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Should College Define Life – Or Life Define College?

By: Melissa Drake

When most people think of college life, they think of young, vibrant teenagers bouncing from class to class between parties, dates, and football games. It's easy to visualize the students taking brisk walks across campus in the crisp fall air while the leaves crumple under their steps.

That's the fantasy, or the ideal for many. It's not necessarily reality though. College isn't "life" for me. It's only another part of my life. It's another responsibility tacked on to all the others in my life. It's neither a way of life nor a lifestyle. More simply, it's *a way to life*. College is a way to create a better life for my son and myself.

I am an independent, 29-year-old single mother who works full-time and attends college full-time. It is my belief that attending college at this time in my life allows me to get the most out of my college experience, which includes **appreciation for the experience of learning**.

When I first attended college at age eighteen, I was in it for the "life" (parties, dates, and football games). I showed up for class on occasion, did the minimum to get by, and received marginal grades. Not to mention the fact that I had no idea why I was there and what I wanted to do with my life.

Leaving college and taking time for life (work, marriage, childbirth, and early adulthood) enabled me to evaluate my priorities and make decisions about the life that lay ahead. During my leave from college, I took a number of evening courses from various programs. Because of this experience, I was better able to discern my goals and choose a college and course of study that best fit into my life.

When young adults attend college, with limited life views and expectations, there is really no choice other than letting college define life. Many people go to college because they are supposed to, expected to, or ordered to go. Under those circumstances, individual choices are limited and few. However, when one makes a choice to go to college, life defines the role that college plays, not the other way around. 11/29/2000

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