

## welcome to andyville

*Food, books, shows, writing, travel and other stuff that life is made of.*

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## Is the United World Colleges worth it?

Posted on [14 April 2019](#) by [andyq](#)

A friend from university wrote and said: “My daughter just got into UWC. Please tell me that UWC is worth it.”

So, having attended Pearson College from 1986 to 1988, I can answer the question, at least from my perspective, though I won't answer the question: is the United World College movement worth the resources invested in it versus what it brings to the world (which is a question that graduates often ask themselves)?

I'll simply answer: was it worth it for me?

Dear M.

Was the United World Colleges worth it for me? In high school, I felt out of place. I was too smart and too political. I was not athletic enough nor socially comfortable. I was bored in most of my classes, taught by teachers who seemed pretty bored themselves.



When I arrived at Pearson College, what was perhaps the most amazing thing for me was that there many people, from around the world, smart, interesting and talented, and they seemed interested in me simply because of my character, because of myself. I didn't have to prove myself or try to fit in. I was liked.

We lived together and did activities and learned and sang together and climbed rocks and stayed up far too late in the night, and I felt accepted in a way that gave me an incredible confidence

in myself, at such a young age. I felt like I could do anything and I could be true to myself from then on. I marvel at how confident I was.

Without a UWC, I think I would have taken another opportunity, perhaps a Rotary scholarship, and perhaps I would have ended up studying away from my home city and even working internationally, as I have done. But I just can't imagine I would have done so with as much confidence as I did, and achieved as much.

Academically, the teachers were the best they could be, and surrounded by people who were at my academic level or higher, I learned and loved learning far more than I would have been doing my last year at my high school. And then when entering university, I found I had been far better-prepared than my peers.

Socially, I made lifelong friends. I learned much about myself. I grew in ways I don't think would have been otherwise possible.

Now, the UWCs aren't for everyone, and a few students don't have great experiences. I've heard lately that sometimes the academic pressure can be high, and students can spend too much time studying and worrying about getting into prestigious universities. I heard of some who had to adjust from being the best and brightest in their schools to being one of many. A few people, for whatever reasons, might not fit in. And of course, students won't be immune from life: a bad (or good) relationship that might take over their lives from regular UWC life, an unlucky incident of some sort, mental health issues. Introverts may find it exhausting to be living with roommates and to be around so many people ALL THE TIME.

But the selection committees do try to select kids with resilience as well as talent, so I hope and expect your daughter to be fine... and wish her all the best ... and hope that you share this with her. I used to be shy to talk about my experience at UWC too much, because I didn't want to make it seem like we were some exclusive club, or make others feel bad who didn't attend, and I thought that to have one experience that defines you might sound limiting. But looking back, it *was* my most important formative experience, one that I will always be grateful for, and that really did make me into the person I am today.

In the meantime, as a UWC parent, you will from this time forward have a steady stream of houseguests from around the world, possibly for the rest of your lives! Enjoy.