

# Chapter 11

## Student Perspectives on Business Education in the USA: Current Attitudes and Necessary Changes in an Age of Disruption

**Ben Christopher Brookbanks**

*Loyola Marymount University, USA*

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter examines the academic and personal trajectory a student takes from before they ever set a foot on campus to beyond a college degree. By first assessing the private vs. public school dynamics in Southern California, the author documents the ways in which these systems are a reaction to the American college system, and how the prevailing psyche around college as being an ultimate end for students and their parents plays out. Reflecting on personal choices and circumstances unique to the individual yields a variety of challenges and benefits posed by pursuing a college degree, all of which influence what to study and where to pursue it. Influences range from relative income to geographical location and parental occupation. Through an examination of these elements, the relative importance and weight of a college degree in light of developments accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic leaves the collegiate system and the students who are at the center of it in an unparalleled position.*

### INTRODUCTION

It is the job of higher education to constantly be reacting to the disruption around it, as socioeconomic dynamics and trends push and pull at the status quo. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the level of this disruption, but the task of students and professors has not changed, it just looks a little different. As a student still in the foundational stages of pursuing a degree, the theatrical visions of a traditional college experience were dismantled as the months of remote learning passed by. This isn't to say that the experience has been a solely negative one. In fact, being a college student in an age of disruption provides the unique opportunity to start anew and do it all again wherever that new start point is. It is

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important to understand what the higher education landscape looked like pre-pandemic, what has stayed the same and what has changed, and what areas should be focused on to ensure the prosperity of the collegiate system for all stakeholders. This chapter aims to provide a unique perspective from inside the heart of higher education in the U.S., focusing on a business education, from the day applications come out to graduation four years later.

## **PRIVATE VS. PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA**

### **National Psyche and Historical Development**

The national psyche surrounding the preeminence of U.S. colleges and universities is a largely unspoken, but accepted mindset. The necessity of obtaining a degree to ensure employability is an expectation in select social strata, and higher education is seen as an ultimate means in achieving this goal. This being said, these attitudes aren't as steadfast as they maybe once were, as exponents of U.S. higher education exceptionalism are prideful but hardly complacent. They recognize deficiencies in this vaunted system. Their celebratory statements are modulated by concerns about growing challenges and threats to its standing. The narratives convey worries about domestic trends and intense competition from overseas institutions and governments, which seek the economic advantages and prestige that strong universities can confer (Mittelman 2018). Evidently, this wavering position is reflective not only of increased potential of international institutions, but the "domestic trends" mentioned stem from a variety of societal and political dynamics that need to be examined.

Higher education can be viewed through a variety of lenses in Southern California that circle back to a sense of duty on the part of the student, and it is important to gain a sense of perspective before assessing these attitudes. An underlying culture that views college as an ultimate marker of success is drilled into student's minds from a young age in some areas more than others. Pasadena is a sprawling superb 20 minutes north of downtown Los Angeles, where the private school system is a mini-biosphere for college-preparedness. Colloquially, Pasadena acts as an umbrella term that includes several smaller cities in the surrounding areas in which there are over 50 private elementary, middle, and high schools (Niche, 2021). In spite of having some of the highest rated public high schools in the surrounding cities of La Cañada and San Marino, a distinct separation between public and private education perpetuates in Pasadena.

This is traceable back to bussing policies that began in the 1970s in an attempt to reintegrate schools. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court declared racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional. In the 1970s and 1980s, and under federal court supervision, many school districts started implementing mandatory bussing plans within their district (Elachem, 2019). Pasadena was a nation-wide vanguard for racial equality in the classroom, but support was not unanimous. Parents who opposed the scheme--and were able to afford it--began sending their children to private schools, and as buses started taking fewer and fewer of the privileged children, generally white at the time. This gradually showed that the bussing system ended up bussing less fortunate families, blacks, Hispanics and other minorities, causing the plan to contradict its purpose and continue the segregation in the area rather than improve and integrate it (Elachem, 2019). This trend developed over time. The public school system in Pasadena statistically falters by comparison to neighboring cities, as of the 21 public schools within Pasadena

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