BS"D

What a Parent Wants for Their Child.

I have spoken to many, many people, and I am a parent myself, and I have found that there is a top six list of things that parents really want for their children.
I want my child to

- be happy.
- be healthy.
- be financially stable.
- live a meaningful life, contributing to society.
- be kind (and other good character traits).
- have a good marriage and family.

This is certainly a great list. Attaining these things would constitute living an extraordinary life, one that could truly be considered successful and fulfilling.
Yet, when we look around us it's rather disheartening to see that very few people seem to be attaining these things. Consistent, authentic happiness, a feeling of deep meaning and purpose, healthy self respect, emotionally intimate marriages, vitality, resilience - these things just don't seem to be the norm for most people.
One reason is that people rarely stop to consider what it would actually take to experience these high ideals. In order to attain these things, there are a few key factors we need.

- **The knowledge and wisdom in order to achieve them**
  ie We really need to understand - What creates real happiness? How do we work on improving our character traits? What does it take to create a good marriage and be a good parent? How much money do I really need to optimise my experience of life (not necessarily the more the better)? How do we get healthy self respect? How do you define 'success' and 'meaning' in life?
- **The tools we need to integrate and implement the knowledge.**
  For example mindfulness and meditation tools, goal setting tools, self discipline, life skill tools, financial planning tools, time management tools.
- **The right environment and support in order to live according to our values.**
  What is our peer group investing their time, money, emotion, thought in? What are the values of the society around us? Who are our mentors, who do we look up to?
- **The commitment to taking the time to actually work on these things.**

Now, given this is the case, let's consider this.
What is a more conducive environment for achieving these things; Yeshivah or secular college? In which environment is there more focus on living with healthy values? Which institution is consciously working on personal growth, developing kindness and gratitude, building meaningful relationships, connecting spiritually?
Where will you find more drug and alcohol use? More partying and misuse of sexuality? More depression, anxiety, suicide attempts? More addiction to social media and netflix? Lower sense of self? Which institution is producing more well thought out, well adjusted individuals living with meaning, good values and healthy families?
Or, more directly, try this. Ask your son these questions (and notice for yourself)….

a) Are you smoking more or less weed / drinking more or less alcohol than you were before you arrived in yeshivah/college?
b) Are you spending more or less time on your phone than you were before you arrived in yeshivah/college?

c) Are you watching more or less pornography and misusing sex more or less than you did before you arrived in yeshivah/college?
d) Are you happier than you were before you arrived in yeshivah/college?
e) Are you more clear on your values and goals than you were before you arrived in yeshivah/college?
f) Are you kinder and more thoughtful than you were before you arrived in yeshivah/college?
g) Do you have a healthier sense of self than you had before you arrived in yeshivah/college?
h) Are you physically more or less healthy than you were before you arrived in yeshivah/college?

I think you’ll see the answers clearly speak for themselves.
The Western world's consumerist obsession with material wealth and short term intense physical pleasure is creating one type of lifestyle. The American Dream. When someone says “My son is very successful” it invariably means that he makes a lot of money. However, unfortunately this often leads to a compromise in the other areas. Rather than stress free, healthy people with close families, these values often lead to stress and anxiety, lack of sense of self and satisfaction in life as we compare ourselves to others, and weakened families units as kids are abandoned for the workplace and the phone distracts the parent from spending real time with the kid. We chase these things hoping they will bring us happiness and satisfaction, however this is rarely the case, even if we attain them.
In Yeshivah, we are driven by our values - self improvement, charity and kindness towards others, spirituality, meditation and prayer, living joyfully and consciously, positively impacting the world, becoming the kindest, most well thought out intelligent, non-judgmental, loving, joyful generous person we can possibly be and being financially stable and able to support our family. It’s a really positive and healthy environment to create well adjusted people who are flourishing and happy. The guys love and support each other in their journey towards meaningful goals. Secular college is in general an unhealthy environment driven by consumerism and physical and ego pleasure seeking. It’s incredibly difficult to build a healthy sense of self when you are constantly being judged on your body, clothes, car, how much you can drink, how much money you have and how many people you’ve slept with.

So how about success in terms of finances? This is the best part! Of course, we have a strong value for taking responsibility for the financial well being of our families. Without financial stability it is hard to be happy and have a good marriage and peace of mind and give your kids what they need. It is a duty and a mitzvah to take care of our family. What is the most empowering part of this is that kids who have been to yeshiva are more mature and well thought out than most kids and therefore do much better in college socially and academically and end up with better jobs. Another factor is that seeing as once we have higher, less materialistic aspirations, we need a lot less money to feel happy, fulfilled and successful in life. We are not prepared to compromise on happiness, spirituality and family structure to grab more money than we need. This is not just spiritual, it’s pragmatic seeing as, as noted before, those things rarely lead to happiness, meaning and personal growth anyway.

So if we really want these six wonderful things for our kids, we should invest in guiding them to the right environment to actualise them.
After that, once they have a strong sense of self and clarity of values, they can (and must) go to college, to the workplace, to marriage, assured that they have the knowledge, tools and confidence to stand up to all the trials and negative influences that may be found there.