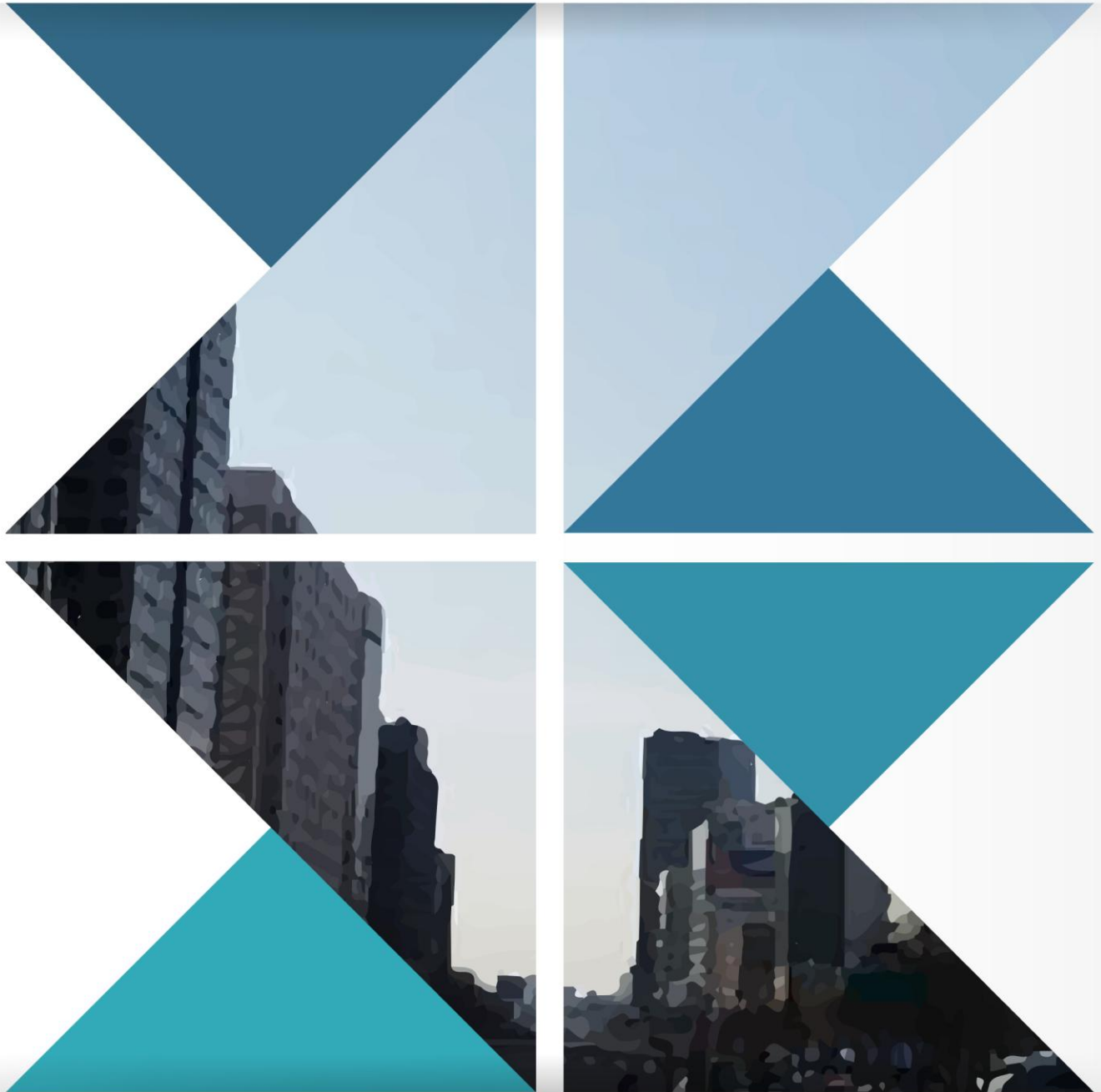


Contribution:



# Foundations of Academic Success: Words of Wisdom

Thomas Priester



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*Foundations of Academic  
Success: Words of Wisdom*

*Thomas Priester*

*Open SUNY Textbooks*



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## *About the Book*

*Foundations of Academic Success: Words of Wisdom (FAS: WoW)* introduces you to the various aspects of student and academic life on campus and prepares you to thrive as a successful college student (since there is a difference between a college student and a successful college student). Each section of *FAS: WoW* is framed by self-authored, true-to-life short stories from actual State University of New York (SUNY) students, employees, and alumni. The advice they share includes a variety of techniques to help you cope with the demands of college. The lessons learned are meant to enlarge your awareness of self with respect to your academic and personal goals and assist you to gain the necessary skills to succeed in college.



## *About the Author*

A hope-inspired educator dedicated to helping others interact with the future, Thomas C. Priester holds a Doctor of Education degree in Executive Leadership from St. John Fisher College, a Master of Science degree in Student Personnel Administration from SUNY Buffalo State, and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Secondary English Education from Fredonia (where he is also a member of the Alumni Board of Directors). Having worked previously in the areas of academic success, student life, student leadership development, orientation, academic advising, and residence life, Dr. Priester currently serves as the Director of Transitional Studies/ Assistant Professor at SUNY Genesee Community College in Batavia, NY where he is also an advisor to the campus chapter of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, the chairperson of both the Academic Assessment and the Transitional Studies Committees, and a member of both the Institutional Effectiveness and the Academic Senate Curriculum Committees. Additionally, Dr. Priester is a faculty member in the Higher Education Student Affairs Administration graduate program at SUNY Buffalo State in Buffalo, NY, has taught conversational English at Fatec Americana in Americana, São Paulo, Brazil, and has also taught Academic Success at the Attica Correctional Facility in Attica, NY. Dr. Priester has served as a contributing chapter author for the books: *Assessing Student Learning in the Community and Two-Year College* (Stylus, 2013) and *Examining the Impact of Community Colleges on the Global Workforce* (IGI Global, 2015) and has most recently published the open access textbook: *Foundations of Academic Success: Words of Wisdom* (Open SUNY Textbooks, 2015).





## *Reviewer's Notes*

*Foundations of Academic Success* is an engaging, informational, and succinct read that connects the reader to personal essays about succeeding in college. The text allows the reader to see different perspectives of the shared experience of navigating higher education. As an adjunct lecturer teaching a course entitled “Learning to Learn,” I see the advice and life lessons discussed as both helpful and informative to many types of students. I believe that this book has a universal appeal for any classroom that is discussing the college life cycle, and would advocate using this text with students who seek out campus services, such as Career Services, Study Abroad, and Academic Advising. I also see this text applicable in the education of student leaders, peer mentors, and peer advocates at the undergraduate and graduate levels. This text goes beyond traditional Student Affairs and Student Development theories to connect the reader with real, honest, and understandable life lessons.

*About the Reviewer: Sherill Anderson is currently the Second-year Experience Coordinator for The College at Brockport. Ms. Anderson attended Alfred University, graduating in 2006 with her Bachelors of Arts in Sociology. She completed her Master of Education degree in Counseling, with a concentration in College Student Development, as well as a certificate of advanced study, in 2008; also from Alfred University. She began her doctoral studies in May of 2013 with St. John Fisher College in the Ed.D program in Executive Leadership. Ms. Anderson pursued her research exploring the employer observations of both negative and positive social behavioral characteristics that impact employer hiring decisions regarding young adults diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder.*



## *About Open SUNY Textbooks*

Open SUNY Textbooks is an open access textbook publishing initiative established by State University of New York libraries and supported by SUNY Innovative Instruction Technology Grants. This initiative publishes high-quality, cost-effective course resources by engaging faculty as authors and peer-reviewers, and libraries as publishing service and infrastructure.

The pilot launched in 2012, providing an editorial framework and service to authors, students and faculty, and establishing a community of practice among libraries.

Participating libraries in the 2012-2013 pilot include SUNY Geneseo, College at Brockport, College of Environmental Science and Forestry, SUNY Fredonia, Upstate Medical University, and University at Buffalo, with support from other SUNY libraries and SUNY Press. The 2013-2014 pilot will add more titles in 2015. More information can be found at <http://textbooks.opensuny.org>.



## *Acknowledgments*

First, I'd like to acknowledge the students enrolled in my FYE100 course at SUNY Genesee Community College during the during the 2014–2015 academic school year. Your very honest and candid feedback truly helped to revolutionize academic success for generations of college students to come.

