Student exemplars: Editorial responses
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Advanced Exemplar

Explanation: In her editorial entitled “Humming to Higher Ed,” Gail Collins’s main point is that students caught up in the college search should focus on schools that will challenge them academically and push them hard to succeed, rather than simply looking at school’s prestige or campus environment. Collins’s editorial cites a study titled “Academically Adrift” at several points; one such quote is “36 percent of students are studying five or fewer hours a week and get a 3.16 grade average.” According to the editorial, “when it comes to time spent on class work and homework ‘only the Slovak Republic would come after us in academic time.’” The study also found that after two years, “45 percent [of students] showed no significant gain in learning – and even after four years, 36 percent showed little change.” Because Collins quotes this study with such frequency, it is necessary for her to establish the credibility of the study itself in order for her argument to maintain its integrity. She does this by pointing out that the study “followed 3,000 students on 29 campuses,” showing that it was well-researched and thus reliable. In addition, colleges that are more prestigious and aesthetically pleasing are likely to be more expensive, meaning that students would be required to pay higher student loans in order to attend those schools. Collins emphasizes this point by sharing the following statistic: “this year, the total amount of outstanding student loans will pass the $1 trillion threshold for the first time.” This staggering figure draws the reader’s attention to the behemoth that is student loans and makes them realize that a top-notch school may not be the best option after all.

Response: “Humming to Higher Ed” challenges many peoples’ perceptions about what they should be looking for in a potential university, and I agree with Gail Collins’s stance wholeheartedly. If the parents are detached from the application process, many students will choose to go to a school where they can relax and have fun; that is, a party school. As Collins addresses in the editorial, “some 18-year-olds may be heartened by the idea that they can go to good school, do almost nothing and still come home with a B.” The problem with this mentality is that these students are, in essence, paying upwards of $20,000 per year to get drunk and have a good time without learning anything that will help them later in life. By going to an easy school, they rack up student loans without getting the skills to help them pay off said student loans in the future and compete in the global economy. If students are serious about benefiting from college, they should follow Collins’s advice and pick a school that will force them to work hard to achieve success. They many not like it at the time, but in the end, they will become smarter, wealthier, and better prepared for success than their partying peers. However, Collins also warns against applying for a school based on its prestige; this is because many students, seeing themselves as invincible will apply for difficult schools (such as Stanford or Harvard), possibly get accepted, show up, start school, become overwhelmed by the work load, burn out, and drop out. Flunking out of school is just as bad as – if not worse than – learning nothing in the first place, and I therefore agree with Gail Collins’s middle-road approach.

Proficient Exemplar

Explanation: “Humming to Higher Ed” by Gail Collins showcases the fact that college is super expensive and should be dealt with very carefully. Collins believes that college is a competition to see who goes to the best university. She also mentions that students are not gaining knowledge. They spend all this money and time worrying about going to the “perfect” college yet they aren’t learning. She uses several statistics to support her argument and
entices her audience from the beginning with a metaphor. “The season is upon us. Squirrels are collecting their winter nuts, the geese are flying off in formation, the hummingbirds headed south – and how the heck do they do that, anyway? Also the high school seniors are beginning their long college visitation treks, which appear to take longer and require even more effort than the hummingbird thing.” Collins compares the path of college to the season of a hummingbird – it is an extremely long and emotional process. Kids are getting ready to part from their families whom they have lived with for eighteen years. But Collins warns students and parents about the truth of college. According the Federal Reserve, “Americans now owe more on student loans than on credit cards.” Does this mean the cost of student loans will get worse? The answer is yes. People need to look at all aspects and demographics of colleges they are considering, and they need to think things through. Basically, Collins believes that if someone pays to go to an expensive college then they need to devote 100% of their time to school. If one wants to be successful and get the most out of college, then they should keep up with their classes. Lastly, Collins uses sarcasm to have an emotional impact on her audience. She says “Wait, there’s more: Besides learning less, today’s students are borrowing more.” In a nutshell, she is saying that the cost to learn is more expensive, while the quality of learning has not improved. If it costs more, shouldn’t it be better? For example, the cost of getting a masters or doctors degree adds up. The United States is falling behind in its college education, says Richard Arum of the article “Academically Adrift.” This is alarming and worries me as I am getting ready to go to college in a few years.

Response: I partially agree with Gail Collins. I agree with the fact that college is extremely expensive. I have been looking at the cost of college for a few years now, and I have seen the dramatic increase in tuition costs in the past two years. I don’t expect for my parents to pay for my college, so I have been working hard to get scholarships to help me pay for my future education. I am worried about how I will pay for college if I don’t qualify for the scholarships to pay for my schooling. I also do not want to leave college with a mountain of debt. For example, my neighbor (who just turned 40) recently paid off her student loan debt. I don’t want that type of weight on my shoulders. The cost of learning is ridiculous. On the other hand, I disagree with that fact that college students are not gaining knowledge. College students I have talked to have said that college gives a student the chance to network, experience the real world, think for himself, and apply himself to different situations. I don’t know where Collins got the idea that most college students don’t learn anything. I believe choosing the right school and working hard is important. My philosophy is that if one works hard in high school, then he/she will benefit form the hard work in the future. In other words, if a student gets straight A’s, wants to learn in high school, takes AP classes, then they will be rewarded with scholarships.

Approaching Proficiency Exemplar

Explanation:
The editorial “Humming to Higher Ed” discusses Gail Collins’ opinion that students need to partake in college, but need to focus mainly on the work ethic the school entails and not the glamour. She demonstrates her view throughout the editorial. At the beginning she discusses the fact that through the years learning about college education has changed a lot. When Collins applied to college she chose it because it was the only college that sent a recruiter to her school. Today there are over 2,000 colleges and numerous websites to do research about them. This doesn’t only make it harder to choose, but can also make it easier to stereotype schools. Collins also mentions that parents cannot just push their child to pick a good school; they have to consistently push them to do their work and take the time to do the studies they need. Collins uses multiple studies and statistics to show that as a government spends more money on college education, the amount of educational growth in college is not increasing. For so much money and time to be dedicated to teenagers choosing a good school,
they should be growing intellectually. Therefore Collins is proving her opinion that college education needs to be taken more seriously.

**Response:**
Personally, I agree with Gail Collins. If parents and their kids are going to spend so much money and dedicate a good amount of their time to college education, then it should be taken seriously. I see college as a stoplight. You are coming up to the red light and you need to figure at which way you want to go. It turns green and you speed through, thinking you can just fly right by, but as you approach the next green light it turns yellow and you realize that you need to slow down. That’s similar to college. 18-year olds think they just pick which college they want and the rest will be easy. Well, it won’t. College students need to hit that yellow light so they can slow down and think about what they are doing. College prepares students for the rest of their lives. You are choosing the focus, but that doesn’t mean it will be easy. There is still learning to be done. Now, every student is different and some may stay more focused than others, but parents still may need to give their kids a wake-up call every now and then. College is the first time kids have full freedom, so it would be easy to take full advantage and run with it; however, it is also the first time kids can show how responsible they can be. So yes, Gail Collins is right. College visits are good way to get oriented with schools, but it’s not all about that first trip. There are years spent at college and everyday needs to be taken seriously!

**Citation:**