**Why should I even bother to get a college degree?**

***By the Antigua and Barbuda National Accreditation Board***

It is that time again. A time which can be called ‘graduation season’. Proud parents, grandparents, other relatives and supportive friends descend upon school grounds, college campuses, local and international, to celebrate the successes of their loved ones. The graduates pose with friends and family for numerous photographs which will adorn walls or find their way into photo albums, or be posted on Facebook, or Instagram and be shared with countless other well-wishers.

The Antigua and Barbuda National Accreditation Board (ABNAB) takes this opportunity to congratulate all those who have recently graduated from educational institutions and wishes them every success in their chosen fields of endeavour. At the same time however, ABNAB wants to take a look at the value of college degrees and share some thoughts.

Education has long been valued. Here in Antigua and Barbuda, as in countries all over the region, we were encouraged to focus on education as that was seen as the way to lift ourselves and our families out of poverty and bring about upward social mobility. As descendants of slaves, the future seemed bleak without access to formal education, no matter how basic or how colonial it was in nature. As the access to secondary education became more widely available, tertiary education became the new goal for opening doors.

Some members of the 2017 Graduating Class will get their dream jobs and begin productive careers, some will go on to graduate school but far too many will encounter disappointment and disillusionment in their search for employment. Those who feel disillusioned wonder if all the years of study and the money spent on higher education were worth it. In some cases graduates return home to find that former schoolmates who never sought to obtain tertiary education are already establishing themselves in the society. Some non-college graduates are climbing up the corporate ladder, some are entrepreneurs, some are homeowners and others are budding civic leaders.

A significant number of Antiguans study outside of the region at great cost. In the 2016/17 academic year, the average cost for an out of State student studying at the undergraduate level at a US public university was $24,930 (US) while in the UK the cost for international students was over £10,000. Is the investment in a college education worth it? Is the formal education system still the means to lift persons out of poverty? Is it still the tool to provide the social mobility desired by many?

In spite of the frustration facing some college graduates, ABNAB still believes that there is great value in higher education for the individual as well as for the society.

There is value for the individual in the intrinsic worth of knowledge. Persons are able to develop themselves to their full potential and fulfil their lifelong passions.

There are also economic benefits for college graduates. If financial independence is the desired goal of the individual, then the programme of study at college must be chosen carefully. Passion alone may not be able to provide the needed financial stability. Passion must be partnered with practicality. Depending on the course of study pursued, the college graduate is in a position to earn more than the average non-graduate .

Higher education is also of great value for the society as a whole. A well-educated populace is a boost for any country. The development of skills and talents beyond the secondary level can contribute to the country’s economic development. The point to be stressed here is that the skills and talents of the college graduates must be in sync with the needs of the nation.

In conclusion, while is true that education in the face-to-face environment can be expensive, ABNAB in a previous article, showed how costs could be reduced and suggested alternatives to the traditional face-to-face model. It is therefore incumbent on individuals to seek ways of increasing their own knowledge in order to add to the nation’s knowledge base so that economic prosperity can be had by all.