

**THE UTILITY OF AN ACADEMIC
EDUCATION FOR YOUNG MEN WHO
HAVE TO EARN THEIR OWN LIVING
AND WHO EXPECT TO PURSUE A
COMMERCIAL LIFE PP. 3-69**

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An Investigation

By R. T. Crane

1901
Chicago

THE UTILITY OF AN ACADEMIC EDUCATION FOR YOUNG MEN WHO HAVE TO EARN THEIR OWN LIVING AND WHO EXPECT TO PURSUE A COMMERCIAL LIFE.

¶ *The Statement of the Case.*

THE question whether an academic, or even a high-school course, is of benefit to young men who have to make their own way in the business world and intend entering upon a commercial life, is one of such vital importance and is surrounded by so much doubt that it is high time it was thoroughly investigated, for, if the facts are as many believe, these institutions are a most stupendous mistake, if not a positive injury to this class of young men.

A great deal has been written on this subject, but, so far as I have been able to discover, the writers have given merely their opinions or theories, not facts.

It has seemed to me that the statements of the actual experience of a large number of prominent business men, of heads of universities, and of college graduates themselves, would be of great assistance in arriving at something tangible on this subject. I have, therefore, made quite an extensive investigation along this line, the results of which are herein given, together with certain comments.

It should be borne in mind that wherever college education is mentioned herein, it refers exclusively to an *academic* course, as indicated by the title of this article.

First will be found a copy of a letter sent to the presidents of nineteen of the principal universities and colleges in this country, and the replies from all who answered, which will show how much light they are able to give on this subject.

¶ *A Copy of the Letter Sent to the College Presidents.*

September 5, 1901.

Dear Sir:

The question of the utility of an academic course, for young men who have to make their own living and who expect to pursue a commercial life, is one of the greatest importance, and as I am endeavoring to ascertain what the facts are in this matter, I should be very glad, indeed, if you would kindly favor me with an answer to the enclosed questions.

Thanking you in advance for your attention to this matter, I am,

Yours truly,

R. T. CRANE.

¶ *The Questions Asked.*

1. Is there, in your opinion, any evidence that such education is of any advantage to this class of young men?
2. If so, what evidence?
3. Have you made any systematic effort to ascertain:
 - [a] What success such college graduates have met with in securing positions?
 - [b] How successful they have been after going into business?
4. If question No. 3 is answered affirmatively, what have you found to be the facts?

5. Can you mention any employers who, when seeking employes, are in the habit of asking, from the head of any college, information regarding students about to graduate, with the view of selecting their help from among such students?
6. Please give an estimate of how much it costs your college to give a young man such a course of education. I do not mean by this simply the student's tuition, but you should also include interest on the plant, taxes, insurance, wear and tear, in fact everything that enters into the actual cost of running the college.
7. Can you give me the names and addresses of the secretaries of classes that were graduated from your college five to eight years ago? I may wish to obtain from them a list of their classmates, in order to make some inquiries of such young men, should the information received from the heads of the colleges be unsatisfactory.

THE OPINION OF COLLEGE PRESIDENTS.

Six of the universities did not reply, *viz.*:

Cornell University.

Washington University, St. Louis.

University of Pennsylvania.

University of Wisconsin.

University of Minnesota.

University of Rochester.

The replies received from the others I give complete, with the exception of their answers to questions Nos. 6 and 7.

The reason for omitting No. 6 will be found elsewhere. Question No. 7, of course, is of no interest to this article.

FROM CHARLES W. ELIOT,
President of Harvard University.

The question of the utility of an academic course for young men who are going into business can not be intelligently discussed unless the term "academic course" be clearly defined. I understand it to comprehend any course of study in a college or scientific school which covers approximately the years from seventeen or eighteen to twenty or twenty-two. With this understanding of the term, there can be no question whatever that an academic course is in the highest degree desirable for capable young men who mean to make their living in business. By business I understand banking, transportation, manufacturing, mining, large scale farming, and engineering in all its branches. These occupations require nowadays, in all their higher levels, a trained mind, and a deal of appropriate information. This training and information can only be acquired in colleges and scientific schools. A young man who is going into business had better take an academic course, in my sense of the term, if he has any mind to train. That is an indisputable proposition, and there is no use in discussing it.

To get detailed evidence of the truth of these statements, I should advise you to procure a series of the Triennial or Quinquennial Class Reports, which are published by the Class Secretaries at Har-

vard, and I suppose at other colleges. These reports give the occupations and mode of life of the members of a class, and even of persons who have been temporarily connected with the class.

By a careful examination of a series of these Reports you will get abundant evidence that college and scientific school training nowadays is profitable, indeed, indispensable to a young man going into the higher walks of business. To procure such a series from Harvard you had better apply to Mr. Jerome D. Greene, President's Secretary, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

FROM ARTHUR T. HADLEY,

President of Yale University.

We regard college education as of great advantage to the business man, as well as the professional man. This is not, however, because it enables him to make more money, but to have more influence and enjoyment with the same amount of money. It is this broader general object which distinguishes the college course from the purely technological one.

The evidence is found in the actual position held by our graduates in the various cities in which they live. One of my most important objects in meeting the alumni associations throughout the country was to obtain a thorough basis of judgment on this point. It is obvious, however, that the facts concerning this kind of success are not readily capable of tabulation.

No systematic effort has been made to compare the success of our graduates in securing positions with the success of any similar body of men who had not been to college.

We prefer not to publish list of employers who are in the habit of consulting us.

Regretting the absence of more detailed information, I remain,

FROM FRANCIS L. PATTON,
President of Princeton University.

In reply to your letter of September 5th, I can only say that I believe that those who can afford to obtain a university education should do so no matter what their career is to be. I believe that those who intend to enter commercial life will not regret the years they may have spent in obtaining college education. But I can not answer the specific questions which you present to me, and I have no specific data to give you in reference to the subject.

FROM NICHOLAS MURRY BUTLER,
Acting President of Columbia University.

I find myself unable to answer the questions contained in your circular letter of September 5th in detail, but may say that we have here abundant evidence that students who make good use of their opportunities, while undergraduates in college, are eagerly sought for in business positions. The man who does not make good use of his opportunities in college is in the same position as one who has neglected his opportunities elsewhere.

FROM G. STANLEY HALL,
President of Clark University.

I have too little detailed knowledge to answer your questions, and have made no systematic effort to ascertain such as your third question calls for. In