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## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A COLLEGE GRAD?

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After May 14th, I will be a college graduate. By fall, there will be no more a cap- 1  
pella rehearsals, no more papers or exams, no more sleepless nights, no more  
weekday drinking, no more 1 AM milk tea runs, no more San Francisco Bay  
Area exploring. I won't be with the people I now see daily. I won't have the  
same job with the same awesome boss. I won't be singing under Sproul every  
Monday. I won't be booked with weekly gigs that take me all over California. I  
won't be lighting another VSA Culture Show.

I will also have new commitments: weekly dinner dates with my mom, 2  
brother/sister time with my other two brothers, job hunting and career build-  
ing, car purchasing and maintenance. In essence, my life will be—or at least  
feel—completely different. From what college alumni have told me, I will soon  
miss my college days after they are gone.

But in the bigger picture, outside of the daily tasks, what does it mean to hold 3  
a college degree? My fellow graduating coworker and I discussed the importance  
(or lack thereof) of our college degrees: while I considered hanging up my two  
diplomas, she believed that having a bachelor's was so standard and insubstantial,  
only a professional degree is worth  
hanging up and showing off. Now-  
adays, holding a college degree (or  
two) seems like the norm; it's not a  
very outstanding feat.

“Nowadays, holding a college degree (or two) seems like the norm.”

However, I'd like to defend 4  
the power of earning a college degree. Although holding a degree isn't as pow-  
erful as it was in previous decades, stats still show that those who earn bachelor's  
degrees are likely to earn twice as much as those who don't. Also, only 27% of  
Americans can say they have a bachelor's degree or higher. Realistically, having  
a college degree will likely mean a comfortable living and the opportunity to  
move up at work and in life.

Personally, my degrees validate my mother's choice to leave Vietnam. She 5  
moved here for opportunity. She wasn't able to attend college here or in Vietnam  
or choose her occupation. But her hard work has allowed her children to become  
the first generation of Americans in the family to earn college degrees: she gave  
us the ability to make choices she wasn't privileged to make. Being the fourth  
and final kid to earn my degree in my family, my mom can now boast about  
having educated children who are making a name for themselves (a son who is a  
computer-superstar, a second son and future dentist studying at UCSF, another

son who is earning his MBA and manages at Mattel, and a daughter who is thankful to have three brothers to mooch off of).

For me, this degree symbolizes my family being able to make and take the opportunities that we've been given in America, despite growing up with gang members down my street and a drug dealer across from my house. This degree will also mean that my children will have more opportunities because of my education, insight, knowledge, and support.

Even though a college degree isn't worth as much as it was in the past, it still shows that I—along with my fellow graduates and the 27% of Americans with a bachelor's or higher—will have opportunities unheard of a generation before us, showing everyone how important education is for our lives and our futures.

### ➤ AT ISSUE: THE FOUR PILLARS OF ARGUMENT

1. What purpose do the first two paragraphs of this essay serve? Do you think they are necessary? Do you think they are interesting? How else could Le have opened her essay?
2. Where does Le state her thesis? Do you think she should have stated it more forcefully? Can you suggest a more effectively worded thesis statement for this essay?
3. In paragraph 3, Le summarizes an opposing argument. Paraphrase this argument. How does she refute it? Can you think of other arguments against her position that she should have addressed?
4. In paragraphs 5–6, Le includes an appeal to the emotions. Does she offer any other kind of supporting evidence? If so, where? What other kinds of evidence do you think she should include? Why?
5. Le begins her conclusion with the statement, "Even though a college degree isn't worth as much as it was in the past, . . ." Does this concluding statement undercut her argument? Do you think she should have addressed this point in her essay instead of simply mentioning it in her conclusion?