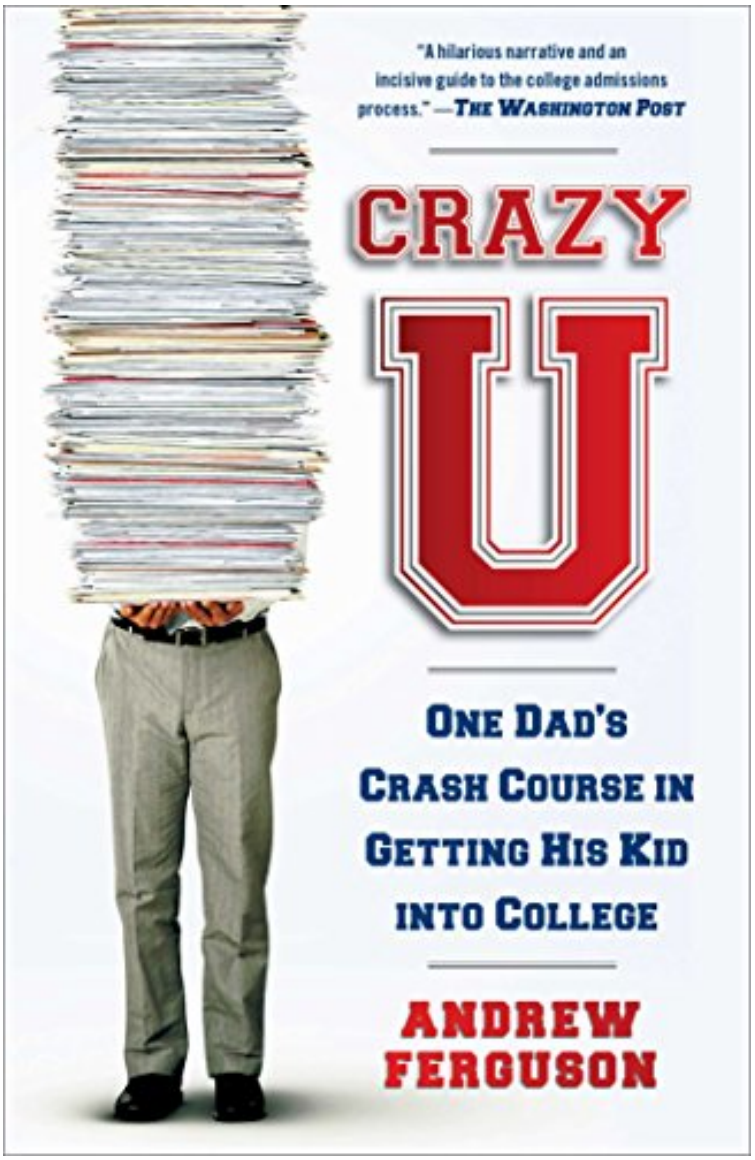
Crazy U: One Dad's Crash Course in Getting His Kid Into College (English Edition)



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(Online library) Crazy U: One Dad's Crash Course in Getting His Kid Into College (English Edition)

Par Andrew Ferguson : Crazy U: One Dad's Crash Course in Getting His Kid Into College (English Edition) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Crazy U: One Dad's Crash Course in Getting His Kid Into College (English Edition):

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe cutthroat competition to get into the perfect college can drive students to the brink of madness and push their parents over the edgeand bury them in an avalanche of books that claim to hold the secret of success. Dont worry: Crazy U is not one of those books. It is instead a disarmingly candid and hilariously subversive chronicle of the journey that millions of parents and their children undertake each yeara journey through the surreal rituals of college admissions. Its a rollicking ride from the man Christopher Buckley has called my all-time favorite writer. Pummeled by peers, creeped out by counselors,

and addled by advice books, Andrew Ferguson has come to believe that a single misstep could cost his son a shot at a happy and fulfilling future. He feels the pressure to get it right from the moment the first color brochures land in his mailbox, sent from colleges soliciting customers as though they were sailors come to port. First is a visit with the most sought-after, most expensiveand surely most intimidatingprivate college consultant in the nation. Then come the steps familiar to parents and their college-bound children, seen through a gimlet eye: a session with a distracted high school counselor, preparations for the SAT and an immersion in its mysteries, unhelpful help from essay coaches and admissions directors, endless campus tours, and finally, as spring arrives, the waiting, waiting, waiting for the envelope that bears news of the future. Meanwhile, Ferguson passes on the tips hes picked up during their crash course. (Tip number 36: Dont apply for financial aid after midnight.) He provides a pocket history of higher education in America, recounts the college ranking wars, and casts light on the obscure and not-terribly-seemly world of higher-education marketing. And he dares to raise the question that no one (until now) has been able to answer: Why on earth does it all cost so much? Along the way, something unexpected begins to happen: a new relationship grows between father and son, built from humor, loyalty, and (yes) more than a little shared anxiety. For all its tips and trials, Crazy U is also a story about family. It turns out that the quiet boy who pretends not to be worried about college has lots to teach his fatherabout what matters in life, about trusting your instincts, about finding your own way. In launching his son into the world,Extrait INTRODUCTION COLLEGE ADMISSIONS in America is a big sprawling subject, but this is not, youll notice, a big sprawling book. Its one parents view, the process seen from beginning to end through the prism of a fathers own flesh and blood. (Watch your stepthere are lots of metaphors running loose around here.) Like many big subjects, college admissions plays itself out on a small scale. The great issues it raises, the clashing interests and massive institutions it involves, come to earth in the lives of ordinary people, clustered more often than not in families. Thats how it happened to us. It began with a trickle, which is why I didnt notice anything at first. Whos going to Elon College? I asked innocently enough, fingering the brochure that arrived in the mail one day. There was no answer, since no one in the house had ever heard of Elon College, much less expressed an interest in it. Occidental College? I called out the next day, when the mail arrived with another brochureor viewbook, as I learned to call them in the admissions world. Who in his right mind would go to an overpriced money trap like Occidental College? It was a sardonic question, as Ill explain in a moment, and it too was met with silence. On the third day there were two fat envelopes and another viewbook, also from schools I hadnt heard of, and then four the next day, and the next. Within a month, more than a hundred envelopes and viewbooks had been stuffed in the mailbox, glowing with color photos of cheerful undergraduates lounging on sunlit knolls against backdrops of