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## Preface

“Success doesn’t come to you...you go to it.” This quote by Dr. Marva Collins sets the stage for the journey you are about to take. Your success, however you choose to define it, is waiting for you, and *Foundations of Academic Success: Words of Wisdom (FAS: WoW)* is your guide to your success. Some may believe that success looks like a straight and narrow line that connects the dots between where you are and where you are going, but the truth is that success looks more like a hot mess of twists and turns, curves and bumps, and hurdles and alternate pathways.

Putting this textbook together was challenging because there is so much to tell you as you embark on your college journey. I have worked with college students on academic success at a number of college campuses, and have hunted for the *most effective* and *most affordable* college student academic success textbook but could never find everything I wanted to teach in one book. So, I figured the answer was to write my own textbook!

Like any good research project, the outcome was not exactly what I expected. In addition to a host of true-to-life stories written by real people who have successfully navigated the journey through college, the first draft of the textbook included everything (and more) that the other similarly themed textbooks about college student academic success do. The chapters were framed by a slew of “How To” facts according to me (such as “how to efficiently take notes during a lecture and how to effectively use your preferred learning style to help you learn better”) and research-based figures according to researchers in the field of college student academic success, such as rules like “For every hour in class, successful college-level work requires about two hours of out-of-class work: reading, writing, research, labs, discussion, field work, etc.” or “A 15-credit course load is about equivalent to working a full-time job.”

Once the first draft was finished, I decided to test-drive my new textbook with the students in my First Year Experience class to see what they thought. I figured, who better to give me feedback on the textbook than actual students who would use the textbook in class, right? I gave the first draft of the textbook (facts and figures and all) to my students to read, review, and reflect upon. It turned out that the pieces that my students learned the most from were the true-to-life stories. They either didn’t read or barely glanced over the facts and figures, but provided very positive feedback (and even remembered) the words of wisdom from real people who have successfully navigated the journey through college.

I guess it makes sense; students love when real-life stories are infused into the activities and lessons. Plus, as a number of students told me, the facts and figures on topics such as note-taking and how many hours to study per week can be found by searching online and can vary per person. What really mattered to students were the real-life words of wisdom that you can’t find online. Thus, *Foundations of Academic Success: Words of Wisdom (FAS: WoW)* as I lovingly call it) emerged.

I share this story because my intended outcome (to be the author of the world’s best open access college student academic success textbook) was not exactly what I expected it to be. The same is true of your journey through college, and you’ll read more about that in the stories right here in *FAS: WoW*. You’ll find that this is not your typical college textbook full of concrete facts and figures, nor does it tell you how to succeed. No textbook can truly do that for you—success is defined differently for everyone. The stories in *FAS: WoW* are relevant, relational, and reflective. The authors welcome you into their lives and offer ideas that ignite helpful discussions that will help succeed.



*FAS: WoW* introduces you to the various aspects of student and academic life on campus and prepares you to thrive as a *successful* college student (since there is a difference between a college student and a *successful* college student). Each section of *FAS: WoW* is framed by self-authored, true-to-life short stories from actual State University of New York (SUNY) students, employees, and alumni. You may even know some of the authors! The advice they share includes a variety of techniques to help you cope with the demands of college. The lessons learned are meant to enlarge your awareness of self with respect to your academic and personal goals and assist you to gain the necessary skills to succeed in college.

In the text, the authors tell stories about their own academic, personal, and life-career successes. When reading *FAS: WoW*, consider the following guiding questions:

- How do you demonstrate college readiness through the use of effective study skills and campus resources?
- How do you apply basic technological and information management skills for academic and lifelong career development?
- How do you demonstrate the use of critical and creative thinking skills to solve problems and draw conclusions?
- How do you demonstrate basic awareness of self in connection with academic and personal goals?
- How do you identify and demonstrate knowledge of the implications of choices related to wellness?
- How do you demonstrate basic knowledge of cultural diversity?

After you read each story, take the time to reflect on the lessons learned from your reading and answer the guiding questions as they will help you to connect the dots between being a college student and being a *successful* college student. Note your areas of strength and your areas of weakness, and develop a plan to turn your weaknesses into strengths.

I could go on and on (and on) about college student academic success, but what fun is the journey for you if I tell you everything now? You need to learn some stuff on your own, right? So, I will leave you to read and enjoy *FAS: WoW* with a list of tips that I share with college students as they embark on their journey to academic success:

- *Early is on time, on time is late, and late is unacceptable!*
- Get the book(s) and *read* the book(s).
- Take notes in class and when reading for class.
- Know your professors (email, office location, office hours, etc.) and be familiar with what is in the course syllabus.
- Put your phone away in class.
- Emails need a salutation, a body, and a close.
- Don't write the way you might text—using abbreviations and clipped sentences.
- Never academically advise yourself!
- Apply for scholarships...*all of them!*
- Speak it into existence and keep your eyes on the prize.

Enjoy the ride! Cheers,

TOM  
Dr. Thomas C. Priester, tcpriester@genesee.edu



## *Part One: Your Solid Foundation*



# The Student Experience

Kristen Mruk

When thinking about college, what comes to mind? Perhaps stereotypical images or misconceptions of college life, a friend or sibling's story, or scenes from popular movies?



"The Student Experience" by Kristen Mruk

In popular culture, some movies depict college life as a party atmosphere in which students binge drink and waste their parents' money to have a good time without consequence. Films including *National Lampoon's Animal House* and *Van Wilder* as well as *Accepted*, to name a few, portray the student experience as a blatant disregard for education coupled with excessive drunken buffoonery. However, my *party* experience illustrates a side to college that is not generally in the limelight.

During my first weeks in college, I felt disconnected from the campus and feared that I would not make friends or find my niche. I was commuting from my family's home and wanted to do more on campus than just go to and from class. I was enrolled in a First-Year Experience (FYE) course that was intended to provide a framework for a successful undergraduate career and beyond. In the class, we learned about student support services on campus (tutoring, personal wellness, academic advisement, etc.) as well as personal success skills (time and financial management, values exploration, etc.).

Being a new student, and a commuter, I was overwhelmed by the amount of new information, new territory, campus culture, and unfamiliar processes. I asked my FYE instructor after class one day if there was something I could do to feel more connected to campus. She opened my eyes to a side of college that I was missing—this was my invitation to the *party*.

My FYE instructor promptly led me to her office, introduced me to the staff, and explained the variety of involvement opportunities available through her office. I was amazed that there was so much to do on campus! Because of that meeting, I decided to apply for a job in the Student Union working at the information desk. This position was a catalyst for all of the additional *parties* I would be invited to throughout my time as an undergraduate student. With so many possibilities, I had to be diligent in prioritizing my time and energy.

### *What My Friends Think I Do*

Friends knew me to be much like the girl in the meme above. I was juggling extracurricular activities and two jobs all while maintaining a full course load. I had to be proactive and diligent to coordinate activities and assignments and make sure I had the time to do it all. Finding a system was a trial and error process, but ultimately I found a method that worked for me. I was an undergraduate student when apps didn't exist and Facebook was just becoming popular, so my organizational system included a planner, a pen, and a lot of highlighters. Whatever that organizational system looks like for you does not matter as long as you use it.

There are a variety of organizational methods and tools you can use to stay on track with all aspects of your life as a student. Some of those are featured in the State University of New York (SUNY) blog: <http://blog.suny.edu/tag/apps>

### *What My Parents Think I Do*

It may be difficult to discuss your studies and educational experience with a parent or someone that has a significant interest in your academic achievement. This was the case for me; I was the first kid in my house to enroll in college, and my parents were under the impression that grades would be sent home like they were in high school. During the New Student Orientation program, my Mom learned about FERPA (Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act) and what that meant for my grades. "FERPA gives parents certain rights with respect to their children's education records. These rights transfer to the student when he or she reaches the age of 18 or attends a school beyond the high school level." In essence, parents cannot access grades or other restricted academic information unless you provide it to them (<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html?src=ft>).

I was fortunate enough to have my parents' financial support toward tuition, so they felt entitled to reviewing my grades at the end of each semester. I did not want to give them direct access to my grade report by filing a FERPA waiver, so after much deliberation, I agreed to share my grades once released at the semester's end. If their standards were not met, there would have to be a conversation about repercussions.

