

5 Reasons to Attend a Liberal Arts College

By Lynn O'Shaughnessy | Jan 21, 2010 | 9 Comments

- [facebook](#)
- [twitter](#)
- [digg](#)
- [buzz](#)

Yesterday I ate lunch with a West Coast mover and shaker, whose children went to Yale and whose husband is an influential and involved Yale alum.

Before the water glasses had even arrived, my lunch guest was suggesting that her children could have been better off not attending Yale. Her children graduated without knowing their professors very well and their pedigree diplomas hadn't helped their job prospects.

She then became animated when she launched into all the reasons why she loved liberal arts colleges. I found myself agreeing with every thing she said. Here are my own reasons why students, whether they are blinded by Ivy League mojo or not, should consider attending a liberal arts college:



1. Student focused. Liberal arts colleges exist to teach undergraduates and only undergrads. That's far different from universities that are designed to focus chiefly on faculty research and graduate students. Star professors at many universities, including the Ivies, never go near undergrads.

2. Small classes. At liberal art college, students can't hide in the back of a large lecture hall because there aren't any. Some introductory courses might have 40 or 50 students, but most are going to be far smaller. Especially for introductory classes, universities tend to herd hundreds of undergrads into lecture halls and often let the teaching assistants deal with these students in smaller settings.

3. Great grad school preparation. It's a fallacy that you have to attend a state flagship or Ivy to enjoy a good shot at grad school. Liberal arts schools dominate the list of the top 10 institutions that produce the most students who ultimately earn doctorates. Per capita, liberal arts colleges produce twice as many student who earn a PhD in science than other institutions. This shouldn't be a surprise. Liberal arts college provide the sort of research experiences that universities often reserve for grad students.

4. Employers value liberal arts. One of the missions of liberal arts colleges is to teach kids how to think, talk and write. Don't all schools do that? Not necessarily. You can graduate from plenty of universities without writing essays or research papers. Who, after all, is going to grade 500 essays? In small class settings, liberal art students are more likely to be required to write

papers, give class presentations and collaborate with their classmates and professors.

A new employer survey that the **National Association of Colleges and Employers** released yesterday indicates that workplaces most value these three skills that a liberal arts education can impart:

- Communication skills.
- Analytic skills.
- Teamwork skills.

5. Price discounts. If you need financial aid, private liberal arts colleges are often more generous than state institutions, which have been spending the majority of their discretionary cash on affluent students. Rich students, however, also routinely receive a price break from most liberal arts colleges.

Bottom line: For all those Ivy worshipers out there, I'd suggest that you at least entertain the possibility that a liberal arts college could be as good as or superior to an Ivy. Even my husband, an Ivy League grad, eventually came around.

*Lynn O'Shaughnessy is the author of **The College Solution**, an Amazon bestseller, and she also writes for **TheCollegeSolutionBlog**. Follow her on **Twitter**.*

Further Reading:

[The Best Colleges You've Never Heard Of](#)

[Do You Really Need a Business Degree?](#)

[What's Wrong with Princeton Review's Best Value College List](#)

Yale image by See-Ming Lee. CC 2.0.

- [More recent post »](#)
- [« Older post](#)

Lynn O'Shaughnessy

Lynn O'Shaughnessy is a financial journalist and the author of a critically acclaimed book, [The College Solution: A Guide for Everyone Looking for the Right School at the Right Price](#). She has been a contributor to such publications as [BusinessWeek](#), [USA Today](#), [Money Magazine](#), [Medical Economics](#), [The New York Times](#), [Consumer Reports](#), [MoneyAdvisor](#), [The Chronicle of Philanthropy](#), [AARP: The Magazine](#) and [Kiplinger](#)

Lynn O'Shaughnessy

- [Center for College Affordability and Productivity](#)
- [Class Struggle](#)
- [Student Lending Analytics Blog](#)

- [The Choice, The New York Times](#)
- [Washington Monthly's college blog](#)

© 2010 CBS Interactive Inc. All rights reserved.

[Beta - Give us your feedback](#)