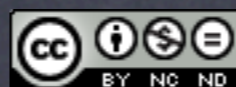


>>the UnCollege manifesto<<

your guide
to **academic deviance**

*replacing college with
self-directed learning*

By Dale J. Stephens



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“I have never let school interfere with my education”

– Mark Twain

PART ONE:

what you'll learn in these 25 pages

“Study without desire spoils the memory, and it retains nothing that it takes in.”

- Leonardo da Vinci

This manifesto will change the way you think about higher education. If you've ever been frustrated with school, the next twenty five pages will prepare you to take your education outside of the classroom and change the world.

Even if you're currently enrolled in college, this report will help you understand the benefits of learning in the real world to complement classroom instruction.

You'll learn why the value of the college degree continues to decline and how to counteract this academic inflation. I'll introduce you to the basics of lifelong learning and help you make the world into your classroom. Finally I'll give you some guidelines to help you to design your own education in the real world and move beyond academia. The appendix includes links and resources to help you get started on your odyssey of learning and introspection.

WHO SHOULD READ THIS REPORT?

I do not intend this treatise to be read by everyone. I do not believe that unschooling should be applied ubiquitously more than any other pedagogy. Everyone has a different learning style, and I hope to help people learn in whatever style is right for them.

Please read this manifesto with an open mind. If you're like me before I began unschooling, you were classically educated and think the only benefit of “home-schooling” is that you can be anti-social. That, and you can learn in your pajamas.

This is not what unschooling is about.

Self-directed learning does not mean solitary learning. I am not suggesting you pull a Thoreau and purchase a cabin by a pond. You should create a learning community in the real world.

In short, I wrote this guide for people who want to learn in the real world and break down the dichotomy between education and life.

I commend your courage to challenge the societally-accepted path to success. Creating your own education is not easy, but I believe the learning outcomes are greater than simply following the standard path through school. You'll emerge with a new sense of yourself and the passion, motivation, and confidence to tackle anything you wish.

Being an educational deviant can be lonely, and that is why I've created UnCollege -- to support a community of independent learners. The conventional path can be appealing, paved with security, certification, and routine. But where's the fun in conformity? To succeed you must differentiate yourself through educational deviance.

“Nothing that is worth knowing can be taught.”

- Oscar Wilde

PREREQUISITES

What’s the best part about UnCollege?
The only prerequisite is life! Chances are that you have already engaged in some type of unlearning in the past. Whether you finish reading this report or find a more productive activity to engage in, please remember one thing:

Life, education, and work don’t have to be separate.

Try to remember that statement when you begin applying the UnCollege philosophy to life. You’re bound to run into naysayers, and you must recall that you don’t have to conform to societal standards. You’re breaking down traditional barriers and living the intersection between these three aspects of life.

If you want educational freedom badly, and you are willing to take a few leaps of faith, change is possible. You really can

lead the life you want, learning along the way. You can have it all -- the only things you’ll have to give up are the societal assumptions and expectations that serve as your comfort zone. Step outside that zone and you’ll be on your path to success!

No matter if you’re a college student, high school student, unschooler, homeschooler, and/or lifelong learner, you can completely redefine higher education. You can learn from life and change the world.

The synthesis of life, education, and work allows you to focus your energy to bring about positive change in the world.

THE CATCH

If I were you, I’d be skeptical at this point. What am I not telling you?

Is there not always a catch? Yes.

The catch is that the synthesis of life, education, and work I am talking about will not take place automatically. You are going to have to do the heavy lifting -- I cannot do it for you, nor can anyone else.

You can, however, use the tools and resources in this report to make the transition to unliving easier. I do not want to sell you anything: this report is not commercial. I only want to inspire you to make life, education, and work mutually inclusive.

After you have succeeded, I’ll give you a few suggestions as to how you can pass on the gift.

A SPOT ABOUT ME

I’m getting ahead of myself -- you are probably wondering what authority I have to tell you about how to live your life. Your hesitation is valid.

You can read my life story here, but I'll spare you the details. In short, I began unschooling in 6th grade and after finishing 'high school' followed the societally-accepted path and enrolled in college. In retrospect, I am not sure why I did this. Hindsight is awesome, isn't it?

As an unschooler I lived in France, started a photography business, worked as a campaign photographer, spent a summer at UCLA, and worked at a venture-backed education technology startup, Zinch.

