

Homeschooling Through College

Matthew and David Bass

Did you know that nine out of ten Christian high school students will leave the church by the time they are sophomores in college? (McNeal, Reggie. *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*. Jossey-Bass, 2003, p. 4.)

If that statistic surprises you, you're not alone. Homeschool parents devote years to developing the spiritual, moral, and academic integrity of their children. They made the choice to homeschool due to plummeting academic standards and harmful social influences in public schools. Yet after graduation, many parents automatically commit their students to a four-year college where everything they worked so hard to instill is threatened and even destroyed.

Considering our culture's emphasis on having a college degree, homeschool families might see no other choice than to send their child to college. After all, a college education is the best way to ensure financial and vocational success, right? Thanks to recent technological advances and changes in the way we view education, the answer is quickly becoming *no*. Many homeschool students are finding that earning a college degree through distance education is a comparable, and even better, way of achieving their academic goals.

So what is distance education, anyway? It is the process of earning an accredited college degree by self-study through the mail or over the Internet instead of attending classes at a traditional institution. Earning a degree in this way offers a number of benefits, including a more positive spiritual and moral atmosphere, more vocational opportunities during school, and a chance to graduate without the burden of student loans.

Take a Step Back

Before considering distance education, take a step back and decide whether a college degree is right for you. Cafi Cohen, author of *The Homeschoolers' College Admissions Handbook*, once observed, "College has been the default button on our child-raising menu for too long. It is almost a mantra in our society . . . We have reached the point where most families routinely push their children to attend college regardless of their sons' and daughters' interests, talents, and occupational goals." (Novak, Claire. "Transcripts, CLEPs, and other ways to get into college." *The Old Schoolhouse Magazine*.)

Don't be fooled: A college degree is not required for vocational and financial bliss. A degree can help your career, but it's no golden ticket to a dream job. Many people swallow the college recruiters' pitch that a degree will guarantee you a Ferrari and early retirement on a sundrenched beach in Bermuda. It does not. Hard work, determination, and a willingness to think outside the box are what count in the long run.

If a college degree is necessary to achieve your goals, go for it, but many careers do not require a diploma. Some of the world's wealthiest individuals—including Bill Gates and Michael Dell—dropped out of college to pursue their dreams. In some cases, earning a college degree may actually be a hindrance to vocational and spiritual development. If God is leading you in a direction other than college, obey His voice.

What's Better about Distance Education?

For those who choose to attend college, the next question is whether distance education is better than tried-and-true alternatives. After all, why should students forfeit the chance to get “the college experience”? Why should parents shelter their children and prevent them from wetting their feet in the real-world atmosphere of the college campus? Why should families forfeit the opportunity to be salt and light on a secular campus?

There are a number of reasons, but we will touch on three main areas of benefit: vocational, financial, and spiritual.

Vocational

Homeschoolers recognize the importance of self-motivation. While teachers in a classroom setting often baby-step students through the learning process, homeschool students, especially those in high school, must cultivate discipline and perseverance in order to learn. That's one of the many benefits home education offers.

Distance education fosters this same attitude of self-motivation in learning. Instructors are typically hundreds of miles away. Students are responsible for effectively managing their study schedules without the structure of a classroom. This system more accurately reflects a real job. Employees are responsible for time management and must take initiative to avoid a pink slip.

Another vocational benefit of distance education is more free time that can be used to pursue an apprenticeship or internship. Online study provides the flexibility to arrange your schedule around other activities that will further your career and life goals. A traditional college setting, with its inconvenient class schedules, shuts down many of these avenues. Gaining real world experience is a big plus after graduation, since most hiring managers place a premium on it. According to a survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, 38 percent of college students who interned at a company while in school ended up working full-time at the same company after they graduated. (National Association of College Employers. “Internships, Co-op Experience Valuable to College Graduates.”)

In our experience, combining school and the right mix of job opportunities can help jump-start a career. While Matthew was enrolled in a distance education program at Thomas Edison State College in New Jersey, he began an apprenticeship at a local software development studio called RoleModel Software headed by a Christian homeschool father. Over the following year, Matthew gained on-the-job experience in

software development while studying in the evenings. During his sophomore year in college, Matthew joined a much larger company, SAS Institute, and was hired as a full-time developer before graduating from college.

Similarly, David is currently pursuing a degree in communications while being a contributing editor to two statewide public policy organizations. A flexible schedule allows him to pursue various freelance writing opportunities and learn about the world of journalism by actually participating in the field rather than simply studying about it. This tactic has also allowed David to develop an extensive portfolio of published work.

With the swiftly changing job market, experience is now at a premium. A college degree will get you only so far. If an employer sees that you have firsthand familiarity with your chosen field, he or she is far more likely to push the “hire” button since a degree coupled with experience is far more attractive than a degree by itself.

Financial

Gas prices may be going through the roof, but that’s nothing compared to what parents will be plunking down to send little Tommy or Mary through college in another decade. Currently, one year at Harvard costs around \$40,000. That’s a decent chunk of change. Without a good scholarship, college bills have the nagging tendency to take up residence in your spare bedroom.

In our borrow-happy society, it’s little surprise that two-thirds of college graduates have student loans. According to a study by the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, the average student loan is nearly \$20,000. (The SmartStudent Guide to Financial Aid. “Student Loans.”) That’s a hefty amount of debt to be saddled with, especially for a young person facing the possibility of marriage and child-rearing in the near future.

Credit card debt is another major issue. Numerous studies show that most college students graduate with thousands of dollars in credit card debt. Adding high interest rates to the mix does not create a pretty financial picture. Even Christian college students who have been trained in the virtues of stewardship and self-control may fall prey to the enormous pressure placed upon them to “swipe the plastic.”

