

Why I wish my guidance counselors would stop talking so much about college

Posted by [Thea Tucker](#) On May 13, 2014 @ 12:43 pm In [Higher Ed,K-12,Opinion,Student Voices: New Orleans perspectives](#) | [No Comments](#)

In New Orleans schools there are a lot of teachers, principals and guidance counselors who encourage students to go to college so much and so vigorously that it seems as though they are forcing the idea of college on them. I have advisors who encourage me to attend a four-year university at both my high school, Lake Area New Tech, and at Bard Early College, a college preparation program I attend part time. Their encouragement is understandable since both my high school and Bard's program were designed to prepare me for a four-year college. But I wish the advisors took seriously some of my other dreams.

For instance, one day I tried talking to one of the advisors about moving to California to pursue modeling and he told me that I should just put that dream on hold and go to college. If I can only talk with my college advisor about college—or else risk being seen as lacking in ambition—then I would prefer a life coach or someone else who accepts me and accepts alternative definitions of ambition and success. It's unfair to force the same notion of success on all children; everyone is different and college is not always the right or best choice.

Not only does my high school tell us that we all should go to college, they force seniors to apply to college and tell us that we cannot graduate unless we have been accepted some place (although they would have no legal right to withhold a diploma). I do not even know what I want to major in if I go to college: My high school has taken us on many field trips to colleges, but we have never visited workplaces that would give us a sense of potential jobs and career paths.

Moreover, there are not enough vocational classes or career courses available for students in New Orleans.

Most schools have math, English, science, social studies, art and physical education classes. Yet I have rarely seen home economics, mechanics, wood shop or any other classes that could provide different options to students with diverse skills.

"If we follow traditions embraced by white people because we think it is the only way to be successful or important in the world, that can lead to...ongoing stress to be someone we are not."

As much as they differed in their outlooks on education, both Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois understood that not all black people need to follow the same path. Their thoughts are still important today in New Orleans, where most of the public school children are African-American. "Du Bois stressed the importance of a college-educated talented tenth ["talented tenth" referred to the most elite African Americans of his day], while Washington emphasized vocational training for the black masses," wrote historian Raymond Wolters. Both Washington and Du Bois were correct. Not everyone should go to college, but not everyone should go to vocational schools. The two men emphasized the importance of personal responsibility and self-improvement. But an individual has to know her own strengths and find her own path in order to take charge of her own destiny. This is a particularly important lesson for African-Americans because we come from a different culture and background than white Americans. If we follow traditions embraced by white people because we think it is the only way to be successful or important in the world,



[1]

Thea Tucker

that can lead not only to financial debt (in the case of college), but ongoing stress to be someone we are not.

Writing in 1978, Diane Ravitch noted that many historians viewed schools as “instruments of coercive assimilation, designed to strip minority children of their culture and to mold them to serve the needs of capitalism.” While Ravitch disagreed with the idea that schools were instruments of “assimilation” at that time, I personally agree with that argument. Many schools, for instance, tell children to go to college and try to teach children rules that will make them disciplined enough to work at corporations that support the country’s capitalistic economy.

Student Voices:

New Orleans perspectives

This essay is part of [a collaboration between *The Hechinger Report* and high school students at Bard’s Early College in New Orleans](#) ^[2]. The teenagers wrote opinion pieces on whether all students should be encouraged to attend college, the value of alternative teacher preparation programs such as Teach For America, the importance of desegregation, or the best approach to school discipline.

Schools should not prioritize college above other goals such as vocational training. The guidance counselor in every school should speak to all students and understand what each student wants to do in their life. Many New Orleans students graduate from high school unsatisfied with their options because the only routes are college or minimum wage jobs. Guidance counselors need to tell students other routes exist, and high schools need to help prepare them by offering a broader range of courses. They also need to employ enough counselors so that they can take the time to get to know students as individuals.

The false teaching that college brings automatic success causes a lot of youth to go to college with unrealistic ideas of getting a job in the field they majored in and making a lot of money. In reality, many people graduate with debt (an [average of more than \\$35,000](#) ^[3] for the class of 2013) and have to get jobs unrelated to their majors because the economy is so bad. There is not a guarantee that students will get a job if they attend vocational schools either. But we must not overemphasize one route: There are many different things that a person can do with their life and be happy.

Thea Tucker, 17, is a senior at New Orleans’ Lake Area high school.

You might like:

- [Instead of getting ready for the tech revolution, schools are scaling back](#)
- [Schools are doling out suspensions “like Tic Tacs,” here are some ways to keep kids in the classroom](#)
- [New York teacher speaks out: “A moratorium on the Common Core Standards frightens me”](#)
- [Four reasons that critics of Common Core should reconsider their opposition](#)
- [How can schools close the technology gap and how much will it cost?](#)

Recommended by

Article printed from Hechinger Report: <http://hechingerreport.org>

URL to article: http://hechingerreport.org/content/high-school-guidance-counselors-must-honor-students-individual-dreams-ambitions_15892/

URLs in this post:

[1] Image: <http://hechingerreport.org/wp-content/uploads/thea-photo.jpg>

[2] a collaboration between *The Hechinger Report* and high school students at Bard’s Early College in New Orleans: http://hechingerreport.org/category/special_reports/student_voices_new_orleans/

[3] average of more than \$35,000: <http://money.cnn.com/2013/05/17/pf/college/student-debt/>