After my frustrations with college compounded earlier in the semester I realized how little I appreciated the opportunities to learn from life that I had whilst unschooling.

Many people asked me what I'd do if I didn't stay in college. Transfer? Get a job? Move home with parents? Travel the world?

None of the above: I'm revolutionizing higher education.

Instead, I decided to channel frustrations in positive action and bring my experience as an unschooler to the collegiate level.

I am leading a social movement I call UnCollege, and I am reinventing education. I will not be doing this by myself: many other educational deviants (including you) are along for the ride. I ultimately want to change the paradigm view that obtaining a college degree is the only path to professional success.

You can keep tabs on my crusade to reinvent college by following along at uncollege.org. A book, tour, conference, and more are in the works. You can follow along and be part of the movement through email updates, the RSS feed, Facebook and Twitter, or just by checking back every few days. I would say that starting the UnCollege movement is part of my UnCollege experience. Is that too meta?

Welcome to the life of an unstudent.

“College isn’t the place to go for ideas.”
– Helen Keller

PART TWO:

life without college?

WHY SHOULD YOU GO TO COLLEGE?

Alright, enough about me. At the end of this report I will tell you some of my adventures, but for moment you are the star.

On the next page I am going to ask you a few questions, but first let us consider reasons why the average person goes to college in the 21st century Western society. In the following pages I will show you how to achieve the same learning outcomes in the real world.

“We are shut up in schools and college recitation rooms for ten or fifteen years, and come out at last with a bellyful of words and do not know a thing.”

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

12 reasons

why society thinks you should go to **college**

1. You get to party all day long
2. And then study all night long
3. To obtain a college degree
4. To make 'friends'
5. To learn from experts
6. Because that's how you succeed
7. To build your network
8. To sit at a desk 40 hours per week
9. To learn about the world
10. Because the real world is scary
11. To grow up
12. Because you'll fail at life otherwise

If those reasons sound good to you, do not feel bad! You shall fit in just fine with society and no one will ever require you to be different. Conforming to societal standards is the easy and expected path. You are not alone!

If you are content with life and education you should probably stop reading, as the issues I am going to address will not apply to you. If this is the case, I wish you the best in your educational and professional pursuits.

For those who reject the societally accepted path to success, here is how I respond to the previously enumerated arguments for going to college:

1. You get to party all night long

Partying all night is fun while you're doing it -- but not the next day! You can bid a normal sleep schedule goodbye, and if you have had a few beers, you can add a headache to the equation. If that still sounds appealing, you can party all night without being in college: invite some friends over and play scrabble until the sun comes up. Problem solved.

2. And study all night long

All-nighters are not fun either. I have not actually pulled an all-nighter in my short time at college, but I did for kicks last year with some friends in San Francisco. Trust me, it's unproductive. If you really want the experience you can do it **without** college.

3. To obtain a college degree

If college is the new high school, a Bachelor's degree is the new high school diploma. A piece of paper is not the end-all, be-all in life! As more and more people go to college and the market becomes degree-saturated, the college degree loses value. I will write more about this in the next section.

4. To make 'friends'

You can make friends in life too.

5. To learn from experts

Experts don't only come with Ph.Ds and reside in academic buildings. You can find experts to become your mentors and teachers outside the collegiate setting.

6. Because that's how you succeed

There are many paths to success -- and many definitions of success. Society defines success in almost purely economic terms, but that shouldn't be the case. Shouldn't success include a measure of happiness?

7. To build your network

An alumni network can be valuable, but it is at best superficial. The best networks are built on personal relationships, not a distant common experience.

8. To sit at a desk 40 hours per week

Going to college is not the only way to get a job. Work does not have to be boring. You can find a job that allows you to pursue your passion and thrive. Moreover, a college degree does not guarantee you that you will get a job post-graduation.

9. To learn about the world

Since there seems to be such a dichotomy between 'the real world' and college, why should anyone learn about 'the real world' in an environment that is supposedly separate?

10. Because the real world is scary

The real world may be scary, but your fear of the world is only going to be exacerbated if you hide behind a college diploma.

11. To grow up

For many individuals going to college is the first time they have ever been away from their parents. However college does not help you mature -- particularly if you go home on the weekends and your mom continues to do your laundry. While this is awful handy, it does not force independence.