shade trees and redbrick towers. The viewbooks were printed on paper so thick and voluptuous they might have been mistaken for the leaves of a rubber plantyou didnt know whether to read them or slurp them like a giraffe. And each was addressed to my sixteen-going-on-seventeen-year-old son, whose name had somehow found its way onto a mailing list of high school juniors. My boy was being solicited, as surely and shamelessly as a sailor come to port. This was something new, something unexpected. I came to see over the next many months that what had once been a fairly brief and straightforward process, in which the children of the middle and upper classes found a suitable college, filled out an application, got in, and then went happily away, returning home only now and then to celebrate holidays and borrow money, has evolved into a multiyear rite of passage, often beginning before puberty. For some of us, anyway. Its worth remembering at the outset that most American high schoolers go on to college, roughly 70 percent of them, and 80 percent of those attend schools that dont involve the difficulties encountered in these pages. Most college kids go to what admissions people call nonselective schools, and many of them begin at two-year institutions; its not too much to say that theres a seat in American higher education for anyone who wants one. Even the cost wont be prohibitive for the majority of students. More than 50 percent of us spend less than $10,000 a year on college, and a good chunk of this can usually be covered by loans and grants. For lots of high school graduates the pressing issue of higher education is finding the time off from work to take advantage of it. All Americans, by virtue of being Americans, are winners of lifes lotto, in my opinion, as citizens of the most prosperous and least class-bound country in history. But the people spoken of in this book, my family included, are luckier than most. I had a happy childhood. My own children are healthy and dont hate me, or say they dont, and chief among my wifes numberless virtues are tolerance, patience, and good humor. We live in a reasonably safe neighborhood in one of those close-in suburbs that have suddenly become desirable. I have a job, as many Americans do not at the moment, and while were far from well-to-do, the money we bring home puts us, in

my laymans reckoning, in the bottom quintile of the lower upper middle class. As a consequence we can entertain a wide choice of futures for our children. I have no right to complain, in other words. My gripes and whines, my missteps and misfortunes in trying to get my son into a highly selective college are the complaints of a man whom fate has treated kindly. I hope that readers, forgiving as always, will keep this in mind as they go along. In Ahead of the Curve, his wonderful book about his years at Harvard Business School, Philip Delves Broughton faced the same problem. How do you chronicle personal misadventures that are themselves, in the large scheme of things, the result of unbelievable luck? Only the luckiest people get to be unlucky in this way. Imagine George Clooney bursting into tears because his lingerie-model girlfriend broke the kitchen faucet in his thirty-room chalet on Lake Como: you will be excused for thinking the lucky bastard really ought to dry up and get over it. As Broughon said about his own difficulties at Harvard, these are high-class problems. So are mine, and Im grateful for them. MY LUCK IN HIGHER EDUCATION showed itself early, for I was a college student just as a great transformation got under way. I write about this larger history later, but my own entanglement with it may be worth recounting briefly here. Both my father and mother were the first in their families to graduate from college, and it was always assumed that my brothers and I would go to college too. Having learned to despise the Chicago winters as only a Chicagoan can, I hoped to get as far away from Lake Michigan as I could and still remain in the contiguous United States. I studied the map. California! My parents were obliging, so long as they could afford whatever accredited school I settled on. They had already dispatched my two brothers to the adult world and were now dropping gentle hints that I might want to get my own show on the road too. With the aid of a college guide in our public librarybut without U.S. News rankings, the massive Fiske Guide, the Internet, a single tour of colleges, or direct-mail solicitations of any kindI applied to three