This raises another harmful effect of the cost of higher education—its impact on family finances. While college students may graduate with heavy debt burdens, research shows that students’ families suffer as well. According to the study “Paying for College: The Rising Cost of Higher Education,” families in New England are devoting an average of 33 percent of their yearly income to meeting tuition and college-related expenses. (Harvard Graduate School of Education. “Study Shows New England Families Paying a Third of Income on College.”) Even for those families that have prepared years in advance, college expenses are still inordinately high.

What’s the solution? While distance education still hurts the wallet, tuition is more on par with what you’ll pay at a community college. In addition, distance ed enables you to pay

as you go by working a job related to your field of study. Imagine graduating from college with a surplus in the bank rather than burdensome student loans that may weigh you down for years. Distance education helps you achieve that goal.

High tuition isn't the only financial pitfall you'll avoid. There are many other expenses you won't face: dormitory or apartment costs, parking permits, gas for driving to and from school, and traveling expenses to visit parents during holidays and vacations, among others. Think of distance education as your "stay out of debt" card.

Spiritual and Moral

Perhaps the most important reason for choosing distance education is avoiding a poisonous campus atmosphere that harms students' spiritual walk and moral integrity. One of the primary reasons parents choose to home educate their children is to avoid the secular teaching and corrupt social life of public schools. But when it comes to college, a large majority of parents mechanically commit their children to institutions of higher learning, overlooking the deleterious environment.

Some parents, even those who have chosen to home educate, feel the need to have their children attend traditional college in order to get a taste of the "real world." Such a viewpoint ignores the plain truth that college is not the real world. Often, students' parents pick up the tab for tuition, dorms or apartments, food, clothing, transportation, entertainment, and a number of other expenses—hardly a reflection of real-world living in which individuals are responsible for meeting their own financial needs independent of their parents. In addition, the social atmosphere among most students is far removed from the responsibilities and obligations of day-to-day life in the real world. Far from teaching independence, traditional college often fosters dependence on others to finance what many students view as four years of "living it up" before true adulthood begins.

For homeschool parents, one of the most alarming aspects of traditional college should be the rampant liberal and atheistic philosophies on campuses. Nowhere else in American society is there so large a conglomeration of authority figures who reflect hard-held atheistic and socialistic views of the world. For Christian homeschoolers, the question is simple: is exposing yourself to the instruction of anti-God individuals five days a week God's will? Proverbs 13:20 says, "*He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.*" Being a witness for Jesus Christ among the lost is critically important, but is subjecting yourself to four years under the authority of an atheist faculty really the best way to do it?

Unfortunately, most Christian students in the polluted atmosphere of college life do not yet possess the moral and spiritual fortitude to stand up against much older, smarter, and more powerful adults. Even Christian and conservative professors are routinely persecuted for their beliefs. If these instructors can't exercise freedom of thought, what makes you think an 18-year-old freshman will be exempt?

Aside from teaching hostile to Christianity, the average campus atmosphere is hardly conducive to spiritual growth. Take binge drinking as an example. According to a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Harvard School of Public Health, college students spend a yearly average of \$5.5 billion on alcoholic beverages. The same study revealed that around 600,000 assaults occur on college campuses each year as a result of drinking. (Dees, Matt, and Jennifer Brevorka. "Colleges find drinking deeply rooted.")

Campus crime is also rampant. According to the Central Michigan University's Sexual Assault Peer Advocates Group, the risk of being raped is four times greater for college-age women than for any other age group. (Morrison, Chloe. "Sexual assault awareness." The University Echo Online.) Is it responsible for Christian fathers, who are obligated by God to protect the purity of their children, to send their daughters into such a setting?

Everyone knows colleges are hardly the safest and healthiest environments in the country, but aren't Christians supposed to enter the dark places of society to witness to the lost? By staying connected with a local church community and protecting their moral character from the damaging influences of the world, students have a greater opportunity to reach out without suffering the consequences of continually being in a polluted atmosphere. The example of Jesus Christ is clear: The Lord and His disciples went into bad places to witness, but they did not "hang out" there and continually expose themselves to sin, and they certainly didn't spend years under the tutelage of pagan philosophers.

What about Christian colleges? The statistics shared above undoubtedly do not apply to Christian colleges and universities. Although campus life might be better, however, the financial and time requirements of traditional Christian colleges are still high. This is another reason to choose distance education rather than traditional college.

Conclusion

The responsibility for education lies with the student and not with the teacher. Society has flipped that around in recent decades, but homeschooling has begun to correct that shift. Distance education is merely one additional avenue that continues the correction through college. After pursuing degrees through distance education ourselves, we firmly believe that distance ed is a positive and realistic alternative to traditional college, especially for homeschoolers.

We encourage you to learn more about this exciting form of learning and make an educated decision. The Internet contains a treasure trove of resources to help you locate and apply for distance education programs, communicate with others who have earned or are pursuing a degree this way, and search for other alternatives if college is not the right option for you.

The positive aspects of homeschooling need not be erased during the college years. By taking an unconventional approach to post-secondary education, students can retain their

spiritual and moral convictions, minimize or avoid college debt, and graduate with real-world experience in their chosen career field. This is another area where homeschoolers can spearhead a countercultural revolution that changes the way society views education.

Biographical Information

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Homeschool graduates Matthew and David Bass are committed to informing others about the benefits of homeschooling through college. Their blog about distance education is located at www.TheDistanceLearner.com. Additionally, Matthew has developed a web-based service to make creation of high school transcripts easier for college-bound homeschoolers. It can be found at www.teascript.com. While attending college online, David is a full-time freelance writer with work featured in numerous publications. He blogs at www.DavidNBass.com.