12. Because you'll fail at life otherwise

There is a misconception that people who stop institutionalized learning do so because they are incapable or unintelligent. I am not stopping college because it is too hard. I am stopping college because I can learn more in the real world. But don't just listen to me: look at Steve Jobs, Steven Spielberg, Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Henry Ford, Rachel Ray, and Michael Dell, all of whom stopped college.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE DEGREE?

You tell me: is a piece of paper worth upwards of \$40,000 for reasons that I just proved invalid?

I think not.

Academic inflation is rampant, and I don't mean in monetary terms. Academic inflation is the process of raising minimum job requirements so that there is an excess of people with lower degrees. As the market becomes completely degree-saturated you will soon need a Ph.D to succeed as a janitor. In fact, a report last October found that 5,000 janitors in the United States have Ph.Ds.

In this instance degrees are meaningless.

With 70.1% of high school graduates going to college in the United States, academic inflation can only worsen. A college degree will soon be no more than an expensive piece of paper. Degrees can no longer be used a standard metric of employability.

If this is the case what are we to do? How shall we distinguish the good from the bad? We will look at what people have done in the real world. Competency and reputation will trump certification: your real-world accomplishments prove more than checking off boxes and turning in homework.

COLLEGE ≠ LIFE

UnCollege is about bridging the crevasse that separates these two entities.

The path to success -- no matter how you define success -- involves both education and life. However, education is not a prerequisite to life : education is a corequisite to life. Many people do not understand that learning and life should not be separated and go through life believing that these two are distinct stages of existence.

I challenge that notion and believe that education and life are mutually inclusive. You cannot have one without the other.

Reading this report is your first step to understanding this relationship.

"As far as I have seen, at school . . . they aim to blot out one's individuality."

– Franz Kafka

PART THREE:

standing out from the other 6.7 billion

THE VALUE OF COLLEGE

Before you begin learning you need to know yourself. At a minimum, you should know how you learn best -- aurally, visually, kinesthetically -- but ideally you should be able to answer three other questions about yourself.

Before you begin hyper ventilating, let me say that it is okay if you don't have clearly articulated responses to these questions -- they are meant to be thought provoking. Also keep in mind that the answers to these questions can (and should) change over time.

Ready? Here you go:

#1. Who am I?

#2. What am I good at?

#3. Why am I here?

We shall examine each question in-depth soon enough, but I want you to take a few minutes to record your first reactions. If you've printed this report, jot down your thoughts in the space provided; if not, grab the nearest stack of post-its.

Your First Answer:

Your Second Answer:

Your Third Answer:

Done? Brilliant. Let's chat about your responses. If you want this to be useful, please take these exercises seriously. You'll learn a lot about yourself.

THE FIRST QUESTION

#1. Who are you?

In other words, how do you identify? If you weren't restricted by societal expectations, who would you be?

Try to come up with a single word, noun phrase, and sentence response.

If you need some inspiration, start with your personality type. Socionics offers some quick online quizzes with detailed descriptions of personality types that you may be able to identify with.

I would caution you to not rely too heavily on any label. Ultimately you want to be able to define yourself without using standard labels. You want to be able to say "I'm me," but you should be able to describe what constitutes "me."

You may also find it helpful to write a six-word autobiography. How would you encapsulate your life in just six words? Summing up your vibrant life into so few words is an exercise in concision, and doing so will help you decide what part of your life (and by extension, identity) matters most. Ernest Hemingway reportedly penned

For sale: Baby shoes, Never worn.

What's your story?

THE SECOND QUESTION

#2. *What are you good at?*

While it is true that you can be good at anything with practice (see Malcolm Gladwell's 10,000-hour rule), you have certain innate talents that are yours and yours alone. What can you do that no one else can?

Most often people enjoy doing the things that they are good at. If you can articulate what special skills you have it will be easier for you to figure out what you should be doing to make education and life mutually inclusive. You want to do something with your life that allows you to be yourself and use your talents.

Being able to articulate your talents is essential for pursuing real-world learning. Most often you will be volunteering, interning, traveling, or helping, and you must be able to communicate what value you can provide.

THE THIRD QUESTION:

#3. *Why are you here?*

I can give you a little bit more guidance in finding this response than I can on the last question. I understand that asking about the meaning of life is bit daunting, but you don't want to know what *the* meaning of life is, you rather want to know what life means for *you*. What do you want to accomplish in life? In an ideal world what would you do? How do you want to be remembered?