schools in California, another on the East Coast, and a state school in Illinois as a safety. The only school outside California that I longed for figures prominently in the pages that follow, what I will call Big State University. I had seen it years earlier on a family trip to the East Coast. It was my first exposure to the idyll of higher ed, to the brick buildings and sun-kissed lawns where students drowsed, the blue-jeaned girls making parabolas through the plazas on their bikes, the intoxicating air of postadolescence and preadulthood. I never quite got over it. The school, for its part, was less enchanted with me than I was with it, and I recall the day that the thin envelope arrived, bearing the return address of the admissions dean, as a dark, cold day. I wound up at the just-mentioned Occidental, in Los Angeles. The next four years straddled the hump of the 1970s, just the moment when the revolution of a decade before was being ratified as everyday life. The insurgents had breached the battlements and settled into the captains quarters. The renegades of 1968 became the tenure-track assistant profs of 1975 (and the department chairs of 1990). Core curriculums were jettisoned, parietal rules struck down, curfews abandoned. All-girl schools opened their doors to men and all-boy schools welcomed, and how, women; and schools that were already co-ed accelerated the integration of the sexes. Administrations empaneled student committees and endowed them with managerial powers that would have been unimaginable only five years before. Customs that we now take for grantedstudent evaluation of teachers, kids sitting on tenure committeeswere introduced and soon became standard. Some people saw these reforms as a major advance for educational democracy. Others saw it as an abdication of responsibility by adults who should have known better. Of the two sides I suspected at the time that the second had it right on the merits, even as I delighted in the indulgences offered by the first. College life has changed in many particulars since then. The students are by all accounts more career-minded, more mild-mannered, and less politically enthused than we were. Their music is better (no K.C. and the Sunshine Band). Drug use is down, and sexual promiscuityto use an anachronism that was losing favor even when I was in schoolhas been hedged in by formal rules governing sexual conduct and by the clinical oversight of health professionals. Still the general shape that schools assumed in the 1970s stubbornly remains, which is why the experience of a moss-back like me remains pertinent, for I took full advantage of the new system as it was then being born. Without a core curriculum, I pursued classes like African Literature of the 1970s, Women in Film, Our Bodies Our Selves for Men, and so on, interspersed with a few dying holdovers from the old regimesurvey courses in astronomy, Shakespeare, American literature, and other general-education offerings that, in many selective schools, have since gone the way of the snail darter. The greater part of my energies were expended in earthier pursuits. I explored the great city of Los Angeles, joined a rock-and-roll band, became a regular at a Zen temple, attended concerts without number, swooned through doomed romances, and pursued a dozen other forms of fun that had nothing to do with traditional educationand all of which, more to the point, could have been pursued at a much lower cost if I hadnt

pretended to be a student. This casual and scattershot approach to the privilege of a higher educationan approach that was widely shared among the non-poor of my generationintersected with reality only when it came time to graduate. While wed been busy doing our part, diligently drinking beer and chasing skirts, something strange had happened to the general economy. My classmates and I emerged from school into a labor market limp from exhaustion, stupefied from the manhandling of Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter. The L.A. Times, in physical size, had always been a big newspaper, plump with advertising, but by the late seventies even it had slimmed down from the lack of Help Wanted ads. Each sunny morning it landed with a little airy plop on the doorstep of our student housing, from which one of my roommates or I would retrieve it. We would carry it to the breakfast table, sweep aside the crumpled cans of Falstaff, and turn with mounting dread to the classifieds. This was in the spring. We were seniors about to be loosed