *Daily Princetonian* generated lots of heated debate. A journalist for the *Guardian* in Britain [wrote](#) that well educated women “have a duty to stay in the workforce.” Another Princeton grad who works at home had a [very different take](#).

The commentary cited above is obviously gendered, but the questions can be broadened. If one is a great STEM student (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) are you obligated to study those areas if you happen to have a passion for poetry? Can a well-educated man choose to retire early? Are trust-fund babies to be forbidden from getting higher education? As life expectancy increases, must our working lives also be extended? Do those who attended state universities have different obligations than those who attended privates because their education was subsidized by tax-payers rather than alumni donors?

Not easy questions. All implicitly ask about the purposes of education – for oneself, for one’s family and for society.

While education often has economic benefits to the graduate and society, surely higher education is not purely instrumental. It would be a poorer world if education was not also about something more.

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