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Published August 1st, 2012

Consider This: Prestige and Education

By *Steven Zhou*

Brown, CAL, Carnegie Mellon, Cornell, Columbia, Dartmouth, Duke, Georgetown, Harvard, Northwestern, Notre Dame, MIT, Princeton, Stanford, UCLA, USC, Yale.

What do these institutions of higher learning have in common?

Prestige.

Admittance at many four-year campuses ordains an unexplainable, automatic aura of respect and power. When asked what school one is attending next year, "the chosen" are proud to pronounce their prestigious university, while basking in the laudatory responses and imminent comments of "Wow! You must be super smart!"

On the opposite end of the spectrum are those who are not applauded upon proclaiming admission to a two-year community college such as local Diablo Valley College. A friend who will be attending DVC endured "oh, I see" to "good job...I guess" to "at least you are staying in school."

Judging intelligence by the college attended is so deeply ingrained in our culture that, verbalized or not, it affects our perception of accomplishment.

"Community college is looked down upon because stereotypically, the students have lower GPAs or are considered to have been too lazy to apply to any 'real colleges,'" said Miramonte senior Desiree C. "However, community college is actually a more logical choice for several reasons."

Such benefits include the lower price tag. "The general education is cheaper at only \$48 per unit," continues Desiree, "plus the flexibility to work part time while attending classes is a huge plus." Other DVC-bound seniors point to other selling points as motives for choosing a community college: the lower levels of stress-inducing pressure, the proximity to home, and the ease of transferring to a four-year university when ready.

Yet a general comment heard from numerous Lamorinda interviewees was that stuck between the choice of going to a four-year college that doesn't fit their goals or to a community college, they would accept anything to avoid the stigma that comes with being a "community college student."

"Looking down on community colleges is just plain dumb," said a Lafayette resident. Senior Kristin C. believes "teens should not go to their safety school. If they really want to study at a specific school, they should work to get in by attending a community college first. Being offered admission by only one university or wanting to move out of the house are not reasons to choose a safety school."

Jonathan D. also defends the community college system. "On a job application, community college attendance is not as impressive as a four-year university degree, even though community colleges do a great job of teaching. People need to be evaluated on their talents and capabilities, not the school they attended." Although prestigious universities claim many exceptional and famous alumni, four-year institutions are not prerequisites to guaranteed achievement.

Seventy-six percent of Lamorinda seniors will attend four-year universities. As we congratulate all our graduates, let's remember that it's not the college that determines success; it's our determination to be successful.

Is the pedigreed diploma the definition of accomplishment?

Consider this: Steve Jobs!

The administrator and host for Express Yourself! Teen Radio, Steven Zhou graduated in June from Miramonte and will be attending Pepperdine University on a scholarship this fall.

Teen Scene is YOUR voice. If you have something to say or have writing skills and want to be part of our Teen Scene team, email our Teen Coach, Cynthia Brian, Cynthia@CynthiaBrian.com.

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