

In College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be By Andrew Delbanco

Student's Name:

Course:

Date

Andrew Delbanco is one of the most popular critics of education and social life. Indeed, his ideas on the role of college cannot be ignored as far as education is concerned. Although colleges differ in terms of structure and culture, Delbanco believes that all colleges should have a specific structure. In support of his thesis in the book; *College What It Was Is and Should Be*, Delbanco denotes that the ultimate goals of every college should focus on helping students think and choose.<sup>2</sup> He further acknowledges that through the years, colleges have developed from the idea of a church to a place for growth in science and most of all liberal subjects like philosophy. Surprisingly, while Augustine of Hippo in his theory of knowledge agrees to some point with Delbanco, he assumes that education should offer happiness and that students should be able to use faith and reason to enhance their educational life.

To begin with, Andrew Delbanco notes that as changes happen in the American colleges, the role of education is becoming more difficult and confusing.<sup>2</sup> For many students, Colleges remains the place where they grow from adolescent to adulthood, trying to explore life as much as they can. Surprisingly, American colleges have been left only for the rich. In its democratic pledge, the US represents education for as many young people as possible regardless of their financial situation.<sup>4</sup> However, Delbanco believes that there is still hope and something should be done to protect college from future generations. Although it seems irrational to think that experiences can be the same for different colleges, it is clear that an unstable future has resulted from this discrimination.<sup>2</sup> To further support his thesis, Delbanco notes that teaching is a growing act that often involves teachers who get older and students who get younger by the year.

<sup>1</sup>Furthermore, he brings upon the idea of understanding the original mission of the American's oldest colleges. The founders of Harvard have the idea of bringing the people of England education in return for economic benefits.<sup>4</sup> Yet their focus was to use the same education to escape illiterate ministries at the church. Surprisingly, the churchly image of the college is far from what many students experience today. Take for instance, philosophy students in different colleges. They would most likely fit in football stadium that they would fit in a philosophy class. Nonetheless, the number of people enrolling to college is growing by the day, yet only a few of the number will experience the traditional sense of what college is meant for.<sup>2</sup> Many students go to college with a specific purpose in mind. Yet college should be a place where they are given the chance to figure out what is worth doing.<sup>4</sup> Some colleges even go further to answering the question of what college is for, but they should leave the students to figure that out for themselves.

To support his thesis further, Delbanco argues that in elite colleges like the one he teaches, students are given the opportunity of selecting different things. But while students are away from their parents and may look like they have limitless choices, they are under pressures of what their parents want.<sup>2</sup> College should be the place where young people find themselves. To make the idea clearer, Delbanco recalls an 1850 manuscript from a student from a Methodist college in southwest Virginia.<sup>2</sup> The student, Emory after attending a sermon by the school's principal noted that God should show him how to think and choose. It is indeed clear the religion sits at the center of what college should offer, yet today's college experience is far from religion.

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<sup>1</sup> Delbanco, Andrew. 2015. *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400866144>.

3. Paffenroth, Kim, and Kevin L. Hughes. *Augustine and liberal education*. Routledge, 2017.

In fact, few colleges would assume religion as a public matter that is worth exploring for their students<sup>2</sup>.

On the other hand, Augustine of Hippo acknowledges education and college thereof as a place where a person achieves a certain desirable activity. Simply, this in a way differs from Delbanco's philosophy of education focusing on philosophy and the liberal arts<sup>1</sup>. In his views, Augustine makes Delbanco's argument look biased while he reject the pagan mode of learning and the purpose of college as far as pagans are concerned. In his views, Augustine says that college should not only give the right knowledge to the students but that it should do so in the right method to achieve the final goal<sup>1</sup>. The '*right method*' as noted in his book; *The Confession* is the method that will lead to being with God. However, Augustine seems to support Delbanco's view that college should be a place for students to follow their curiosity to finding themselves<sup>3</sup>. In his views, Augustine acknowledges that curiosity is a better mode of learning than the modern day learning that is based on pressure.

Furthermore, just like Delbanco, Augustine sees teaching as an act of love that is bestowed upon the students to understand new ideas. The introduction of philosophy in today's curriculum goes against Augustine's initial presumptions. In his argument, Augustine suggests that teachers should ask the student's what they want to learn<sup>3</sup>. Delbanco recounts Augustine's views and acknowledges that the traditional form of colleges was the best place where young people not only discovered their talents but learn to stay true to themselves<sup>1</sup>. However, looking at

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4. Delbanco, Andrew. "The two faces of American education." *The New York Review of Books* 60, no. 15 (2013): 4-8.

today's colleges, one must not pay much attention to the bigotries of past education but acknowledge it as the right way for colleges.

Consequently, it is plausible to assume that a true college is right only when it opens doors for everyone regardless of religion, money, gender or race. However, today's American college is actively supporting the increasing trend on the gap between the poor and the rich<sup>2</sup>. Although some philanthropists and defenders of present day college may argue that poor student's rarely apply to elite colleges, this pattern has resulted from numerous rejections. In their view, the ideal college as noted by Augustine and as supported by the founders of education exists only in an imaginary world<sup>1</sup>. In short, college has now become a place for governments and corporation to make money and spread ideas. The new system of admitting students using application essays and recommendation letters came about to increase diversity and discrimination.

All in all, although Delbanco is right that the traditional system of education was better, is biased for him to ignore the role of faith in enhancing education. Delbanco assumes that today's colleges achieve the central purpose of education as denoted by Augustine of hippo. In fact, he notes that while there may be shortcomings in American colleges, teachers have done so well to stick to the ultimate mission of education. Yet, this is wrong. Indeed, today's colleges provide economic benefits to the founders and the government than they help the student's discover themselves. Even more, Delbanco's views are generalized and this obscures his most important arguments.

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