upon the world, and none of us had the prospect of a job. As we scanned the job listings, our dread was two-pronged: first, that we might never find a way to earn a living; and second, that we might find a job. As it turned out, only the first fear was realistic. We were majors in the most liberal of the liberal arts: one in music, another in art history, a third in the visual arts (a fancy word for movies), and one in something called the philosophy of religion. And morning after morning the Times classifieds failed to yield up even one suitable advertisement. A minimally acceptable listing would have read: PHILOSOPHY SPECIALISTpref. w/expertise in epistemological implications of Anselms ontological proofs and the lyrics of Howlin Wolf. Hours 15 p.m. Generous sal./benefits. No refs. nec. No exp. nec. Pool privileges. Employer assumes payment of all student loans. BYO bong. Applicant does not have to wear shoes. Not finding this, we grew desperateso desperate, sometimes, that we would get all duded up in T-shirts and shorts and visit our colleges job placement officer. As I remember her, she was a cheerful woman, which was perfectly understandable: as a career counselor at a liberal arts college in 1978, she had a steady paycheck and nothing to do. At my third or fourth appearance she roused herself long enough to subject me to a battery of employment tests, of the kind that are no longer in fashion. For two hours, alone in a cubicle, I typed, I spelled, I placed words in alphabetical order, I analyzed charts and graphs. When I was done she called me into her office. Nowadays, under similar circumstances, a career counselor would take a more positive, therapeutic approach. She might tell the student how trainable he was, and how marvelously transferable his skills were. But in the 1970s no one was in a pitying mood. You must understand, my career counselor said, glancing through the papers, that you have no marketable skills whatsoever. So I became a journalist. LUCK AGAIN. I MENTION MY own experience because it nicely encapsulates a larger confusion I have encountered in my recent efforts to wedge my son into college. While expending vast amounts of money and energy on higher educationboth selling it and buying itwe seem not to be sure what its for. I hate to generalize (actually, I love to generalize) but I think that Americans, as a practical people, are most excited about getting things, a job or a skill or a Wendys coupon, that can in turn be used to get us other things, a cheeseburger or paycheck, which, in sufficient quantities, can get us just about anything. Whatever it is were after, we want to make it pay. As a rule we dont get terribly excited about the ineffable. Matthew Arnold, the nineteenth-century essayist, thought up a lovely phrase in trying to describe what people should do when they go to college: learning to like what right reason ordains, and to follow her authority. Arnold also coined the phrase the best that has been thought and said, the study of which was supposed to be the substance of a liberal education. That was his idea anyway. Neither of these pretty phrases applies to what Americans expect from higher education, except in the smallest percentage of cases. We suffer from a built-in confusion of means and ends. We want college (the means) to produce results (the ends) that it wasnt built for. With its ample time for leisure, its relatively light workload, its often leafy setting, its discursive methods of instruction, its vast, comprehensive libraries, college was designed for contemplation, for the slow, steady nurturing of the spirit. It wasnt designed to do what most Americans want it to do: set their kids up to get a good job. If the end we seek is the acquisition of marketable skills, there are much speedier means of doing this than a four-year education in the liberal arts. What were left with instead is an entity that isnt the one thing or the other, neither a preparation for productive employment nor an Arnoldian idyll, though it combines elements of both: its in part an apprenticeship, in part an immersion in the finer things; part summer camp, part group therapy, part booze cruise. IM GETTING AHEAD OF MYSELF. It may be that, not really knowing why we want college for our children, we want it even more. But the sources of my anxiety were more immediate. Readers will notice, perhaps, that I sometimes appear to dwell on the issue of cost. It was much on my mind, as it is on the minds of most parents in our situation; and the cost keeps going up. Another cause for concern was the looming presence of the SuperKids. I kept reading about these