In the fall of my sophomore year I took my first online course—Introduction to Computers and Statistics. All of the lectures and assignments were available online at anytime and exams were administered in a computer lab on campus. I thought having the ability to view lectures on my own time would be more conducive to my schedule as I was becoming more involved on campus. For the first few weeks of classes I watched the lectures regularly and did the assignments on time. Slowly but surely I found myself prioritizing my time differently, ultimately putting my online class on the back burner, because (I told myself) the work could be done anytime! By the end of the semester I realized that I was going to fail the class. No amount of extra credit, crying, or pleading could save my grade; I had earned an F.

Seeing a failing grade on my transcript taught me two valuable lessons. First, I discovered that I needed the routine and accountability of an in-person class to ensure my participation in the material. Second, I was responsible for the grades I received. I probably could have come up with a million excuses for why I didn't watch the lectures or do the assignments, but the reality was I

just didn't do it. I did not seek my professor's help during their office hours when I started to fall behind, I did not go to the tutoring center on campus to get extra help, and I did not reach out to my classmates to form study groups.

Although the F that I received will never disappear from my transcript, it is an important reminder of the gruesome conversation I had with my parents and the feeling of failure in the pit of my stomach. Needless to say, that was the only online course I took during my collegiate career, but it was absolutely worth the lessons learned.

### *What My Professors Hope I Do*

Professors do care about how you are doing in their class; they genuinely want you to succeed, but they will give you the grade you earn. There are people and resources on campus for you to utilize so you can earn the grade you want.

Your professors are one of those resources, and are perhaps the most important. Go see them during office hours, ask them questions about the material and get extra help if you need it. The caveat here is that you cannot wait until the last week of the semester to visit your professors to get help. Tears and pleading will not help you at the eleventh hour.

Another resource to utilize can be found in the campus learning center. I frequented my campus' writing center for assistance with papers and research projects. Initially, I was scared to be critiqued, thinking my work would be perceived as inadequate. The first time I took a paper there, I recall standing outside the door for about ten minutes thinking of an excuse not to go in. Thankfully I saw a classmate walk in and I followed suit. The experience was less dramatic than I imagined it to be; no one ripped my paper to shreds and told me that I would never graduate. Instead I sat with an upper-class student who coached me through some pointers and suggestions for improvement. Thanks to that first visit, I received an A- on the paper!

### *What I Would Like to Do*

I thought I knew exactly what I wanted to do when I started college, but that changed three times by the time I graduated. Initially I started as an International Business major but ended up receiving a degree in Communication and continued on to graduate school. My greatest advice to you is to embrace feelings of uncertainty (if you have them) with regard to your academic, career, or life goals. Stop into the Career Services office on your campus to identify what it is that you really want to do when you graduate or to confirm your affinity to a career path. Make an appointment to see a counselor if you need to vent or get a new perspective. Do an internship in your field; this can give you a first-hand impression of what your life might look like in that role.

When I chose International Business, I did not do so as an informed student. I enjoyed and excelled in my business courses in high school and I had hopes of traveling the world, so International Business seemed to fit the bill. Little did I know, the major required a lot of accounting and economics which, as it turned out, were not my forte. Thinking this is what I wanted, I wasted time pursuing a major I didn't enjoy and academic courses I struggled through.

So I took a different approach. I began speaking to the professionals around me that had jobs that appealed to me: Student Unions/Activities, Leadership, Orientation, Alumni, etc. I found out I could have a similar career, and I would enjoy the required studies along the way. Making that discovery provided direction and purpose in my major and extracurricular activities. I felt like everything was falling into place.



### *What I Actually Do*

I would like to pause for a moment and ask you to consider why you are in college? Why did you choose your institution? Have you declared a major yet? Why or why not? What are your plans post-graduation? By frequently reflecting in this way, you can assess whether or not your behaviors, affiliations, and activities align with your goals.

What you actually do with your student experience is completely up to you. You are the only person who can dictate your collegiate fate. Remind yourself of the reasons why you are in college and make sure your time is spent on achieving your goals. There are resources and people on your campus available to help you. You have the control—use it wisely.

# *Practice, Practice, Practice*

*Dr. Kristine Duffy*

Life in college will be like no other time in your life—I can guarantee you that! This is your time to explore who you are, who you want to become, and how you wish to play a part in this world. Don't squander this unique time in your life. I hope to share some thoughts that might help you avoid regrets when reflecting on your college years.

I want to be clear—there are many paths through college and we know that no one path is right for all. You may be starting at a community college, taking courses part-time, starting college again after an unsuccessful start, or returning to education after many years away, but no matter who you are or what path you've chosen, make the most of it.

I took the fairly traditional path. I graduated from high school and went directly to college (which was three hours away from home). Because I wasn't really sure what else I should do, I chose to be a business major by default. My parents thought it was a good route to take and would lead me to a *good job* (mainly to ensure I made some money and didn't live with them forever).

There are three things I learned quickly in college:

1. I had lived a very nice life, but in a very homogeneous environment.
2. There were people different from me.
3. Although I was a decent student, I had a ways to go to be a good student!

Learning to appreciate what you have is just as important as earning As on exams and papers. I share this because part of college is preparing for life, not just a job. Ask yourself some questions:

- What's important to me and why?
- What do you know about other people's lives, beliefs, and passions?
- Are you confident in your abilities to study, listen and learn, take notes, and be a learner?

## *What's Important to Me and Why?*

Is it only to make money to buy things? If so, do you truly believe that money makes everything better? Don't be fooled by that. Yes, money certainly makes life more comfortable, but it absolutely doesn't buy happiness. I had friends in college that came from a significant amount of money and they would have traded it all to have a family they can depend upon and love in their homes. Consider this very carefully as you dream of the life ahead of you.

## *What Do You Know about Other People's Lives, Beliefs, and Passions?*

You are not the center of the world. You should be confident and proud of who you are, but be humble and be open to others' experiences and worldviews. Take classes that stretch you, maybe even make you uncomfortable. In the end these types of classes will test your assumptions, beliefs, and make you a more well-rounded and interesting person. The roommate or classmate that is different from you can teach you about yourself. Be open to this.

### *Are You Confident in Your Abilities to Study, Listen and Learn, Take Notes, and Be a Learner?*

Remember, if college were easy, everyone would do it! You have full control and responsibility for your learning. Yes, your professors have the responsibility of teaching well and helping you learn. But they cannot and should not do the work for you. Part of college is learning to learn: learning to study, listen better, take notes, and most importantly asking for help when you need it.

In my own research I have learned that students are confronted with a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, students in high school are warned that college will be hard—the professors won't care if you do the work or not, and you need to do it on your own. However in reality, college professors and support professionals do care and will tell you to come and see them if you need help.

So what is a student to do? You may feel bad in class if you just aren't getting it and are embarrassed to ask for help. Stop that thought in its tracks! Colleges offer many opportunities for help and in almost all cases, for free! Professors offer office hours specifically to address students' questions and tutoring is available to help you do better, not to punish you for not getting it. Remember you are paying a substantial amount of money for your tuition; find out what resources you have and take advantage of them. Be a mature learner, take advantage of everything your college offers, and hold your head high for doing so. There is no shame in asking for help. I always compare it to a job. When you start out on any job there is usually some type of training to teach you how to do that job. College is no different. We are teaching you how to be a student—you've been practicing since Kindergarten, and doesn't end when you get to college.

Finally, here are some words of advice based on some of my regrets when I reflect on my college experience:

1. I didn't study abroad during my four years of college.
2. I didn't do any type of internship.
3. I didn't get involved with many clubs or organizations.
4. I didn't get involved with any type of research opportunities until graduate school.

### *Study Abroad*

Whether it is a short-term experience (some are as short as three weeks) or a semester to a year—do it! This goes back to my point about understanding people different than you. The United States is a great nation, but we are not the only nation and our world is filled with amazing stories to share. One of my favorite quotes by Neale Walsch is: "Life begins at the end of your comfort zone" (2010). You will not miss much being gone from your college for a short period of time, and you will return from your adventure a changed person. How do I know this if I didn't study abroad myself? I know many who have and the end result is the same for all—no regrets, life changing moments, and better appreciation for the world we live in.

### *Internships*

Going to college in the 80s was different than today. The job market was relatively strong and the push for an internship or co-op was not as strong. But if I had gotten some hands on experience and discovered my likes, dislikes, strengths, and weaknesses, I would had more direction for my career when I graduated. In addition, there is nothing more frustrating for a college graduate than to go on job interviews only to be told that you can't be hired because you have no *real* experience. So talk to your professors, academic advisors, counselors, and mentors

about getting some internship experience while in school or during the summer. There are many companies that welcome interns, and you may find the direction you are seeking.

