Top 5 Benefits of a College Degree

1. Increased earning potential: Everyone knows the price of a college degree, but fewer know the price of not getting one: $22K a year. In 2008, median earnings of college graduates were $55,700, which was $21,900 more than the median earnings of high school graduates who hadn’t attended college.

2. Better recession protection: College graduates’ employment rose 2 percent between the first quarter of 2007 and the first quarter of 2010, despite the great recession. Every group with lower education levels saw employment numbers decline. Those hardest hit were those who hadn’t finished high school. One in 5 for them has lost a job, compared with 1 in 100 for high school graduates and those with some college education.

3. Higher job satisfaction: In 2008, about 60 percent of people who had attended college – whether or not they’d completed a degree – reported that they were very satisfied with their jobs. Only 50 percent of high school graduates and 40 percent of high school dropouts could say the same. People with job satisfaction were three times as likely to say that they were very happy.

4. Fewer smokers, more exercise, & less fat: Between 1998 and 2008, the smoking rate declined from 14 percent to 9 percent among college grads, while the rate for high school grads barely dropped, from 29 percent to 27 percent. Of people with advanced degrees, 70 percent never smoked, only 3 percent choose to keep smoking, and the rest have quit or are trying to. Of people who didn’t finish high school, half have never smoked, a third have quit or are trying to, and 15 percent choose to maintain the habit. Further, those with more education are more likely to exercise than those with less education. College-educated adults are also less likely than others to be obese or have obese children. These results hold for all age groups.

5. More volunteering and voting: The share of people who donate their time to organizations and the number of hours that they spend in volunteer activities are higher among individuals with higher levels of education. Most volunteer for religious organizations (34 percent) or youth-related services (26 percent). At every age group, the more educated someone is, the more likely she is to vote. It’s most dramatic among 18- to 24-year-olds, where college graduates are 2-1/2 times as likely to vote as those who haven’t finished high school.