



August 15, 2009

**The Essay Assignment: What Is the Purpose of Higher Education?**

**Overview:**

In 1848, Horace Mann argued for the benefits of higher education for all U. S. citizens on the grounds that higher education is critical to the success of a country that aims to dissolve class distinctions and to sustain the ideals of democracy. Today, President Barack Obama is calling for all students to receive one year of higher education or technical training beyond high school. Publicly and privately, American citizens are seriously considering and questioning the value of higher education – its various benefits and costs – for individuals and society.

After reading an excerpt from Horace Mann’s 1848 report, an article on Obama’s education plan written by reporter Kelly Field, and a research report sponsored and published by the Institute for Higher Education Policy, draft a response to the question below.

**Essay Question:**

Drawing upon two of the three sources provided, state and give support for your position on the value of higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Requirements:**

Length: The draft must be 2 to 3 pages long (typed and double-spaced).

Style: MLA – a full description of MLA style can be found in a writing handbook or online at <dianahacker.com/writersref>.

Sources: You must appropriately use two of the three readings provided.

Academic Honesty: You are expected to write this paper alone, without help from others, and without consulting and using additional sources that you have not fully and appropriately cited.

For help in understanding what academic honesty entails, please see:

<http://www.montclair.edu/writing/firstyearwriting/academicintegrity.html>

Bring your essay (and the readings) to your first writing class. Also, make sure you arrive at college with a digital copy of your paper (on flash drive or the computer you bring with you).

**Pointers:**

To construct a successful argument, you will need to have a strong central claim and to use the sources provided carefully, which is to say that you need to engage with the writers and their ideas. You may also draw upon your own experiences, insights, and observations.

There is no right answer to this question, either as to what might be valuable about higher education or whether it is valuable at all.

## Writing and Reading Guidelines

### Writing Process

We recommend the following method to begin the process of writing your essay.

1. Pre-writing. Writing before you even begin reading will help you read more easily and with a greater sense of purpose. On your computer or with a pen and piece of paper, write without editing for 15 minutes on the following questions:
  - a. You have decided to be part of the academic community of higher education. Why? What is the value of higher education for you personally?
  - b. What does the American society gain from supporting (financially and perhaps otherwise) students in going to college?
  - c. How does the price, in time and money, for college compare with other services or interests that individuals, and the society at large, might have?
2. Using your pre-write, make a list of your beliefs about higher education.
3. Read and annotate (take notes on) the assigned readings (see below for more on reading).
4. Looking over your pre-write, your list, and your notes, form a tentative claim about higher education.
5. Scan the readings for support for your claim and identify what will help you get your point across.
6. Make an informal outline to help you organize.
7. Begin your first draft.

### Active Reading for College

Active reading differs from reading we do for pleasure – not that active reading isn't pleasurable! It simply requires a greater degree of concentration. When you read for a college assignment, do so with a pencil in hand. Mark up (annotate) the text as you read. Some readers prefer to write directly in the margins of the text and others prefer to write in a notebook. Do whichever feels the most helpful to you.

Write questions you have as you go along, and note definitions of words you look up.

Note parts of the text that seem contradictory or simply don't make sense to you.

Write counterarguments that you think of as you read the author's argument, and note places where your ideas coincide strongly with the author's.

In other words, write as you read. It not only helps you to understand what you are reading but also helps you to identify what you don't understand.

When reading for a college assignment, it's vital that you know what you have read. When reading is assigned in college writing classes, it is expected that you will come to class prepared to discuss what you have read.