### *Clubs and Organizations*

For years employers have been surveyed by colleges to ask them what type of skills they are seeking in college graduates. Although having discipline specific skills are important (in other words, the courses you take in your major), employers are very consistent in seeking out employees with what they call “soft skills,” such as writing well, public speaking, getting along with others, and having leadership abilities. You’ll develop these skills in your courses, but you can really hone and apply them by joining a club or organization on campus, where you will have opportunities to work with others, lead efforts, and have something to show for it—a campaign you ran, funds you raised, or an event you organized. Colleges offer many types of clubs to attract students in areas of interest. For example, if you are a business major, you could join the business club. More than likely the activities the club offers will allow you to meet business leaders, go on field trips to learn more about the business world, and meet people who have similar interests as yourself. I was a college athlete so my time was limited, and while I support athletics in college as an opportunity to continue your passion and to grow and learn, try to make time to join a special interest group. Take a leadership role in a group, and later, when you go on that job interview, talk about your leadership experience. The employer will be impressed and it may determine whether or not you get the job.

### *Research*

Finally, develop your research skills. You may think that research is most important in the sciences and medicine. But research occurs in all fields of study, and much of what you do in college is research in some form. If you are a music major you may need to research how other musicians developed their talent, the history of genres, or new ways music is applied in our world. Problem solving through effective research and knowing how to test your ideas and hypotheses will make you a very valuable employee and citizen of your community. If your professor offers a chance to work on a special research project—sign up.

Question everything, and don’t take the answers at face value. Question how people come to their conclusions, develop your own set of research questions, and be willing to dig to find the answers. This is not only important as a student but as an employee as well. Strive to be an engaged citizen in our world and don’t believe what everyone tells you. An adult needs to make informed decisions to buy products, pay taxes, and vote for government leaders. Don’t be complacent and put your life in the hands of others without fully researching the pros and cons—draw your own conclusions.

In conclusion, come to the classroom with an open mind and a willingness to exercise your right to take full advantage of all a college offers. Done correctly, college will be challenging and frustrating, and will test every part of you. Life will be the same way so use this time to practice, practice, practice.

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# Why So Many Questions?

*Fatima Rodriguez Johnson*

I chose to attend a small liberal arts college. The campus was predominately white and was nestled in a wealthy suburb among beautiful trees and landscaped lawns. My stepfather and I pulled into the parking lot and followed the path to my residence hall. The looks we received from most of the families made me feel like everyone knew we didn't belong. But, he and I greeted all we encountered, smiling and saying, "Hello." Once I was unpacked and settled into my residence hall, he gave me a hug and said, "Good luck." I wasn't sure if he meant good luck with classes or good luck with meeting new friends, but I heard a weight in his voice. He was worried. Had he and my mother prepared me for what was ahead?

With excitement, I greeted my roommate who I had already met through the summer Higher Educational Opportunity Program (HEOP). She and I were very happy to see each other. After decorating and organizing our room, we set out to meet new people. We went to every room introducing ourselves. We were pretty sure no one would forget us; it would be hard to miss the only Black and Latina girls whose room was next to the pay phone (yes, in my day each floor shared one pay phone).

Everyone on our floor was nice and we often hung out in each other's rooms. And like some of you, we answered some of those annoying questions:

- Why does your perm make your hair straight when ours makes our hair curly?
- How did your hair grow so long (whenever we had weave braids)?
- Why don't you wash your hair everyday (the most intriguing question of all)?

We were also asked questions that made us angry:

- Did you grow up with your father?
- Aren't you scared to take public transportation?
- Have you ever seen anyone get shot (because we both lived in the inner city)?

It was those questions that, depending on the day and what kind of mood we were in, made a fellow student either walk away with a better understanding of who we were as Black and Latina women or made a fellow student walk away red and confused. I guess that's why my stepfather said, "Good luck." He knew that I was living in a community where I would stand out—where I would have to explain who I was. Some days I was really good at answering those questions and some days I was not. I learned the questions were not the problem; it was not asking that was troubling.

My roommate and I put forth a lot of effort to fit in with the community—we spent time hanging out with our peers, we ate together almost every evening in the dining hall, and we participated in student organizations. We were invited to join the German Club, and were the only students of color there. In doing all these things we made ourselves approachable. Our peers became comfortable around us and trusted us.

Although my peers and I all had similar college stresses (tests, papers, projects, etc.) my roommate and I also had become a student resource for diversity. Not because we wanted to, but because we had to. There were very few students of color on campus, and I think students really wanted to learn about people different from themselves. It was a responsibility that we

had accepted. The director of HEOP would often remind us that for many students, college was the first opportunity they had to ask these types of questions. He said we would learn to discern when people were really interested in learning about our differences or insulting us. If someone was interested in insulting us, there was no need to respond at all.

Although I transferred to another college at the end of my sophomore year, during those two years I learned a great deal about having honest conversations. Taking part in honest conversations challenged my notions of the world and how I viewed people from all walks of life (race, class, sexual orientation, ability, etc.). Those late nights studying or walks to the student center were when many of us listened to each other's stories.

My advice is to take time to examine your attitudes and perceptions of people different from yourself, put yourself in situations that will challenge your assumptions, and lastly, when you make a mistake do not get discouraged. Keep trying. It's easy to stay where we are comfortable. College is such a wonderful experience. Take it all in, and I am sure you will enjoy it!

# *These Are the Best Years of Your Life*

*Sara Vacin*

These are the best years of your life. I hope you've been told this a ridiculous amount of times and that you are finding this to be true! College provides an amazing opportunity to expand your mind, meet unique people you can deeply connect with, and discover new aspects of yourself. Being aware of this energy and taking full advantage of these opportunities can be life changing.

You learn a lot about yourself when living on your own for the first time or studying topics that are completely taboo at your home's kitchen table. When I transferred to a four-year institution, I found the strength to come out. Realizing I was gay led me to question where I belonged in the religion I was raised in and an enlightening journey ensued of exploring Buddhism, Native American beliefs, and even New Age mysticism. This process of questioning what I believed helped me to create a spiritual foundation that makes sense to me. I kept the best of what I was raised in and upgraded the rest!

I also discovered that the college I attended had amazing tools to help me be as healthy as possible. I used the free gym and knew the counseling center was there if anything became too tough. I also chose incredible electives (including Mountaineering and Modern Dance) that stretched my physical capabilities. Additionally, I made deep connections with my professors, many of whom remain friends. These smart, caring people validated my journey and were my safety net as I grew out of my old, comfortable self.

Another incredible lesson learned was the importance of balance. I couldn't party every night and neglect my schoolwork without consequences. I figured out the hard way that I really did need sleep and I couldn't nourish my body on coffee and pizza alone. In a moment of brilliance, I also figured out that if I used time with my friends as a reward for finishing my work, I would study and complete assignments more efficiently. Fun can be a great motivator—try this; it works!

In college, the emphasis is often on the mind. Do yourself a favor and remember to also nourish your spirit and take care of your body. Leave college brighter, healthier, and with a new understanding of yourself. Try that yoga or nutrition class. Join that new club. Trade in that soda for water. Jump into that drum circle or improvisation group. Who knows what you will discover—it just may be greatness!

# *With a Little Help from My Friends*

*Paulo Fernandes*

We often hear about the importance of relationships: a necessary aspect of integration in society. Unfortunately, we rarely follow that advice. Perhaps we live an excessively busy life or we already have a close group of friends and do not feel compelled to meet new people. I have come to learn through my time in college that neglecting to cultivate new relationships is detrimental to living a happy and successful life. I would like to offer this piece of advice: *no matter how difficult it seems at first, always try to make new friends*. College is not always easy. However, having friends makes it much easier. Friends are a vital part of your life that can expose you to new subjects, cultures, and experiences while giving you the opportunity to do the same for them.

At my college, there was a small space that the students called “the bat cave.” It was by no means a first-class lounge, but it was a place where friends could help others better understand their course material. We gave it this peculiar nickname because it was our place to get together and conquer villains one after another. These were not your everyday super villains, however. Sometimes they were complicated homework assignments and other times they were difficult exams. No matter the challenge, someone was always willing to help. I went to the bat cave several times and every visit I learned something new. Professors and teaching assistants could not relate to us like our friends could. That made a difference, because nothing was better than being taught by a friend.

