

MythBusters: College Edition

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College to me always seemed far off in my future, so it wasn't discussed very much when I was younger. Now, as I am quickly nearing the end of my senior year, I feel all that anyone discusses is college related. Once I reached my junior and senior years, I was told a lot of things about college before I even started applying. Looking back now, many of them I realized weren't accurate in the slightest. Not only was I receiving data from my classmates and teachers, but I was also taking in information from movies and tv shows that were about college. Some of these movies that instilled false testimonials of college for me included, *Accepted*; where the unaccepted students create their own college with their own rules and *Greek*; college is all about partying, frats, relationships, and hazing's. I was given a false idea of what college life would be like. If I'm being completely honest, I was nervous for college after watching these movies, but little did I know it was all a facade. While researching this topic, I found out that many people had similar feelings toward going to college as I did. A survey done by EAB (2024) states that, "Almost half (48%) of all students surveyed indicated that 'stress and anxiety overshadow their college search and planning.'" Consequently, instead of placing these inaccuracies in the minds of incoming college students, it is important for me that students be informed about career paths, residence halls, courses, and price tags before they decide whether college is for them or not. I believe that everyone should be able to transparently see what an accurate college life could be like before they commit to anything.

Before applying to college, I felt very uncertain about what I wanted my experience to look like. I am the first of four children, so I also didn't have an older sibling to help me. My parents hadn't been to college in over thirty years, and a lot has changed since then. According to Brehe-Gunther from KD College Prep (2024), there are many things that make the college experience different now compared to the experience thirty years ago for example, higher costs, standardized test changes and how Covid-19 made most colleges test optional, the effects of

social media, and the changes with applications. I was looking at private, public, small, large, near, and far. These are all decisions that prospective college students will also have to make before they even get to experience what the “college experience” is all about. I find it crazy that we are lighted up to make all these decisions about our future when our brains aren’t even fully developed, but since seventeen or eighteen-year-olds don’t have a choice, I thought I’d pass on some of what I learned from my own research for my college choice and for this essay.

Going into college undecided is possible, but it was uncommon from what I’ve heard. I was told it’s okay if you don’t have to have it all figured out, yet I still felt a lot of pressure to make a decision because how are you supposed to know what school you want to attend, without knowing the career path you want to take. Figuring out what you want to do with the rest of your life doesn’t happen overnight but is found through finding out what you like and dislike over a long period of time. Anothny Carlisle from USN (2024) states that, “They [students] are still progressing toward degree completion while in that exploring pathway figuring out where do they fit, where do they see themselves best.” Learning is a process and having the knowledge that I have now about this topic, I have realized that it is okay to go into college not knowing what career path you want to take. According to Tuition Fit (2021), “Three out of every four college students don’t find the major they graduate with until after they start college.” We are all on our own timelines, so it is unrealistic to think that everyone will fit into a cookie cutter college path. When I was figuring out my own path, I was very conflicted. I was stuck between pediatric nursing and elementary education. The only thing I knew for sure was that I wanted to work with children. With the resources of my school and parents, I was able to shadow in both areas. I realized that I enjoyed leading a classroom over working in a hospital. It is just fine to not know what you want to do because eventually you will get there, and the path you chose

today may shift and change before you actually graduate college. Learning is a lifelong challenge and a privilege, so take advantage of it.

When it comes to hitting the books, I was fed a false reality through books and movies that college classes would be filled with boring professors teaching boring lectures. However, college classes do involve lectures, that's not all they have in store. They also include interactive activities, relatable discussions, and classmate collaborations. During one of my college tours, I got the opportunity to sit in on a college class. I was expecting to walk into a big room, laid out in an auditorium style, packed with students. What I walked into was a lot less intimidating. There was a grouping of about ten couches and comfy chairs arranged into a circle. The professor was clearly the head of the room, but students were given a chance to speak, and it was as if the other students were learning from the students who were speaking. According to Jessica Dickenson (2022), "In high school, it was important for you to learn and repeat the information that you were taught. When you toured the campus, you probably noticed a lot of lecture halls. While there is a lot of talking in college, it is a different atmosphere." I can definitely be a witness to the atmosphere change that happens between high school and college courses. In college, it felt as though the students wanted to be there and wanted to learn, whereas in high school it feels the complete opposite.

College is not only about classes. It is also about creating bonds and getting involved. When I heard the term residence halls, I always thought they were just buildings with rooms in them; a place where people just went to sleep. But, oh was I wrong. Residence halls are so much more than that. They are places where students come together, hang out, study, and to simply put it just have fun. I recently slept overnight in a residence hall for a college retreat. It was nothing like I expected at all. So, first, you walk into a bustling room filled with students playing pool, card games, making pancakes, listening to music, and chatting it up. After I passed the initial

overwhelmingness of what I just walked through I was taken up to the girls' hall. Most of the doors were open and very inviting, everyone was laughing and getting along just great.

Rosenburg (2018), wrote an article on residence halls being more than just a place to sleep, they declared, “We all need to be good neighbors and that starts with students recognizing that their behaviors have an impact—good and bad.” The student gets to decide what type of experience they would like to have. It depends on how involved one gets and how far one will go. If the student puts little effort into getting to know others, that is going to be perceived as they don’t want to get to know others. If I had a word of wisdom to give, I would suggest being yourself. The people who are most like you are going to find you in a matter of time.

This year the most common concern I have and have heard from my classmates is how in the world are we supposed to pay for college, it totally out of our price range. According to Scheckel (2024), “Average 2024-2025 annual tuition for public, four-year colleges is \$11,610 for state residents, and \$30,780 for out-of- state residents, according to College Board data.” Now being up against the hefty amount, I have found that there are a ton of ways to receive aid. I am in the mist of filling out the FASFA, applying for scholarship after scholarship, grants, loans, and work-study programs. I have also picked up part-time work during the school year and full-time work during the summer. Tightening the reins on things like fancy drinks, foods, clothing, etc... is also a good idea to save money. However, with all of these in place the college price tag can still feel a bit daunting. The Federal Student Aid website (2025) suggests, “That you meet with a representative from your school’s financial aid office to determine what resources and options may be available.” Sometimes if schools are aware that certain students are struggling to meet their payments, they will give grants to those students which help them cover some of the cost. Another idea would be to look at the areas in which costs piled up the most. Students could choose cheaper living arrangements, for example living at home, different meal plan options, or

even take on less courses to save money. With all that being said, we all have choices, and it is the situations that we create for ourselves that can determine the outcomes of our future.

After reading my essay I hope that it has better helped you understand the grey areas when it comes to talking about college. I truly believe that before a student heads off to college they should be fully aware about different career paths, courses, residence halls, and price tags. Writing this essay felt like a big task to me, since I didn't totally feel like I knew what I was talking about. Now, after reading it back to myself, I realized I really do know what I am talking about and with the information I have learned, I hope to encourage someone else in their post high school plans. I hope the same goes for you reader. If you are an older adult, there are many students out there unsure of what their future could look like and just need someone to help them through it. If you are a student, instead of college being an undiscussable topic until senior year rolls around, get familiar with what it could look like, so it doesn't feel overwhelming when the time comes to start the application processes.

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