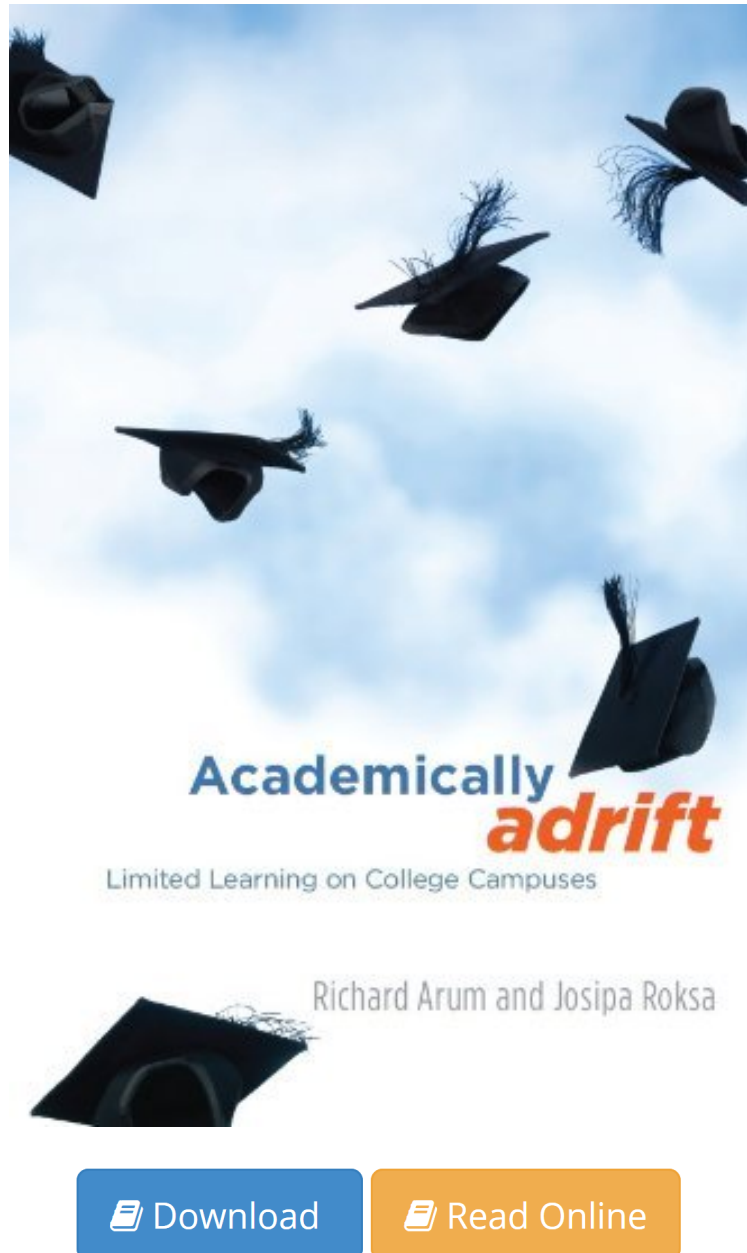


(Free) Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses

## Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses

*Richard Arum, Josipa Roksa*

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**Richard Arum, Josipa Roksa : Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses:

12 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Very disturbing!By Paul Tognetti"Current cultural norms among U.S. undergraduates support a conception of schooling as an important, but part-time activity. Other parts of life, notably social and leisure activities, are at least as important." This observation from the sociologist Steven Brint should certainly come as no surprise to anyone who is paying the least bit of attention to what is happening on our nation's college campuses. Several months ago I began exploring the state of higher education in America by reading

Naomi Shafer Riley's fine book "The Faculty Lounges: And Other Reasons Why You Won't Get The College Education You Paid For". That book focused on the pros and cons of tenure for college professors. Riley believes that the tenure system increases costs and demonstrates why it often results in inferior classroom instruction as well. I was left eager to learn even more about the state of higher education in America. Recently, I heard about Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa's new offering "Academically Adrift: Limited Learning On College Campuses". I knew immediately that this was a book I simply had to read. The main focus of "Academically Adrift" is a standardized test known as the Collegiate Learning Assessment or CLA. This particular study was conducted among 2,300 undergraduate students from 24 different universities across the nation. The CLA is definitely not your typical multiple choice test. Rather, the CLA consists of three open-ended assessment components: a performance task and two analytical writing tasks. The purpose of this test is to try to evaluate a student's critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem solving and writing skills. And what Arum and Roksa discovered is certainly cause for alarm. Essentially, the results of this study strongly suggest that after two years of college the vast majority of students show precious little improvement in their capacity for critical thinking, complex reasoning and writing. While it is extremely important for students to master the material presented in textbooks and in class shouldn't we expect more from our colleges and universities? As part of the research project that led to "Academically Adrift" Arum and Roksa also conducted a 26 question survey of the participating students that appears in the appendix of the book. Very revealing indeed! The results of this survey underscores the importance of rigorous coursework requirements, high faculty expectations, time devoted to studying and the potentially negative impact of employment and extracurricular activities. In altogether too many cases academics takes a back seat to working, socializing with friends and participating in campus activities. Too many students seem to buy into the notion of doing the least amount of work just to get by. According to statistics cited by the authors today's students spend considerably less time studying than their peers did 25 and 50 years ago. Furthermore, the study also found that half of students did not take a single course requiring 20 pages of writing during the prior semester and one-third did not take a single course requiring 40 pages of reading per week. Does this sound like college-level work to you? In doing some research for this review I came across a website from Alfred University. In commenting on Arum and Roksa's study an assistant professor of media studies joked "40 pages of what? How much would be gained if I were to assign 40 pages of comic books a week?" As far as I am concerned this is precisely the kind of attitude that we need to change. Trust me, there is an awful lot to chew on this book and time will simply not permit me to touch on all of the important issues the authors discuss. Finally, reading "Academically Adrift: Limited Learning On College Campuses" may also cause you to rethink the whole subject of higher education in America. For example, has the time finally come to discard the "college for all" philosophy that has been in vogue in this country for the past 30 or 40 years? Clearly not everyone belongs in college and buying into this philosophy only serves to prop up an extremely bloated system. When I was in high school guidance counselors served as "gatekeepers" pointing the less academically gifted students in the direction of vocational schools and other career opportunities. Let's face it, there is an awful lot of money to be made in the trades these days. Furthermore, I believe it is time to reexamine the wisdom in taking out college loans in order to finance an education. A shocking number of students never even graduate and are left with nothing but a mountain of debt to show for it. At the same time, many students emerging from four year institutions are not only poorly educated but also find themselves tens of thousands of dollars in debt to boot. I think there is an awful lot of wisdom in going the community college route. And what kind of a market is there for those individuals who choose to major in subjects like "area, ethnic, cultural and gender studies"? If these folks can't find a job please don't blame me or society-at-large. Frankly, we don't want to hear it! Finally, if parents and students make the decision to go to college it is extremely important that the student is fully focused on what he/she really wants to accomplish in school. All too often Arum and Roksa found students who had absolutely no idea what they were doing in college and really were "academically adrift". At the end of the day Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa have given us a very scholarly and well-researched book. Since I am not from academia I found myself struggling with terminology from time to time. "Academically Adrift: Limited Learning On College Campuses" will challenge much of what you believe about higher education in the United States. This is a thought-provoking book that is well-worth your time. Highly recommended!