Friends are not only an essential support for your time in school, but also can be integral in helping realize post-college aspirations. During a visit to New York City, I visited the offices of the company Spotify. After touring their facilities I had the opportunity to talk to some of the employees. One man I talked with was a senior employee who worked at Microsoft prior to joining Spotify’s team. Our conversation stuck in my head because he gave a very striking piece of advice: make friends. It never truly occurred to me that the friends you make in college could impact your future in the workforce. They could be partners in potential business ventures or help you land your dream job. In any case, having strong connections with friends can undoubtedly make a major difference in your career.

The best part of making new friends, however, is trading life experiences, skills, and interests with them. For a year and a half before my final semester of college, I studied abroad in the United States. My family was concerned because typically, students search for first jobs prior to graduation. I, on the other hand, had no trepidations about going because I knew that I would have countless, exciting learning experiences. I can say today, without a doubt, that my trip was a great decision. I met incredible people, and through knowing them, I grew and changed. I also know that I was a positive feature in the lives of my new friends. The greatest thing that I learned was that meeting different people with different backgrounds, histories, perspectives, or even different musical tastes, inevitably changes you and lets you see the world in an entirely different way. You no longer see the world as simply a big, blue sphere with freezing winters or sizzling summers (although that certainly seems to be the case up North!), but as a place in which people like you live, learn, and love.

Going to college may seem hard, but it does not need to be. I have learned that the way I perceive my life as a student completely relies upon my relationships with my friends. They are not only the people that I like to spend time with, but also are essential in my growth and development as a human being. The pages in this book include insights from others just like you



and me. They want to help you get through the common struggles of college with confidence and perseverance. Consider them your most recent new friends. I truly hope that this inspires you in your quest for a great future.

*Part Two: You are the President  
and CEO of You*



# *Can You Listen to Yourself?*

*Yuki Sasao*

It is almost impossible to find time away from information sources like TV, phone, advertisements, or even your friends and family in this modern society. Can you put yourself in a place that has no information at all—you alone, just yourself? If not, you should try—finding this quiet mental space will let you to practice listening to yourself. It is a wonderful way to find out who you truly are. Our society has become so loud that it is very difficult to listen to your own voice and extremely easy to lose it.

I am an international student from a very small town in Japan, and I am the first one among my family members to study abroad. When I told people that I decided to come to the United States to study, every single one of them was shocked and gave me their advice. Some said Americans are very bossy and tend to look down on people. Some said I would not be able to find any jobs there.

It does not matter who you are and what type of circumstances you are in. You will get some comments and advice no matter what you do.

Was the advice people gave me accurate? I'm sorry, but mostly, no. People I met in the United States were nice, and the advice I received really depended on whether or not the person looked down on others. Am I struggling with finding a job? No. My major in accounting provides me more opportunities than I can take. Looking back on the comments from my friends and family, I am very grateful that I was able to see what I truly wanted and stick with my decision.

The reason I could tune out those negative voices was not because I am lucky or intelligent. It is because I listened to myself—my own voice. However, this doesn't mean that I didn't listen to others. I considered what people said to me and I understood them. I just didn't agree with them, which was the most difficult part. In the process of building my own decisions, many pieces of advice actually helped me and I made some changes based on the advice from others combined with my own thoughts.

Why was I able to stick to my decision so tight and live the life I wanted? It's because I talked to myself and asked myself millions of questions.

“What do I want in my future?”

“Do I really need it or just want it?”

“Am I where I wanted to be? Yes? No? Why?”

“Where am I going?”

“What am I doing?”

“What would happen if I do this?”

“Why am I doing it?”

It is difficult, frustrating, and time-consuming to find your raw voice in this very noisy society, but in doing so you will get through life with minimal regret and confidence in who you are and what you are doing. Pull yourself away from the massive amount of information, talk to

some people, understand them (never ignore them), and then talk with yourself. This is your life, and you cannot run away from yourself forever. You'd better learn how to listen to yourself and be able to stick with your own thoughts even after accepting what other say.

# *Failure Is Not an Option*

*Nathan Wallace*

In the movie Apollo 13, Ed Harris portrays NASA flight director Gene Kranz as he successfully guides the crew of a damaged spacecraft to safety. In a famous scene during which Kranz and his staff are attempting to overcome some extremely daunting challenges, Harris shouts, “Failure is not an option!” This singular statement perfectly articulated the determination of Kranz to bring the Apollo astronauts back to Earth.

This “failure is not an option” credo was perfect for the life and death situation that NASA was facing. Failure meant that the astronauts on Apollo 13 would never come home, and that outcome was unacceptable. Attending college, on the other hand, shouldn’t be a life or death experience, though it sometimes might feel like one. Failure, though never the intended outcome, can and sometimes does happen. Sometimes failure manifests itself in election results for a student government post, in a test score, or even in a final grade.

Throughout my life I have had many failures. In high school I drove my parents and teachers crazy because of my lack of academic achievement. I even managed to get an F- in Spanish on my report card. When I told my mom that it was a typo she responded, “So you didn’t get an F?” “No,” I said, “I definitely earned the F, but there’s no such thing as an F-.” To this day I’m not so sure that my reply was accurate. I might have earned that minus after all.

My failures in high school led to only one acceptance from of all the colleges I applied to attend. Furthermore, I was not accepted to the school’s main campus, but to their branch campus. During my first semester there my effort wasn’t much better than in high school, but since my parents were now paying for my education I did enough work to avoid academic probation. It wasn’t until my second semester that I found my niche as a Religious Studies major and started getting good grades, moved to the main campus, and eventually graduated with honors.

Since graduating from college, my career path has taken me into higher education as a Student Affairs administrator. This career has exposed me to many great theories regarding student success, and many of them gave me insight into my own college experience. But it was Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck who appeared to be thinking of me when she wrote the following about fixed mindsets in the introduction to her book titled *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*:

Believing that your qualities are carved in stone—the fixed mindset—creates an urgency to prove yourself over and over. If you have only a certain amount of intelligence, a certain personality, and a certain moral character—well, then you’d better prove that you have a healthy dose of them. It simply wouldn’t do to look or feel deficient in these most basic characteristics. (Dweck, 2006)

This statement was a revelation to me. I finally understood my problem throughout high school and even in college. I earned good grades because I liked Religious Studies but never really challenged myself inside or outside of the classroom. My problem was that I had a fixed mindset about academic success. I believed that a person is either smart or they’re not, and nothing could be done to significantly change that. I also believed that I was one of the fortunate ones to be “gifted” with an abundance of intelligence.

One might think that having confidence in your intelligence is a whole lot better than thinking

that you're stupid, but the result was the same. My fixed mindset was holding me back because it led to a paralyzing fear of failure. Since as far back as I could remember, my family, friends, and teachers were always telling me how smart I was, and I believed them. But that belief was a double-edged sword. High school and college offered many occasions when self-confidence in my inherent intelligence could be threatened. If I fail on this test or in this course it means that I'm not the smart person I thought I was. If I fail, my family and friends will find out that they were wrong about me.

However, there was a way to avoid all of the risks of academic rigor. I could just not try. If I don't try I'll get bad marks on my report card, but those won't be true indicators of my intelligence. By not putting forth any effort, my intelligence would never be disproven. I would always be able to say to myself and others that, "I could do the work and be a straight A student, but I'm just not interested." Looking back on this time in my life, it is clear to me that this wasn't a conscious decision to save face. It was fear, not logic, which was guiding my behavior.

After reading *Mindset* I have made a conscious effort to identify and thwart any remaining fixed mindset thoughts that I continue to hold. Dweck's book acts as a manual for rooting out fixed mindset thoughts, because she explains that the idea of fixed mindsets is only half of her mindset theory. There is another kind of mindset, and she calls it growth mindset. Dweck writes that, "This growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts" (Dweck, 2006). Dweck goes on to explain that we can choose to have a growth mindset about any type of ability, whether it's math, art, athletics, or any other skill that one wishes to cultivate.

I put this theory to the test not long after reading the book. A few years ago I attended a meeting only to find out that it wasn't any ordinary meeting. During this meeting we would be brainstorming solutions to a specific problem. This was going to be a true brainstorming session, led by a facilitator trained in the science of soliciting uninhibited ideas from an audience. As soon as I heard the word *brainstorming* I froze. I have always hated brainstorming. I'm the type of person that likes to think things through two or three times before expressing an opinion. My fear of failing at this task in front of my coworkers paralyzed my mind. I couldn't think.