A friend of mine, Jenn Vargas, has made a wonderful website called [101in365](http://101in365.com) to track yearly goals. You set 101 goals to complete in a year and track the progress online. The list can be kept private or opened to the public. I would encourage you to make your list public -- publishing goals means you are accountable to the internet!

For example, I keep four goal lists:

1-year

5-year

10-year

Bucket

I review each of these lists at the end of the year and treat them as my New Year's resolutions. I keep 100 different items on each list. My goals range from recipes I want to try to countries I want to visit to skills I want to acquire. If you take the time to write out goal lists you will have a good idea of what you want to get out of life.

I also suggest that you check out National Public Radio's *This I Believe* series. The site contains 500-word essays by thoughtful men and women about their personal credos. What is your life philosophy?

If you're up for it, I suggest adding a twist to the original prompt:

What do you believe about the world that most others reject?

I encourage you to take the time to write a response following the *This I Believe* guidelines. If you like what you've written you could even submit it to the website! Getting to know your beliefs will help you understand the biases present in your worldview and allow you to approach problems in a manner that aligns with your beliefs.

UNCOMMON CERTIFICATION

As the college degree continues to depreciate due to academic inflation, it becomes valueless as a standard metric of employability. No longer can you judge success based solely upon one's college degree. In the post-degree world we need a standard to measure one's potential for success based on competency and reputation, not homework assignments.

You are surely familiar with the term 'CV' and what it stands for in Latin: curriculum vitae. But did you know that 'curriculum vitae' literally means 'courses of life?'

What I call a learning portfolio harkens to the Latin roots of CV but includes more than just your education and work experience. Your learning portfolio includes evidence of all types of learning -- from service to travel to internship to academics to independent study to mentorship.

Fortunately, the internet makes creating your learning portfolio possible. It will take you some work, but it is worth it. I'm working on something to help you create your portfolio, so stay tuned.

As narcissistic as this sounds, the first step in creating your learning portfolio is to register a domain name consisting of your name (I use dalejstephens.com) at GoDaddy, or any domain registrar.

Then you'll need to sign up for hosting which runs around \$5 per month. I use Dot5Hosting, but any will work. Once you get an account up-and-running I suggest you install WordPress and find a theme. I realize this all sounds pretty complicated if you do not have experience with creating websites. Check out the **Resources** section for some links to tutorials. I also encourage you to watch my blog as I am working on a product to streamline this entire process.

Once you have figured out how WordPress works, here are some suggestions for what you could include in your online learning portfolio:

- Test Scores
- Internship and Jobs
- Classical Education
- Travel and Study Abroad
- Skills
- Service Learning
- Articles and Press Mentions
- Your blog and writing samples

- Klout Score
- Recommendations
- Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn
- Examples of design or photography
- Video work or a video about you
- Github and Stackoverflow
- Your Odesk profile
- Organizations you have led

Basically you should include anything that demonstrates your competency or reputation.

It is not enough to just list things about yourself -- you need to articulate what you learned from each experience. Don't forget to include a short biography that tells who you are, what you do, and what you want from life. I told you those questions would come in handy!

COMPETITION IS FIERCE

In case you were not aware, the world population is growing at an alarming pace. According to UNESCO, more people will be graduating from school in the next thirty years than in **all of history** combined. If you didn't buy my argument about academic inflation, that fact alone should be enough to make you realize that you need to flaunt non-conformity to succeed.

“How could youth better learn to live than by
at once trying the experiment of living?”

– Henry David Thoreau

PART FOUR:

the reality of lifelong learning

WHAT IS UNSCHOOLING?

If you have only had experience with classical education, the idea of unschooling must seem wholly foreign to you. I understand: I used to be in your position.

In 5th grade when I went to a meeting with unschoolers I was skeptical of the practice. I assumed that unschooling was just a nice name for apathy. Boy was I wrong. As an unschooler I did far more work than my friends in traditional school.

The term unschooling was coined by John Holt in the 1970s. Unschooling is based on the idea that people should direct their own education and learn through life experiences. Unschooling, or self-directed learning, differs from homeschooling in that the learner directs her own education. Students choose how, when, why, and what they pursue.

Structuring your own learning is the ultimate leadership experience as you develop self-motivation, passion, organization, creativity, and confidence.

Self-directed learning also involves recognition that one's learning is never complete. If you have an insatiable thirst for knowledge I hope you will give self-directed learning a try.

SCHOOL ≠ CREATIVITY

Why did Newsweek run a story called The Creativity Crisis?

