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Mastering A Degree

Zachary Klein sets his briefcase on his pool table and gently slides off his work shoes. Klein, a senior at Louisiana State University, has already settled into his first job.

“I always like to have a little control over my future,” Klein said. “Securing this job before graduation is the lock that makes me feel extra secure.”

However, Klein’s job is not permanent. He’s saving money until he can obtain his master’s degree.

According to census.gov, from 2002 to 2012, the population with a master’s degree climbed by 43 percent.

Joan Gallagher, a licensed professional counselor and associate director of Career Services at LSU, said a bachelor’s degree doesn’t mean as much today as it used to.

“There is a much higher percentage of people earning a bachelor’s degree so you don’t stand above others like you used to,” Gallagher said.

However, Gallagher doesn’t believe every student should strive for a master’s degree. She said the decision to obtain a master’s degree depends on your undergraduate major.

Gallagher said students with a major in psychology, social work and business should strongly consider pursuing a master’s degree in order for more doors to be open in their future workplace.

Students with a major in mass communication and environmental science do not generally need master’s degrees, Gallagher said.

“If you have the time and money to be able to do it, it certainly will give you an edge,” Gallagher said. “But not a huge edge, depending on your major.”

Gallagher said there are some circumstances when having too many degrees can be more detrimental than helpful.

She said that her son is the lead director for the security team at Microsoft Office. Gallagher said he told her that in fields like information technology, the higher the degree doesn’t necessarily make you the better candidate for the job.

“In fact, they are a little suspect of someone who wanted to stay in school for a long time,” Gallagher said. “It looks as though it’s a student who just wanted to stay in school instead of accepting any of the available jobs out there.”

As Gallagher said, most mass communication majors do not need to obtain a master’s degree. Lacy Miller, senior public relations major at LSU, agrees with Gallagher and is entering the workplace right after her graduation this May.

“The most crucial thing for someone wanting to work in public relations is to gain real-world experience,” Miller said. “Most jobs won’t hire you without a minimum three-year experience in the field, so more schooling will actually work against me getting a job.”

Miller also agrees with Gallagher that a bachelor’s degree doesn’t mean as much today as it used to.

Despite this belief, Miller believes that even if she had a master’s degree, she wouldn’t necessarily be more successful.

“I think the most important thing in public relations is working your way up,” Miller said. “You need to show your boss and coworkers that you’re a hard worker and dedicated to your job. I think my work ethic will set me above others more than having my master’s degree could.”

One of the main reasons students do not pursue an advanced degree is cost. For Matthew Poche', a senior studying architecture design at Delgado University, the high cost worries him, but also inspires him.

“Money is a stress-filled topic for any college student,” Poche' said. “But instead of stopping me from entering a 5-year architecture program, it inspires me to stay focused and keep my grades up.”

However, one of the people Poche' is closest to, his mother, does not fully support his decision to continue his education because of the cost.

“My mom is just being a mom,” Poche' said. “She is worried I will be too poor. It is extremely difficult because my mother is a very influential person in my life, but I have to make the decision based on what will make me happy.”

Poche' has wanted to be an architect since he was a junior in high school and he is determined to accomplish his dream, no matter the cost or years that it will take.

When deciding whether or not to get a master’s degree, the decision is personal. Klein, Miller and Poche' are all graduating seniors, yet they have very different plans.

Like Gallagher said, the main thing a student needs to consider is their undergraduate major and whether or not obtaining a master’s degree is needed to be successful in their field.

The next decision is based on time. Students need to realize the amount of time it takes to obtain a master’s degree besides the expense of a master’s program.

For Klein, obtaining a master’s is mandatory for him to reach his end goal: CFO of Coke-A-Cola.

Klein said he could not even get an interview for an entry-level position at Coke without a master’s degree.

He’s assessed the cost and realizes the time and effort it will take to obtain his master’s degree, and after a few more years of working in sales, Klein said he’ll be ready to go back to school.

For Klein, receiving his master’s degree is more than just having another diploma to hang on his wall.

“It’s a personal test, it’s the drive to provide and the personal feel-good about success that inspire me,” Klein said.