

Not every kid belongs in some form of higher education

By Wayne Hoffman

Whenever I hear someone intone about the poor state of things in not receiving a higher education, it reminds me of John Blutasrsky (John Belushi) in the movie "Animal House" upon learning he was about to be expelled: "Seven years of college down the drain," he said, adding that he might as well join the Peace Corps.

It's possible that no one else has the nerve to say this, but I do: I disagree with the newly minted goal, embraced by the governor's education reform task force, that 60 percent of Idahoans should have an advanced degree or certificate by 2020.

It's not that I have a problem with college. I went to college. Both my kids are considering college as a future option upon graduation. My 16 year-old daughter and I plan to tour colleges and universities next summer, ahead of her junior year.

My daughter is not your daughter, or son, or grandchild. What's right for her may not be right for other children. And if my son or daughter decides that college is not right for them, or that another option will lead to better opportunities, so be it.

Still, there is a remarkable amount of academic snobbery being injected into American schools and the workplace. It's an elitist notion that if you don't go to college, you're less valuable than someone who did. That you're an underachiever, or not smart. That you'll never be rich or happy. It's also profoundly untrue.

I'll refrain listing all the millionaires and billionaires who managed incredible success without a college education or advanced education certificate. It sounds a tad trite, even if it is entirely true. But I also have a great number of friends and associates throughout our state and country, successful in life and in business, in their families, their communities and the workforce, who have done and are doing just fine without the academic credentials academia says they're supposed to have.

I also have friends who work in the trades, who make good money and are incredibly happy, without an education beyond high school. Some in academia treats them like they're subhuman, dumb, abnormal or irrelevant.

Likewise, I have friends and associates who have college degrees that they have never used, or college debt they simply can't get out from under, or college educations that failed to deliver on the promises to prepare them for the careers they had in mind. A college degree is one thing; the knowledge and proficiency to do a job is something else entirely.

In the 21st century, much can be learned from resources that are nowhere near a classroom on a college campus. Is it more important that 60 percent of Idaho have a degree or post-secondary certificate, or that they have the knowledge and skills to do a job?

Moreover, I'm shocked we're even having a serious discussion about post-secondary education, when our public officials have yet to get K-12 education right. Of the kids that go on to college, as many as half require some kind of remedial education, which, of course, students have to pay for

without any credit toward their degrees. Shouldn't we try to fix that first? Why the rush to push kids from one broken education venue to the next?

The race to set and meet an artificial goal is overshadowing everything else right now. And the results that await are rather predictable. Don't be surprised if more schoolchildren end up being propelled into college or post-secondary programs when that's neither what they want nor need. Don't be surprised when the artificial demand for new academic credentials drives up the already-inflated price for post-secondary education.

And don't be surprised when more kids end up with debt they can't afford or degrees and certificates that they'll never use.

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