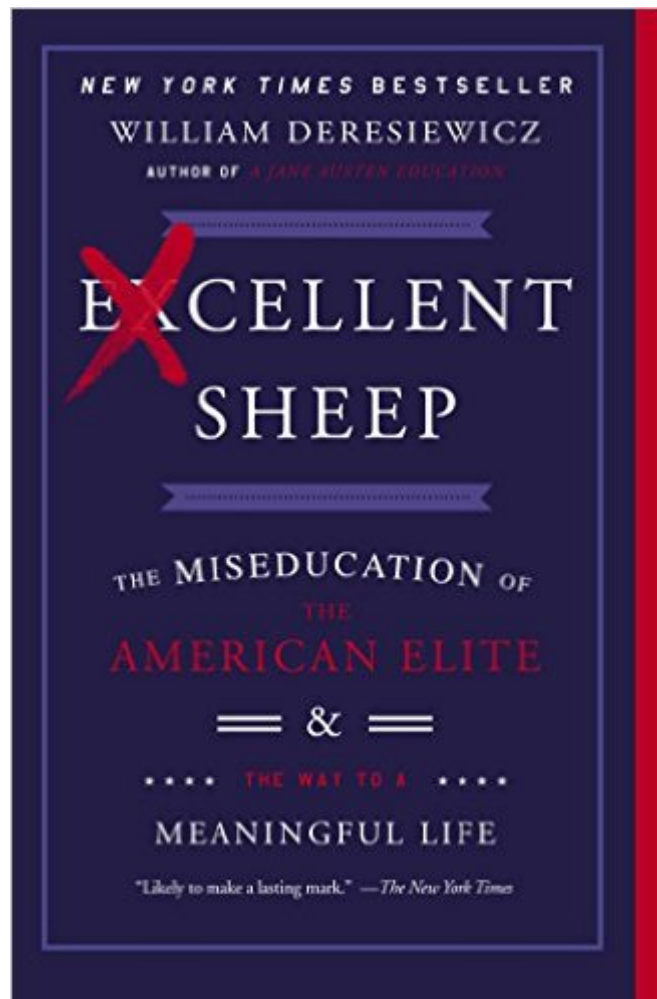


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# Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation Of The American Elite And The Way To A Meaningful Life



## Synopsis

A groundbreaking manifesto about what our nation's top schools should be but aren't providing: The ex-Yale professor effectively skewers elite colleges, their brainy but soulless students (those "sheep"), pushy parents, and admissions mayhem. As a professor at Yale, William Deresiewicz saw something that troubled him deeply. His students, some of the nation's brightest minds, were adrift when it came to the big questions: how to think critically and creatively and how to find a sense of purpose. Now he argues that elite colleges are turning out conformists without a compass. *Excellent Sheep* takes a sharp look at the high-pressure conveyor belt that begins with parents and counselors who demand perfect grades and culminates in the skewed applications Deresiewicz saw firsthand as a member of Yale's admissions committee. As schools shift focus from the humanities to "practical" subjects like economics, students are losing the ability to think independently. It is essential, says Deresiewicz, that college be a time for self-discovery, when students can establish their own values and measures of success in order to forge their own paths. He features quotes from real students and graduates he has corresponded with over the years, candidly exposing where the system is broken and offering clear solutions on how to fix it. *Excellent Sheep* is likely to make a lasting mark. He takes aim at just about the entirety of upper-middle-class life in America. Mr. Deresiewicz's book is packed full of what he wants more of in American life: passionate weirdness. (The New York Times).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book piqued my interest because my son just graduated high school and is entering college. His classmates range from the "Super People" (author William Deresiewicz's phrase for the highest achievers) who are on their way to elite universities, to the more typical students who are starting their higher educations at community colleges. In each book review I try to include a few well-written sentences that concisely illustrate an author's point of view. This book is so well written that I could have chosen just about every sentence. Here are some of the best:=====The compulsive overachievement of today's elite college students-- the sense that they need to keep running as fast as they can-- is not the only thing that keeps them from forming the deeper relationships that might relieve their anguish. Isolated from their peers, these kids are also cut off from themselves. The endless hoop-jumping... that got them into an elite college in the first place--the clubs, bands, projects, teams, APs, SATs, evenings, weekends, summers, coaches, tutors, leadership, service -- left them no time to figure out what they want out of life. Too many students, perhaps after a year or two spent using college as a treadmill to nowhere, wake up in crisis, not knowing why they have worked so hard. "I hate all my activities, I hate all my classes, I hated everything I did in high school, expect to hate my job, and this is just how it's going to be for the rest of my life." The result is what we might refer to as credentialism. The purpose of life becomes the accumulation of gold stars.

When I saw William Deresiewicz's New Republic piece, "Don't Send Your Kids to the Ivy League," I jumped at the opportunity to read it. As a partial Ivy League apostate myself, the thought of somebody -- a former Ivy League professor at that! -- calling out the cultural problems within these institutions excited me. The piece made waves, with students and professors alike responding, and getting people excited for Deresiewicz's book, *Excellent Sheep*. It worked. I bought his book and worked my way through it, hoping for an intricate analysis of a serious cultural issue and a nuanced solution. While at an Ivy League university -- the University of Pennsylvania, in my case -- I see many of the issues that Deresiewicz identifies in his New Republic piece and in interviews on the book. Students who came to school wanting to change the world and make it their own place, to be in the driver's seat of their lives, quickly fell into an assembly-line-like mold. They may have entered school wanting to start a business and offer a new service, or to write a book, or to become a professional speaker, but by their second or third years, many had their eyes set on the crown jewels of the Ivy League experience -- On Campus Recruiting (OCR). They designed their resumes and schedules around exactly what recruiters from Goldman Sachs or Morgan Stanley would want and slowly extirpated the things they had passions for coming in to school. They became barely identifiable with their starry-eyed freshman selves. It wasn't infuriating as much as it was sad. The

problem is not necessarily that students want to go work on Wall Street after their time at school -- if that is truly your dream and what you believe will make you come alive, then by all means, please go pursue that!

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