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Stunning report on colleges and universities - and their failure to educate  
By Twice Retired  
Well documented report on how our colleges and universities with a few exceptions are failing to educate their students - mostly because the institutions are unwilling to impose and maintain standards. I retired from a university faculty earlier than I had planned when I began to teach because I believed there was no hope for, no respect for, solid teaching. Most institutions seem to exist for social connections and sports events.  
3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A Good Starting Point: Raises Important Questions  
By another believer  
This book is interesting and concise. The basic premise is that, based on results of the Collegiate Learning Assessment, 4 year college students are making minimal progress on critical thinking and clear written communication skills. This test consists of three questions which require students to collate and analyze a set of information, and present their conclusions in written format. The assessment was given to a sample of students at the beginning of the freshman year and again at the end of the sophomore year. Though their sample size is small (24 institutes of higher learning) they seem to adequately control for other variables,

and relationships between the reported variables. Their findings conclude that although in general, progress is limited, the following factors contribute to higher rates of improvement between the two iterations of the test:- Students taking courses requiring more than 40 pages of reading a week and a paper of at least 20 pages of length in the course of a semester- Studying alone rather than in groups (though the authors allow that this may be different among science students completing structured labs)- Working 10 hours a week, but not much more, and preferably on campus- Not devoting too much time to fraternities and sororities- Concentrating in social sciences/humanities or math/science- Receiving more funding from scholarships and grants as overall percentage of education funding- Attending more selective schools- High faculty expectations- Academic and social preparation for higher education They also note that on average students spend fewer hours per week studying now than in the past. These findings are not entirely surprising, but they do show that less emphasis on campus social pursuits and group work and more focus on academic rigor would likely be helpful, a refreshing thought. The authors additionally suggest that institutional accountability is a worthy goal, while clearly "consumer-driven" concerns like fancy facilities and social events should likely be de-emphasized. But this last is difficult in the age of "Rate My Professor" where students can share which professors are the least and most demanding, while campus websites highlight athletic facilities and posh dorms. I'm left with a few questions. Is slightly less than two years an adequate gap between two iterations of this assessment? It's possible that general education classes do not increase analytic and writing skills as much as upper division classes. Have colleges and universities done a better job of teaching these kinds of skills in the past? Thinking about my own experiences, I learned to write concisely and factually from a journalist parent, before college, and gained more analytic skills as a graduate student, and especially on the job, than I did as an undergraduate. Analysis may best be learned by turning people loose on real problems with real consequences, at real work sites. That's my theory. Perhaps we should administer the College Learning Assessment to a sample of entry level and a sample of mid-career professionals, and find out. That would be some interesting data.

In spite of soaring tuition costs, more and more students go to college every year. A bachelor's degree is now required for entry into a growing number of professions. And some parents begin planning for the expense of sending their kids to college when they're born. Almost everyone strives to go, but almost no one asks the fundamental question posed by *Academically Adrift*: are undergraduates really learning anything once they get there? For a large proportion of students, Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa's answer to that question is a definitive no. Their extensive research draws on survey responses, transcript data, and, for the first time, the state-of-the-art Collegiate Learning Assessment, a standardized test administered to students in their first semester and then again at the end of their second year. According to their analysis of more than 2,300 undergraduates at twenty-four institutions, 45 percent of these students demonstrate no significant improvement in a range of skills—including critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing—during their first two years of college. As troubling as their findings are, Arum and Roksa argue that for many faculty and administrators they will come as no surprise—instead, they are the expected result of a student body distracted by socializing or working and an institutional culture that puts undergraduate learning close to the bottom of the priority list. *Academically Adrift* holds sobering lessons for students, faculty, administrators, policy makers, and parents—all of whom are implicated in promoting or at least ignoring contemporary campus culture. Higher education faces crises on a number of fronts, but Arum and Roksa's report that colleges are failing at their most basic mission will demand the attention of us all.