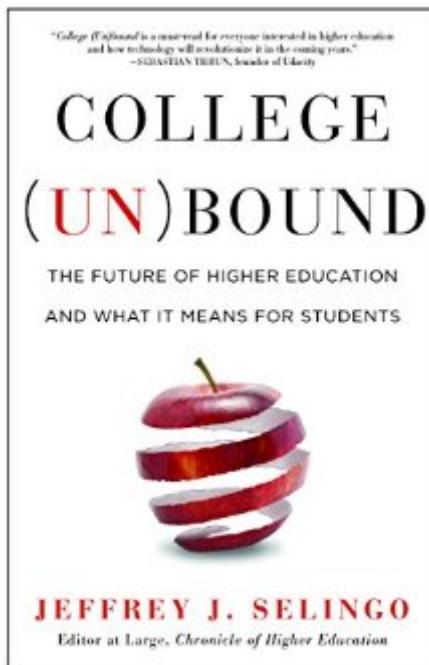


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# College Unbound: The Future Of Higher Education And What It Means For Students



## **Synopsis**

What is the value of a college degree? The four-year college experience is as American as apple pie. So is the belief that higher education offers a ticket to a better life. But with student-loan debt surpassing the \$1 trillion mark and unemployment of college graduates at historic highs, people are beginning to question that value. In *College (Un)bound*, Jeffrey J. Selingo, editor at large of the Chronicle of Higher Education, argues that America's higher education system is broken. The great credential race has turned universities into big business and fostered an environment where middle-tier colleges can command elite university-level tuition while concealing staggeringly low graduation rates, churning out graduates with few of the skills needed for a rapidly evolving job market. Selingo not only turns a critical eye on the current state of higher education but also predicts how technology will transform it for the better. Free massive online open courses (MOOCs) and hybrid classes, adaptive learning software, and the unbundling of traditional degree credits will increase access to high-quality education regardless of budget or location and tailor lesson plans to individual needs. One thing is certain: "the Class of 2020 will have a radically different college experience than their parents. Incisive, urgent, and controversial, *College (Un)bound* is a must-read for prospective students, parents, and anyone concerned with the future of American higher education.

## **Book Information**

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## Customer Reviews

I am a former college professor who left academia a year ago, in large part because I did not care for the trends I was seeing in higher education. So when I had the opportunity to review this book, I was eager to do so, especially given the background and expertise of the author, Jeffrey Selingo, who is the Editor at Large of the The Chronicle of Higher Education. I was hoping to find a balanced and nuanced review of the changes taking place in colleges today. Instead, this book--other than the obligatory criticisms of the high tuitions and large debt loads families are assuming these days to put their children through college--presents a largely glowing portrait of where college is heading. Take, for example, the topic of online classes, which occupies a large part of Selingo's book. This is a hot trend in colleges today for two main reasons: Colleges make a bucketload of money off them, and students love them. Selingo obviously loves them, too, and he waxes eloquently at great length about their promise for delivering convenient and inexpensive courses to students. He notes on p.99 that "a vocal slice of professors and administrators remain skeptical" of online classes, even though "every new study of online learning" arrives at essentially the same conclusion that students perform better in online courses than traditional courses. This is only one small example of sweeping statements that Selingo makes without offering any supporting evidence, and it seriously distorts the actual state of the pedagogical research, because it is emphatically NOT true that every study supports the superiority, or even equality, of online classes compared to traditional classes.

Let us start with a statement college professors, homeschool advocates, and Jeffrey Selingo can surely agree upon: American higher education is too expensive. Budget cuts have jacked tuition, schools spend scarce resources outside the classroom, administrative roles have become patronage plums, and deregulated loans put many working-class students in debt they may never beat. The question becomes: what do we do about it? Books like this one matter, not because they attempt to answer the question, but because they advance the debate. No 250-page book can truly address all the options. Believe me, several noble attempts have crossed my desk. But they inevitably reflect the authors' preferences for what American education should resemble. Therein, maybe, lies the problem, that American higher ed has become perilously homogenous. Selingo, a

respected educational journalist, addresses the question from multiple angles, gathering diverse sources with divergent views, reflecting real trends in recent debate. Because he addresses so much, I find myself swinging wildly. At one moment, I pump my fist and shout "Yes! Yes! Yes!" Then the next moment, I palm my face and mutter "No! No! No!" Then I ask myself the real question: why do I feel so strongly? Education, Selingo says, has suffered in the last decade from a "race to the top" that involves little actual educational content. Highly groomed campuses and pricey sports championships attract new enrollees and alumni donations. But colleges, particularly private colleges, have offset these expenses by hiring adjunct instructors, concentrating efforts on grant-earning grad students, and packing undergrads into lecture halls of questionable pedagogical value.

"The typical state university or research institution is the amalgamation of three different business models: a consulting firm that offers solutions (the university's research function), a manufacturer that adds value to a raw material (the teaching function), and an online auction site that facilitates networks (the life and career function)." --Jeffrey Selingo, COLLEGE UNBOUND, p. 68 So Jeffrey Selingo is telling us that students are "raw materials" which gain value through the production process of "manufacturers" so that the finished product can be "auctioned" to employers as purchasers. If you can get your head around this conceptualization of education, you will be well on your way to understanding Selingo's argument (disjointed though it may be) in this book. Higher education is, according to Selingo, broken. The whole system needs to be revamped from nearly the top (excluding the "elite" institutions, that is) to the bottom. And Selingo has been hanging out with just the educational entrepreneurs to do the job. If it's new-fangled and glossy and sizzling, Selingo is all for it. Everything else is just a relic of the entrenched status quo of universities stuck in their "traditional" methods which no longer serve the needs of twenty-first century students. Having heard most of these same market-based, "reform" arguments made about K-12 education, I'm already on my guard. There are so many problems with higher education that I hardly know where to start, but one of the biggest problems Selingo seems to have is the "bundling" of services at colleges.

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