That's when it hit me. This was fixed mindset thinking. My belief in my brainstorming inadequacies was preventing me from even trying. So I flipped this thinking on its head and decided the best way to improve my brainstorming abilities was to clear my mind and start firing out ideas. I gave it a shot, and though the ideas didn't come out at the prolific rate of some of my colleagues, I had never before had such a positive outcome and experience while brainstorming. Through this experience I found that I really could choose to have a growth mindset, and that this choice produces a greater chance of success. With a greater chance of success comes a smaller chance of failure.

Nevertheless, when it comes to academic success and success in all phases of life, failure is always an option. Though it can be painful, failure can lead to great learning and progress when a specific failure is analyzed through the lens of a growth mindset. By focusing more on effort than on outcomes anyone can learn and grow, regardless of their skill level. Therefore, to make the most of their time in college, students must seek out challenges that will stretch their abilities. These challenges can take many forms and they can occur in a variety of settings, both inside and outside of the classroom. When seeking out challenges there is always the possibility of agonizing defeat, but out of that defeat can be the seeds of great success in the future.

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# Thinking Critically and Creatively

*Dr. Andrew Robert Baker*

Critical and creative thinking skills are perhaps the most fundamental skills involved in making judgments and solving problems. They are some of the most important skills I have ever developed. I use them everyday and continue to work to improve them both.

The ability to think critically about a matter—to analyze a question, situation, or problem down to its most basic parts—is what helps us evaluate the accuracy and truthfulness of statements, claims, and information we read and hear. It is the sharp knife that, when honed, separates fact from fiction, honesty from lies, and the accurate from the misleading. We all use this skill to one degree or another almost every day. For example, we use critical thinking every day as we consider the latest consumer products and why one particular product is the best among its peers. Is it a quality product because a celebrity endorses it? Because a lot of other people may have used it? Because it is made by one company versus another? Or perhaps because it is made in one country or another? These are questions representative of critical thinking.

The academic setting demands more of us in terms of critical thinking than everyday life. It demands that we evaluate information and analyze a myriad of issues. It is the environment where our critical thinking skills can be the difference between success and failure. In this environment we must consider information in an analytical, critical manner. We must ask questions—What is the source of this information? Is this source an expert one and what makes it so? Are there multiple perspectives to consider on an issue? Do multiple sources agree or disagree on an issue? Does quality research substantiate information or opinion? Do I have *any* personal biases that may affect my consideration of this information? It is only through purposeful, frequent, intentional questioning such as this that we can sharpen our critical thinking skills and improve as students, learners, and researchers. Developing my critical thinking skills over a twenty year period as a student in higher education enabled me to complete a quantitative dissertation, including analyzing research and completing statistical analysis, and earning my Ph.D. in 2014.

While critical thinking analyzes information and roots out the true nature and facets of problems, it is *creative* thinking that drives progress forward when it comes to solving these problems. Exceptional creative thinkers are people that invent new solutions to existing problems that do not rely on past or current solutions. They are the ones who invent solution C when everyone else is still arguing between A and B. Creative thinking skills involve using strategies to clear the mind so that our thoughts and ideas can transcend the current limitations of a problem and allow us to see beyond barriers that prevent new solutions from being found.

Brainstorming is the simplest example of intentional creative thinking that most people have tried at least once. With the quick generation of many ideas at once we can block-out our brain's natural tendency to limit our solution-generating abilities so we can access and combine many possible solutions/thoughts and invent new ones. It is sort of like sprinting through a race's finish line only to find there is new track on the other side and we can keep going, if we choose. As with critical thinking, higher education both demands creative thinking from us and is the perfect place to practice and develop the skill. Everything from word problems in a math class, to opinion or persuasive speeches and papers, call upon our creative thinking skills to generate new solutions and perspectives in response to our professor's demands. Creative thinking skills ask questions such as—What if? Why not? What else is out there? Can I combine perspectives/



solutions? What is something no one else has brought-up? What is being forgotten/ignored? What about \_\_\_\_\_? It is the opening of doors and options that follows problem-identification.

Consider an assignment that required you to compare two different authors on the topic of education and select and defend one as better. Now add to this scenario that your professor clearly prefers one author over the other. While critical thinking can get you as far as identifying the similarities and differences between these authors and evaluating their merits, it is creative thinking that you must use if you wish to challenge your professor's opinion and invent new perspectives on the authors that have not previously been considered.

So, what can we do to develop our critical and creative thinking skills? Although many students may dislike it, group work is an excellent way to develop our thinking skills. Many times I have heard from students their disdain for working in groups based on scheduling, varied levels of commitment to the group or project, and personality conflicts too, of course. True—it's not always easy, but that is why it is so effective. When we work collaboratively on a project or problem we bring many brains to bear on a subject. These different brains will naturally develop varied ways of solving or explaining problems and examining information. To the observant individual we see that this places us in a constant state of back and forth critical/creative thinking modes.

For example, in group work we are simultaneously analyzing information and generating solutions on our own, while challenging other's analyses/ideas and responding to challenges to our own analyses/ideas. This is part of why students tend to avoid group work—it challenges us as thinkers and forces us to analyze others while defending ourselves, which is not something we are used to or comfortable with as most of our educational experiences involve solo work. Your professors know this—that's why we assign it—to help you grow as students, learners, and thinkers!

# Time Is on Your Side

Christopher L. Hockey

There I was, having just eaten dinner and realizing that I had less than twenty-four hours to go before my capstone paper was due for my History of Africa class. This paper was the only grade for the class and all I had done was some research. I still had thirty pages that needed to be written! How was I going to get this paper done?

I came to the realization that I was going to have to skip some classes and work through the night. I kept my roommate up with the click clack of the keyboard and worked through the night with breaks only to replenish the caffeine in my system. Morning came and I still had work to do.

I contacted my other professors letting them know that something came up and I wouldn't be in class. Thankfully, I was in good standing in my other classes and could afford to miss one class. I snuck in a twenty minute nap and kept working. I finally finished about thirty minutes before the deadline. Exhausted and not terribly proud of myself, I trudged my way to class to drop off the paper and committed to never working like this again. After all, there was a small likelihood that I would get a decent grade; I was hoping for just a C to keep my GPA respectable. I went back to my room and slept for a long time. Imagine my amazement when I received my grade for the paper (and ultimately the class) and there was an A- staring me back in the face! How could this be possible?

My experience illustrates a very important lesson. Best practices do not always yield the best results. Logic would tell us that to manage a thirty-page paper would require the student to spread out all the tasks over the semester and do a little bit of work over a long period of time as opposed to a lot of work over a short period of time. The problem is that time management is a personal thing. Everyone works differently and excels under different circumstances.

The important thing to remember about time management is that there is not one method. Everyone must find what works best for her or him. There are some strategies that have been used for years and others that are new. While there are multiple perspectives on how best to set personal and professional goals, there are three general themes that influence the development of personal time management plans: identifying priorities, managing time, and managing energy.

The concept of time management is actually personal management. Where you are going or what you are trying to accomplish is more important than how fast you get there. Personal management demands organizing and executing around priorities. One thing to watch out for on your college journey is something called *time famine*. Time famine is the feeling of having too much to do and not enough time to do it. This happens often to college students and without warning. This was certainly the case with my paper. I certainly felt overwhelmed with thirty pages to write and not a lot of time available to write it in. However, there's one really helpful aspect of time—you always know how much you have in a day. You know that in any given day, you have twenty-four hours to accomplish everything you need to do for that day. With that knowledge in hand it becomes an easy task to make smart choices when planning both the schedule for the day, as well as the energy needed to complete the tasks.

The objective of successful time management is to increase and optimize controllable time. Once you have a schedule made, don't change it unless something of some serious urgency comes up. However, while managing time is challenging enough, there's another concept out

there about the management of your energy. Think of energy as money and time as what you'd like to buy. If you're too tired (or energy broke) to be productive, it's hard to accomplish (buy) everything on your schedule. Luckily, at the age of twenty-two, I had lots of energy and stamina to pull an all-nighter and finish the paper. If I tried to do that today at thirty-five, I would be asleep on my keyboard after a few hours. In order to always have enough of time currency, it's important that you are physically energized, emotionally connected, and mentally focused on your purpose.