SuperKids. They figured as protagonists in the innumerable articles that appeared in newspapers and magazines about the craziness of college admissions. A typical SuperKid receives a perfect 2400 on their SATs, earns a 4.3 grade-point average, stars as captain of the football team or the volleyball team, spends summers building handicap ramps in Honduras and weekends curing cancer in the research labs of the local hospital. Some of us spawn SuperKids, others merely feel surrounded by themand worry about what they might do to our chances of getting our own AverageKids into a good school. On top of this, I had learned early on that 2009 would be a historic year. A larger number of American kids would be applying to colleges than ever beforethree million in all. No one had seen a market so competitive, nor would we again. In 2010 the number declined slightly, and will decline again the year after that, until it stabilizes through the next decade. Even so it will remain at a level high enough to have left previous generations agog, and guaranteeing that our own children will also have the opportunity to obsess about college on behalf of children yet unborn. A FEW ITEMS OF HOUSEKEEPING: the scheme of the book is chronological, beginning with the onset of the craziness in my sons junior year of high school and concluding eighteen months later when he enrolled at college. (Spoiler alert: he got in!) Ive compressed the time line in a few places and telescoped it in others, for narrative coherence and to make it easier on me as the storyteller. All the quotes are real, although youll see, as I mentioned, that I refer to one school as Big State UniversityBSU, for reasons that I hope will become clearand to the little city it occupies as Collegetown. I have assigned new names to two friends and have left others unidentified; when they became my friends, long ago in most cases, I forgot to ask them to sign the release that would later let me broadcast our most intimate conversations to the reading public without getting sued. And there is indeed intimacy here. It was unavoidable. The subject entangles our deepest yearnings, our vanities, our social ambitions and class insecurities, and most profoundly our love and hopes for our children, with the largest questions of democracy, of equality, fairness, opportunity, the social good, even the nature of happiness. If the book seems to veer recklessly between the two poles, between matters of the heart and the big booming issues of culture and politicswell, thats one reason it seemed worth writing. The college mania wont subside anytime soon. Too many people, too many institutions and businesses, have an interest, financial and ideological, in keeping it going. This was one of my many discoveries. Though not at all original to me, I took to dropping these mini-revelations at dinner parties, cocktail parties, school sporting events, my office, wherever parents with high school kids gathered. Facing the same trackless future my wife and I did, they scooped up the nuggets like squirrels scurrying for acorns before winter set in, bringing them home to build cozy little nests of worry. I began getting a rep as an obsessive and, less plausibly, as an expert. Even friends without kids raised the subject of college admissions with me, assuming Id be interested in whatever news they had. They were always right. And so it happened when an editor friend of mine in New York called me one day out of the blue. Hed read an article in a magazine about a woman I could hire to take all my college worries upon herself and resolve them without fuss. I thought she sounded like a yuppie version of the sin eaters who once served the villages of Ye Olde Scotland. But it will cost you, he said. A lot. 2011 Andrew FergusonRevue de presseA laugh-until-your-ribs-squeak book. George WillCompulsively readable, unusually vivid . . . The most darkly humorous aspect of this often hilarious book is its depiction of an admissions process that corrupts everything it touches. Daniel Akst, The Wall Street JournalIn Crazy U, Ferguson is at his dazzling best, using humor and narrative as portals to very serious subjects. The book is both a hilarious chronicle of his 18-month ordeal helping his not-always-cooperative son apply to college and a devastating expos of the buying and selling of higher education in America. Christina Hoff Summers, National