Because a researcher at the College of William & Mary, Kyung Hee Kim, discovered that average Creativity Quotients, measured by a Torrance test, began to decline in the United States in 1990. Before 1990, CQ scores had been rising with each generation just like IQ scores. Then in 1990 CQ scores in the United States began declining.

If you are thinking to yourself, “Why should I care about creativity?” you probably should have stopped reading this report a while ago.

The article continues:

“The potential consequences are sweeping. The necessity of human ingenuity is undisputed. A recent IBM poll of 1,500 CEOs identified creativity as the No. 1 “leadership competency” of the future. Yet it’s not just about sustaining our nation’s economic growth. All around us are matters of national and international importance that are crying out for creative solutions, from saving the Gulf of Mexico to bringing peace to Afghanistan to delivering health care. Such solutions emerge from a healthy marketplace of ideas, sustained by a populace constantly contributing original ideas and receptive to the ideas of others.” *

I agree: if we want to improve the human condition we need creative solutions to common problems. It is not enough to maintain the status quo.

By engaging in self-directed learning you are forced to find innovative ways to learn in the real world.

*I encourage you to read the entire story at <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/07/10/the-creativity-crisis.html>.

The only authority required is your own.

CHALLENGING AUTHORITY

In February 2011 I ate breakfast with a friend and we had a friendly debate about UnCollege. The premise of his argument was that he couldn't understand why I was trying to fix a system that wasn't broken.

I disagree with his position on two levels:

1. I think the education system is broken.

I challenge you to find a single educator who thinks that the system is perfect. If nothing else, you have to acknowledge that the cost of college is soaring in comparison to inflation. In addition, the report *Academically Adrift* found that students are not learning in college. If those two facts do not convince you that the system is broken I am not sure what will.

2. The system is always broken.

I do not think the wave of the future will be found by maintaining the status quo.

If the greatest innovators and creatives in our society hadn't asked themselves "How can I make this better?" where would be today? I submit that we would be living a pretty simple life -- who knows, agriculture might never have developed.

There are always ways to improve the system even if it seems perfect.

My point is that advancement does not come from complacency and the acceptance of established authority.

DEALING WITH UNBELIEVERS

The only authority you need to change the world is your own. Although it is nice (and helpful) to have others validate your ideas, the second everyone agrees with you, you have lost your innovative edge.

You are not striving to please everyone. You are striving to change the world on your own authority. As the meme goes, "haters gonna hate."

If you have a world-changing idea the only person who needs to believe in it is you. Success is a semantic issue: if you believe, you will succeed. If you cannot believe in yourself, no one will.

I am pleased when others disagree and call me crazy. Being the ultimate contrarian is my objective -- and it should be yours too.

You are expert only to the extent that you call yourself one.

To learn from life you do not need anyone's authority. You only need to believe that what you are doing at this very moment is somehow educational.

“Education is hanging around until you’ve caught on.”

– Robert Frost

PART FIVE:

how to succeed without academia

A college degree is not a prerequisite for life.

THE SECRET

As much as society would like you to believe, a college degree is not the key to success. Life does not suddenly begin once you have a diploma in hand. That \$40,000 piece of paper will not make your dream job fall into your lap.

The most important secret of life is that you don't have to go to college to be successful. Anyone who insists otherwise defines 'success' too narrowly.

You're almost ready... but wait...

Before you begin living life without college you will need to know a few things.

Future movers and shakers, I present to you the tool belt for life without college.

UNCOLLEGE TOOL BELT

An Elevator Pitch

Imagine you step into an elevator with someone who has the power to influence the rest of your life -- say your personal idol. What would you say to that person? You should be able to articulate who you are and what you're doing in a sentence. My elevator pitch is "Hi, I'm Dale, and I'm leading a social movement to change the notion that a college degree is requisite for success."

First off, you don't need to have a specific pitch -- saying "I'm _____ and I'm learning from life" is perfectly acceptable. However, as you continue your UnCollege journey, you should narrow that pitch and figure out what you are doing with your life.

Self-confidence, Passion and Drive

To succeed without a college degree you will have to build your competency and reputation through real world accomplishments. I am warning you now: this is not going to be easy. If you want to take the easy path to mediocrity, I encourage you to go to college and join the masses. If you want to stand out from the crowd and change the world, UnCollege is for you! However, you need to have enough self-confidence, passion, and drive so that you will not be hindered by unbelievers or your own downfalls.

