**How Necessary Is a College Education?**

*Attaining a college degree is a milestone many people dream about — and expect to achieve. But with the rising cost of tuition and high unemployment rates for recent graduates, is college a necessity or a luxury?*

In the op-ed piece [“The Imperiled Promise of College,”](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/29/opinion/sunday/bruni-the-imperiled-promise-of-college.html) Frank Bruni writes:

For a long time and for a lot of us, “college” was more or less a synonym for success. We had only to go. We had only to graduate. And if we did, according to parents and high-school guidance counselors and everything we heard and everything we read, we could pretty much count on a career, just about depend on a decent income and more or less expect security. A diploma wasn’t a piece of paper. It was an amulet.

And it was broadly accessible, or at least it was spoken of that way. With the right mix of intelligence, moxie and various kinds of aid, a motivated person could supposedly get there. College was seen as a glittering centerpiece of the American dream, a reliable engine of social mobility.

I’m not sure things were ever that simple, but they’re definitely more complicated now. And that was an unacknowledged backdrop for the pitched debate last week about federal student loan rates and whether they would be kept at 3.4 percent or allowed to return to 6.8 percent. That was one reason, among many, that it stirred up so much anxiety and got so much attention.

Because of levitating costs, college these days is a luxury item. What’s more, it’s a luxury item with newly uncertain returns.

Yes, many of the sorts of service-industry jobs now available to people without higher education are less financially rewarding than manufacturing jobs of yore, and so college has in that sense become more imperative. And, yes, college graduates have an unemployment rate half that of people with only high school degrees.

But that figure factors in Americans who got their diplomas and first entered the job market decades ago, and it could reflect not just what was studied in college but the already established economic advantages, contacts and temperaments of the kind of people who pursue and stick with higher education.

It doesn’t capture the grim reality for recent college graduates, whose leg up on their less educated counterparts isn’t such a sturdy, comely leg at the moment. According to an Associated Press analysis of data from 2011, 53.6 percent of college graduates under the age of 25 were unemployed or, if they were lucky, merely underemployed, which means they were in jobs for which their degrees weren’t necessary. Philosophy majors mull questions no more existential than the proper billowiness of the foamed milk atop a customer’s cappuccino. Anthropology majors contemplate the tribal behavior of the youngsters who shop at the Zara where they peddle skinny jeans.

**Students:** You will create a geared towards high school seniors what are about to graduate and need to decide what to do. Using PowerPoint, you will have one period to address the following questions within your presentation:

\*\*Each of your sections below should have data or a quote to back up your information\*\*

-Give us your outlook on future job prospects and the value of a college education.

-What is college for? To gain skills for future employment? Immerse oneself in a field of study? Experience character-defining events? Something else?

-Should students aspire to get a college degree?

-What are the benefits or drawbacks to college?

-Is there a less traditional route to earning one than going straight from high school to a four-year college?

-What are some of the other options available to students?