

## True Cost of College Education

By Kayleigh M. Stack

Writer, Blogger, Ethnographic Researcher <http://kmswritings.pressfolios.com>

After going to four years of college, and perhaps an additional 2-to-6 years of higher education for a M.A. or PhD, one might expect, or at least hope, all their time, effort and most importantly, *money*, will pay off. However, a degree does not always equate directly to employment or antepup in the way so often pitched to credulous high school graduates. There are a staggering number of additional factors, beyond a degree, that need to be considered when gauging one's future employability and economic success, post graduation. Unfortunately, the reality often is that if you want a well paying job, one generally needs the network and credentials from a top University. This necessity contributes to the correlation between wealth and opportunity, causing the ever-increasing income inequality gap.

Lack of opportunity and resources is the main factor for why the poor continue to get poorer and the rich continue to get.... you know how it goes. Even a 4.0 GPA student of all four years at a decently ranked school, will not have as much leverage in the job market as the guy who got a 2.9 GPA at an Ivy league, for which his parents footed the bill. However, it doesn't stop there. The guy who had funding from his parents that went to the Ivy league may or may not land a lucrative position in a firm, but either way, it does not matter *as much* as to those students who tried to break the economic inequality "glass ceiling", by deciding to pay his or her own way with loan after loan. This is because, the latter student will be swimming in debt for the majority of his adult life and will inevitable be more frustrated, than his debt-free counterpart, to discover the job market, with the now newly acquired Ivy league credential, can only offer a mediocre income.

The truth is, the *true* cost of a college education often differs from given cost. Not all college degrees will be offering increased opportunities, while others will. Therefore, I have come up with an equation to measure popular college degrees and their opportunity of costs, to discover the true cost (and value) of yours or your child's education. Below I will be analyzing the opportunity of costs between a 4-year degree program, alongside a popular trades school, to study the best investment of a students time. Since time equals money, it is important to get the most out of your academic endeavors.

*Equation: cost of opportunity - cost of school + =*

### **Law school vs Culinary School:**

Law school is generally a 3-year program that costs \$120K. Now this does not include the time and expenses of an undergraduate degree one inevitably would need to invest in effort to pursue Law, nor does it account for other fees just as book, dorm, living, ETC. Therefore, in total, acquiring a Law degree would actually consist of a minimum of 7 years in academia. The

undergraduate degree costs would fluctuate depending on what and where one decided to pursue, but for the sake of argument, if a student did their undergraduate degree at Brown University it would cost an average of \$170K. Meaning that after 7 years in school, one would be paying, roughly, a grand total of around \$300k, with still no job guarantee. Let us compare this to a trades school. Take Culinary School. Generally the certificate program for a culinary degree, which is equivalent to that of a bachelors, can run anywhere between 6 months to 4 years. Taking the maximum of 4 years in school, that is still three years less in academia then a Law degree, with the ability to be making an income for three extra years versus the alternative. The average cost of Culinary school again varies between \$20k-\$100k, however, lets say if one were going to be attending Culinary school for a total of 4 years, they would be paying the full cost of \$100K. Although 4 years in school and \$100K is still quite a decent amount of time and resources, comparably, it would be \$200K less (\$300k (law) -\$100k (culinary) then Law school, with again, an additional three extra years of income. The starting salary of a Head Chef averages to about \$50K – which would ideally would increase with seniority. However, if this salary were to stay the same, over the course of ten years they would make \$500k. Where as, the starting salary for a Lawyer averages to about \$75K, with the ten year salary, again if it were to stay the same, amounting to \$750K. So lets crunch some numbers and see where all this can take us!

**Culinary school Cost: \$100k\* Years: 4yrs Annual Salary: \$50k\*\* 10-yr Salary: \$500k**  
**Law School Costs: \$300K\*\* Years: 3yrs Annual Salary: \$75K 10yr Salary: \$750**

For culinary graduates, \$500k (10 yr salary)- \$100k (cost of school) = \$400K

**Culinary school value after 10 years would be \$400k**

As for Law school, taking the \$750K (10 year salary)- \$300k (cost of school) = \$450K

**The Law school value after 10 years would be \$450K**

Looking at the difference between the two, at first glance it would look as the individual who chose law school would make \$50K more than the culinary grad, an additional \$5,000 per year - over the course of 10 years. However, this does not take into consideration the opportunity of cost., leaving out the *True* value.

Since the culinary students will be out of school and ideally work for an additional three year before the Law student, the culinary student - given he/she lands a job as a head chef - will be making roughly \$150K (\$50k x 3 years in job market) within those three years, versus the Law student would will be loosing the possibility of making \$225K (\$75k x 3 years of not being in the job market) since they will be unable to make an income in school.

Therefore...

**The opportunity of costs for Culinary school would therefore be \$150K -income of 3 years in job market**

**The opportunity of costs for Law school would be -\$225K -income lost of 3 years not being in the job market**

So whats the *True Value*

\$400K (10 yr salary - cost of school)+\$150K (income of 3 years in job market) + = \$550

\$450K(10 yr salary - cost of school)-\$225K (income lost of 3 years not being in the job market)=  
\$225

In this case,

**The True value of costs for Culinary school would therefore be \$550K**

**The True value of costs for Law school would therefore be \$225K**

So with that being said...

**The true cost of a Law degree = \$300 (school) + \$225 (income lost of 3 years not being in the job market)) = \$525K**

And one could go back and once again say...

**The True VALUE of Law School is: \$750K (10 year salary) - \$525K (School + 3 years of income lost in comparison to culinary school) = \$225**

Phewww, so yes it is a lot of numbers, however, it is something to consider when choosing one mode of education over another.