While an understanding of these general principles is essential for the development of sound time and energy management strategies, it is also important to focus on practical strategies that can be implemented to improve the college experience. The first recommendation is to know who you are and how you work. In this step, you need to examine all aspects of your current time management skills. Take a look at personal practices such as where you work, how you organize information and course materials, how current and future assignments and projects are prioritized, how commitments are balanced, and lastly, how you prevent burnout. Once you have taken stock in your current practices, you'll have a better idea of what you need to do to improve.

Even today, I try to space out large projects and assignments and find that I am not as focused or motivated. I struggle to complete the task and when I do, it never feels like I did it well. However, when I revert back to that practice of waiting until the last minute, I am focused, energized, and motivated and the results have been very positive. In my own doctoral program, I have begun assignments a little too close to the deadlines but they ultimately get completed and I continue to be amazed at the high marks I get back. What does that tell me? It tells me I thrive in high-pressure situations where I have to focus intensely on one thing and stay focused for a long period of time. Is that method for everyone? Certainly not, but it works for some and it may or may not work for you. You must examine your own work habits and practices and look back at times that you have done well and times you have done poorly and identify habits that led to those results.

The next strategy is to create a personal time management method to help prioritize projects and activities. Try to identify and eliminate activities that may detract from effectively balancing your roles and responsibilities. In any given day, what are the most important things that need to be completed? What can be eliminated from your schedule that provides you the time you need to be successful? I like to think of this as the "five-year-old plan." My five-year-old loves to play in the morning as her Mom and I are getting ready for work. The problem is that we need her to get ready for school, too. We put a plan in place that allows her to play in the morning, only after she is completely ready for school. You need time to play, have fun, and socialize, but it should not come at the expense of higher priority tasks.

The next recommendation is to focus on the process of energy management. Create goals focused on physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional renewal. These goals can include, but are not limited to: getting seven to eight hours of sleep a night, taking small breaks during work sessions, eating healthy, exercising regularly, drinking lots of water, having a positive attitude, and practicing positive self-talk. Anytime I know I have a big work task or school task to complete, I am in the mindset of energy conversation—my energy. I make sure to get a good night sleep, eat my Wheaties, and think good vibes. These habits allow me to complete projects in a way that works for me.

Lastly, set up a reward system. One of the great things about creating prioritized lists of things that need to be done is the sense of accomplishment when you cross that item off the list. Once you've identified your major goals and tasks, identify a reward for each of these goals that provides an even greater sense of accomplishment. The reward should be personal and should

encourage you to continue your good habits. What are the things you love to do? Write them down next to the major tasks and learn to practice delayed gratification by only doing those things once you've crossed the item off.

In conclusion, practical and tangible strategies for time and energy management can be the key to success for any undertaking. While each concept related to time and energy management is unique and provides a starting point for you to begin to develop strong personal management skills, these methods and ideas are not one-size-fits-all, and you need to explore the strategies and discover which components of each best fit your lifestyle and circumstances. Through this exercise, you can develop a personal management plan that is best suited to your needs and goals.

# What Do You Enjoy Studying?

*Dr. Patricia Munsch*

There is a tremendous amount of stress placed on college students regarding their choice of major. Everyday, I meet with students regarding their concern about choosing *right* major; the path that will lead to a fantastic, high-paying position in a growth industry. There is a hope that one decision, your college major, will have a huge impact on the rest of your life.

Students shy away from subject areas they enjoy due to fear that such coursework will not lead to a job. I am disappointed in this approach. As a counselor I always ask—what do you enjoy studying? Based on this answer it is generally easy to choose a major or a family of majors. I recognize the incredible pressure to secure employment after graduation, but forcing yourself to choose a major that you may not have any actual interest in because a book or website mentioned the area of growth may not lead to the happiness you predict.

Working in a college setting I have the opportunity to work with students through all walks of life, and I do believe based on my experience, that choosing a major because it is listed as a growth area alone is not a good idea. Use your time in college to explore all areas of interest and utilize your campus resources to help you make connections between your joy in a subject matter and the potential career paths. Realize that for most people, in most careers, the undergraduate major does not lead to a linear career path.

As an undergraduate student I majored in Political Science, an area that I had an interest in, but I added minors in Sociology and Women's Studies as my educational pursuits broadened. Today, as a counselor, I look back on my coursework with happy memories of exploring new ideas, critically analyzing my own assumptions, and developing an appreciation of social and behavioral sciences. So to impart my wisdom in regards to a student's college major, I will always ask, what do you enjoy studying?

Once you have determined what you enjoy studying, the real work begins. Students need to seek out academic advisement. Academic advisement means many different things; it can include course selection, course completion for graduation, mapping coursework to graduation, developing opportunities within your major and mentorship.

As a student I utilized a faculty member in my department for semester course selection, and I also went to the department chairperson to organize two different internships to explore different career paths. In addition, I sought mentorship from club advisors as I questioned my career path and future goals. In my mind I had a team of people providing me support and guidance, and as a result I had a great college experience and an easy transition from school to work.

I recommend to all students that I meet with to create their own team. As a counselor I can certainly be a part of their team, but I should not be the only resource. Connect with faculty in your department or in your favorite subject. Seek out internships as you think about the transition from college to workplace. Find mentors through faculty, club advisors, or college staff. We all want to see you succeed and are happy to be a part of your journey.

As a counselor I am always shocked when students do not understand what courses they need to take, what grade point average they need to maintain, and what requirements they must fulfill in order to reach their goal—graduation! Understand that as a college student it is your

responsibility to read your college catalog and meet all of the requirements for graduation from your college. I always suggest that students, starting in their first semester, outline or map out all of the courses they need to take in order to graduate. Of course you may change your mind along the way, but by setting out your plan to graduation you are forcing yourself to learn what is required of you.

I do this exercise in my classes and it is by far the most frustrating for students. They want to live in the now and they don't want to worry about next semester or next year. However, for many students that I see, the consequence of this decision is a second semester senior year filled with courses that the student avoided during all the previous semesters. If you purposefully outline each semester and the coursework for each you can balance your schedule, understand your curriculum, and feel confident that you will reach your goal.

## *Part Three: The Future You*

# *Fighting for My Future Now*

*Amie Bernstein*

Instead of completing high school, I elected to obtain my GED due to an anxiety disorder that kept me from being successful in the traditional school setting. At sixteen years old, I thought I had it figured out. I was going to go to college before my high school class graduated, and I would be ahead of the curve. But I learned quickly that college coursework is tremendously different from high school. College requires a level of self-discipline that I had not yet developed. More importantly, college requires a substantial amount of courage and confidence that I was sorely lacking.

In the spring of 2005, I attempted to take my first two college classes. I withdrew from both within the first month. I made excuses as to why I could not complete the semester. I told people that it was the professor's fault for making the information too difficult or teaching the material too quickly. I told other people that the readings were too easy and I was wasting my time. The truth was that I was afraid to try. I was afraid that if I tried, the result would be failure.

After eight consecutive semesters, I had completed only five classes successfully, accrued seventeen withdrawals, and got three failing grades. In those four years, I was placed on academic probation five times because I neglected to withdraw from classes and just received a failing grade instead. I made the decision to find an entry-level job in an office so I could grow with a company to be successful instead of getting an education. Through a little bit of searching, I found what I was looking for. At the time, it seemed like the perfect place to be, and I was excited to start.

I was working at an HVAC company in the office part-time as a general office assistant. My duties included answering phones and taking messages. There wasn't a great amount of room for growth, however it had a better salary than any of the previous jobs I had at fast food restaurants and retail stores. I worked at the company for nearly two years before I asked for a raise. It took a month of contemplation, and the owner finally agreed to give me a raise. I waited for my next paycheck, excited to see the increase in pay even though I knew it wasn't going to be very big.

The raise meant that I had accomplished something, but when I received my next paycheck, the pay rate wasn't changed and it felt like I had accomplished nothing at all. When I questioned the owner about it, he said he forgot and he would change it for the next pay period. This same routine went on for two months until I made a big decision. The moment I received my paycheck, three months from when I originally asked for a raise, I walked out of the office and drove directly to the registrar on my local community college. I registered for classes again, but this time I promised myself it would be different; I was fighting for my future now.