A Skillful Command of Language

You needn't to be another Shakespeare, but you should be able to clearly articulate how and why you are learning from life. When a critic asks why you're following the UnCollege approach, you should be able to give a clear answer referencing academic inflation. If you mumble "Ugh well, like college like was boring," you're not helping anyone.

Expert Status

Years ago at a homeschool conference I went to a session where the presenter argued that every child should become an expert in something. I left thinking that the notion of becoming an expert was little more than a declarative statement. Yet I decided to try it out and began calling myself a photographer -- and that led me to shoot for Gavin Newsom's campaign, the now-Lieutenant Governor of California.

You need to be -- or become -- an expert in something. When you take the time to become highly specialized in something that really adds value to the world, people will start looking to you for answers. You are an expert only to the extent that you call yourself (and believe that you are) one, but being an expert opens the door to unknown opportunities.

Friendtors

Some call self-learners arrogant for promulgating the notion that self-directed learning can replace college. The unbelievers ask, "How can you know what you need to know?" The answer is that we don't, at least not initially. Part of the UnCollege process is figuring out what you need to know -- which involves learning from experts.

In a collegiate setting, these experts come in the form of professors. For uncollegians, experts come in the form of mentors.

The difference between a friendtor relationship and a professor-student relationship is that the friendtor relationship is reciprocal: knowledge is exchanged in both directions. Everyone should find a mentor whether you are a student or not. Mentors are critical to your success.

Supporters

While external validation is not required, it is nice to know that others believe in you. Where is the best place to gain these supporters? Start with your friends, and when you begin publishing your ideas, the supporters will come. After *The Chronicle of Higher Education* published an article about UnCollege my inbox was inundated with hundreds of emails offering encouragement and assistance. Don't underestimate the power of the internet.

Connections

Even more valuable than having supporters is having a robust network of connections. The old adage "It's not what you know, it's who you know" holds true today. The awesome news is that the internet makes it much easier to 'know' people. If you don't already have a LinkedIn account, make one. Once again, start with personal friends and work outwards. Join Twitter and find a community of followers. Go to events and set yourself a goal for the number of connections to make.

The key with connections is that you must develop personal relationships with all of them. If your connections don't know you, they won't have any incentive to help you. I respond to every communication I receive (be it Twitter, email, Facebook, text or otherwise) and make a point of interacting with my hundreds of connections monthly.

Time

There are elements of self-directed learning that work whilst enrolled in college, but to replace college with self-directed learning, you need to commit full-time.

12 steps

to self-directed lifelong learning

1. Always carry a book, pen, and paper
2. Teach others
3. Keep a To-learn list
4. Start something -- a website, company, organization, movement
5. Find & be a mentor
6. Set your homepage to Wikipedia:random*
7. Live abroad & learn a new language
8. Surround yourself by people who are smarter than you
9. Think, write, and publish your ideas
10. Always ask 'Why?'
11. Practice unlearning to challenge your views
12. Become an expert

THE TWELVE STEPS

I was not intending for this list to include exactly twelve items -- in fact, I was trying to avoid doing so for obvious reasons.

I'm going to write more about each of these in the future, but I wanted to give you an idea of some of the things you can do in your everyday life.

If you're wondering about how to pursue some of the larger steps (#4, #5, #8, #12), don't despair -- I will address those specifically in subsequent manifestos, blog posts, and my upcoming book, so please take a moment to subscribe. For the moment, think about how you might implement these suggestions into your daily life.

If you need any guidance, don't hesitate to email me.

“Learn as if you were going to live forever.
Live as if you were going to die tomorrow.”
- Mahatma Gandhi

PARTING THOUGHTS

JFDI

I encourage you to plan out your 'courses' and write down your goals, but only to a point. If you only plan and never do, I will have failed in my mission to help you learn in the real world.

If you're worried that you don't have the perfect idea or don't know the best way to approach something, don't worry! Making mistakes is an awesome way to learn.

I subscribe to the words of Mark Suster, a Partner at GRP Capital Partners: JFDI. You need to stop whining and complaining and **"just effin' do it!"** Those are words to live by.

JUST ASK!

Too often I hear people complain that they cannot find an internship, mentor, or help. My first response is "Have you asked?" Too often the response is a sullen "No." I was having a conversation with a friend a few days after I launched UnCollege.org, and he asked if I had heard the NPR report

about *Academically Adrift*. When I responded that I had, and had in fact exchanged a few emails with one of the coauthors, Richard Arum, my friend incredulously asked, "How?" I had Googled his name, found his faculty profile at NYU, and sent him an email. It was only a matter of asking.

