

What a College Degree Says

Executive summary. A college degree sometimes seems overrated as it isn't necessarily a measure of intelligence, nor a guarantee of success. A pigskin on the wall says more than "I know engineering" or "I know business". It says, "I can finish things."



What is a college degree? A Bachelor of Science degree in civil engineering means that the holder of the degree has attended four years of classes and received passing grades. It means that (s)he has learned something along the way about math and science – and also that water plus dirt equals mud. It may also mean that the student has a genuine interest in civil engineering. And yes, it probably means that they're not stupid – there's a lot of math and a lot of late-night studying.

All that's good in achievement of a degree, but what it means to an experienced employer is that the person can finish something.

These guys didn't need a degree! Yes, it's true that there are some mega-successful people that didn't graduate college. Here are some: [QR] However, these guys are extreme outliers. Are you Bill Gates? No. These are one in 500 million-type people. Using this as an excuse not to obtain, or not to finish, your degree is statistically a bad idea.



You're a snob Scott. When I had my construction business, which is traditionally a blue-collar industry from the laborer position to the project manager role, I frowned upon those companies that necessitated a college degree for certain positions. I earned a civil engineering degree but didn't see the need for others to have one. However, I'm not of that mindset necessarily anymore. I believe the college degree is an excellent measure of competence. Life competence and task competence – not capacity for intelligence.

It's close enough. Some candidates didn't finish their degree because they couldn't – there were challenges like personal health issues, family emergencies, or financial woes. That is understandable.

However, I've found that those who didn't have these enormous obstacles to overcome, who just didn't finish the program, do the same when they're at work. Their final product is unfinished. Their product is not thorough. Not complete.

Why get a college degree? Get it because it says you can finish something. I know plenty of professionals in construction that have degrees completely unrelated to engineering or construction. But they had the ability to see something to completion – a college degree in basket weaving, or whatever, says I can take on a task and complete it to the satisfaction of a third party who is willing to award me a certificate of completion (i.e., a college degree).



My story. I had a third-party estimator who often helped me with bids. We were low bidder on a Lowe's Home Improvement Center (these are huge parking lots, right?!). We were low by probably 30%. Thanks goodness the job rebid, and we were able to make up for the incomplete and unthorough bid. Leaving out 8" of aggregate under an asphalt lot the size of a football field is a difficult budget gap to "make up in production".

Work Safe!