I realized that what I consider to be normal -- deciding what I want, figuring out who I should contact, and actually contacting said individual -- is actually abnormal. When you're asking -- be it for help, a job, advice, connections, or otherwise -- be specific about what you need. I don't write emails saying "Hi, I'm Dale and I could use your help." Abstraction is bad! Your email should consist of "Hi, I'm __, I'm doing __, and I'd like your help with __ Specificity makes for better communication.

WHAT I'M DOING

I am stopping out of college to prove that obtaining a degree is not the only path to professional success. On this contrarian journey I will be writing weekly essays at my website about education, life, and society.

It isn't easy to succeed in society without a college degree. I may succeed, I may fail, but I am committed to documenting the entire process for you.

THE UNCOLLEGE MOVEMENT

Whilst pursuing my own adventures outside academia I plan to be a catalyst for change by changing the notion that a college degree is the only way to achieve professional success. I'm crusading to help people understand that life and education can (and should) be mutually inclusive. My social movement is called UnCollege, and the writing on my site is for everyone who learns outside the classroom.

I'm not going to tell you what to do -- that's for you to decide! Remember, self-directed learning is about taking charge of your own education. I hope my writing will inspire you to pursue your educational goals.

By the end of 2011 I plan to finish my first book which will expand upon these ideas further. I haven't written more than an abstract yet, but I hope you'll hold me accountable.

JOIN ME?

I would love for you to join my crusade to revolutionize education. Joining is easy, and nothing is for sale. You only need to believe that education needs a makeover -- and you can decide that for yourself.

You can follow my degree-less journey, as well as the UnCollege movement, through your favorite RSS reader, via email, or on [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#).

À BIENTÔT!

Before I leave you to synthesize life and education, I want to tell you one final story about college.

About a week after I launched [UnCollege.org](#) I sat down with some acquaintances for dinner on Sunday night in my college cafeteria. The topic of conversation revolved around what we had done that weekend.

The guy sitting across from me, Rob was talking about how much fun he'd had partying when he asked me what I had done for the weekend.

I responded that I'd been interviewed by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and was starting a social movement.

His response was:
"But dude college is about having fun!"

I thought about Rob's comments for a few seconds and realized that I considered what I had done, something most would consider serious, loads of fun. Where had this divide between college and life come from?

Then Kevin, the guy next to Rob, was more positive: his response was "That's amazing, congrats!" It's true: I live an amazing life, and I try to be grateful every day.

But my life isn't an accident: the way I live my life is attributable to the way I approach education.

Kevin continued, "But why are you stopping out of college?"

"Well," I responded, "I believe that life and education should be mutually inclusive. And besides, I can party and have fun in real life too."

As I walked back to my dorm I began thinking about what I had just said. My future was waiting for me -- I just had to choose between having a degree or going it without. I decided to practice what I preached and stop college to prove that a college degree is not requisite for success.

What will you make of your education?
-It's your decision.

What will you do with this report?
-It's up to you.

What's your story?
-It's your turn to find out.

If you've found this report useful, please take a moment to post a comment on my site. I'd really appreciate it.

Post your feedback at <http://uncollege.org/manifesto> or email dale@uncollege.org.

Thanks for reading. I hope you'll share my writing with both your friends and followers. It'll change your lives for the better.

You are your education,
Dale

“Education is what remains after one has forgotten everything he learned in school.”

– Albert Einstein

PART SIX:

real-world and online resources

FINAL THOUGHTS

If nothing else, remember that:

1) Life and education can (and should) be mutually inclusive

2) You are your education -- own it!

I wish you the best in your educational endeavors. Don't forget to join the movement at <http://uncollege.org> and keep me updated about your success.

RESOURCES

Instead of keeping a list here that cannot be updated, I've decided to create a dynamic list of resources at

<http://uncollege.org/blog/resources> .

On the site you'll find links to online and offline academic resources ranging from programs to books to blog posts to projects to co-working spaces.

I hope this list will prove useful.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to you for reading, and thank you to all those who believe in me and what I'm doing with UnCollege. You don't know how much your support means.

Thanks to Jean-Baptiste Collinet and Jordy van Lith and Jesse Harding for editing.