I then started taking classes again in the fall of 2011 going part-time. I attended every class and studied as much as I could. I took every opportunity for extra credit assignments. I didn't stop to doubt myself. I just kept my thoughts focused on finishing the assignments—one at a time. Before I knew it, I had successfully completed the semester. I continued to take classes and try my best—taking every challenge head-on.

A year later, in the fall of 2012, I received a letter in the mail inviting me to join the honor society. Up until this point in my life I had let my anxiety disorder rule my life. This was proof that I was finally on the right track. I reluctantly joined and decided to continue to further push myself outside my comfort zone to challenge my anxiety.



Not only did I start going to meetings, but I participated in every event that the honor society had to offer. That included bake sales, volunteering for nonprofit organizations, and volunteering for the college itself. The opportunities came at me from every angle.

I then started to be recognized by the college. In addition to being recognized for my good grades, I was also recognized for my involvement with campus activities through the honor society. I received both a Distinguished Student Award from my college and a SUNY Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence. I joined everything I could after that, including two more honor societies, one for English and the other for Psychology. I enrolled in a non-credit bearing leadership class on campus so I could have even more experience that would help me with my future goals. I even went on to run for a regional officer position in my honor society and won. I was able to travel to California, Florida, and Missouri, all because of campus involvement in the honor society.

I still have anxiety, but now I am able to cope with it without letting it dictate my every move. I have confidence. I always thought that because I wasn't that cookie cutter all-American student, my opportunities would be limited, but getting involved on campus opened so many doors for me. I learned so much about what it was to be a leader. I learned what it meant to be part of a team and the value in building relationships. I learned what it meant to be engaged both inside and outside of the classroom.

I developed a deeper sense of who I am through my campus involvement. Sometimes I think about what would have happened if I never had taken that step and joined the honor society or never attended any meetings. Honestly, I probably would have been okay. I would have been steadily gliding through my education. I would have shown up to class, taken notes, then gone home and studied. I would have probably then gone on and found a decent job with a regular amount of satisfaction. But who wants an okay, decent, or regular life? I don't; I need more. I want to love what I do and enjoy every moment I can.

Maybe the honor society isn't something that you are interested in and that's okay. Do something different and learn about all of the opportunities that your campus offers and pick one to try out. Make your life more than run of the mill—and start now.

# Something Was Different

Jacqueline Tiermini

I have earned both a bachelor's and a master's degree and I have nearly twenty years of teaching experience. Would you ever guess that I contemplated not going to college at all? I originally thought about going to Beauty School and becoming a Cosmetologist. It was to me, honestly the easy way out since I was sick of all the drama after high school. The thought of college seemed overwhelming. Why did I really need to have a college degree when all I ever wanted was to get married and be a stay-at-home mom? My friends weren't going to college either, so I often wondered if going would complicate our friendship.

I decided to go anyway, and it *did* separate us a bit. While I was writing a ten-page paper for my summer class in Genetics and Heredity, my friends were swimming in *my* pool. They also had the chance to buy new cars and new clothes and to go on vacations. I just went to school, driving my used Nissan Sentra, without much more than gas money and a few extra bucks. Again, why was I doing this? It would have been easier to just do what my friends were doing.

Little by little, semesters went by and I graduated with my bachelor's degree in Education. I started substitute teaching immediately and within six months I was offered a full-time job. Just like that, I had more money and all kinds of new opportunities and I could now consider a new car or going on vacation just like my friends. At that point, I decided to continue my education and get my master's degree. Yes, it was a lot of hard work again, and yes, my friends wondered why I wanted to go back again, but I knew then that this was the best choice for me. The challenge wasn't knowing where I wanted my career to go, but rather overcoming the pull to settle into a lifestyle or career because it was easy, not because it was what I wanted.

By the time I graduated with my master's degree I realized that something was different. For all the years that I felt behind or unable to keep up with what my friends had, I was suddenly leaps and bounds ahead of them career-wise. I now had two degrees, a full-time teaching job, and a plan to keep my career moving forward. I was able to do all of the things that they had done all those years and more. None of them had careers, just jobs. None of them had long-term plans. None of them were as satisfied with their choices any longer and a few of them even mentioned that they were jealous of my opportunity to attend college.

Don't be fooled. Being a college student is a lot of work and, like me, most students have questioned what they are doing and why they are doing it. However, the rewards certainly outweigh all of the obstacles. I used to hear, "Attending college will make you a well-rounded person" or "It sets you apart from those that do not attend," yet it never felt true at the time. Eventually though, you will come to a point where you realize those quotes are true and you will be on your way to earning that degree!

# Transferable

Vicki L. Brown

I was supposed to be a teacher. Growing up, I had a classroom in the basement. I had a chalkboard, chalk, desks, textbooks, homework assignments, pens, pencils, paper—you name it, I had it! My brother and sister called me “Miss Brown.” All I ever wanted to be was an elementary school teacher—until I went to college.

As an elementary education major in college, I participated in a variety of classes—classes on literacy, math and science, philosophies of teaching, child development theory, principles of education, foundations of classroom behavior, and a whole list of others. We learned how to write a lesson plan, manage a classroom, how to set up a classroom, and much, much more.

In addition to my studies, I got involved in campus life. I joined the swimming and diving team, participated in campus activities, and joined clubs. I served as a captain of the swimming and diving team, became an Orientation Leader and a Resident Assistant, and completely immersed myself in the college experience. It was through these co-curricular activities that I was introduced to the world of higher education and a potentially new career choice for myself.

Through my academic and co-curricular activities, I gained valuable knowledge from all those I came in contact with—my peers, professors, Residence Hall Directors, and many college administrators. They encouraged me to explore what it was that I *really* wanted to do with my life. The more I got involved in my college experience, the more I learned about myself: what I’m good at, what I’m not good at, what I wanted to, and what I didn’t want to do.

As I started to sort through my options, I continued my studies, receiving both a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree in elementary education. While attending graduate school, I also worked as a Graduate Residence Hall Director. It was during that time when I finally made the decision to pursue a career in higher education administration/student affairs administration and leave my plans of being an elementary school teacher behind.

The decision wasn’t as difficult as one might think. When some listen to my story, I often hear “you’ve wasted all that time and money...” But, the truth is I gained valuable, lifelong skills from the people I met, the classes I took, the jobs I’ve had, and the activities I involved myself in. Each and every skill you acquire is transferable. This is perhaps the best lesson I’ve ever learned in college.

The countless lesson plans I had to write for my education classes and student teaching have helped me prepare practice plans as the head coach for the men’s and women’s swimming and diving team. The skills I learned while planning programs and activities for my residents as a Resident Assistant, Hall Director, and Area Coordinator have helped me plan campus events as the Director of Student Activities in the Center for Student Leadership & Involvement. The classroom management techniques I learned in college have helped me to manage my office, staff, team, committees, etc. The communication and development theories I’ve learned have taught me how to have meaningful conversations with others and how best to meet their needs.

Each and every skill you learn throughout your academic, personal, and professional career are valuable and transferable. Do not let your college degree define who you are but rather, let the knowledge and skills you’ve acquired define who you are.

# *It's Like Online Dating*

*Jackie Vetrano*

Searching for a job, especially your first job, is a lot like online dating. It begins as a time commitment, gets nerve-wracking towards the middle, but ends in success and happiness if you follow the right process.

Like many single people with access to current technology, I ventured into the world of online dating. I went for coffee with potential mates who were instant *no ways*, some who left me scratching my head, and a few who I found a connection with.

But hang on. We are here to talk about professional development, not my love life.

Being on the job hunt is not easy. Many spend hours preparing résumés, looking at open positions, and thinking about what career path to travel. Occasionally, it is overwhelming and intimidating, but when taken one step at a time, it can be a manageable and an exciting process.

## *Your Dating Profile—The Résumé*

The first step of online dating is the most important: create your dating profile. Your profile is where you put your best foot forward and show off all of your attractive qualities through visuals and text. Online daters find their most flattering photos and then season the “about me” section of their profile with captivating and descriptive words to better display who they are and why other online daters should give them a shot.

Résumés follow this same logic. Your résumé should be clean, polished, and present you in your best light for future employers. Like dating profiles, they are detailed and should paint a picture for other prospective dates (or future employers) supporting why you deserve a chance at their love—an interview.

The unspoken rules of online dating profiles are very similar to the rules for writing a résumé. Whether you like it or not, your online dating profile and résumé both serve as a first impression. Profiles and résumés that are short, filled with spelling errors, or vague are usually passed over. Unless you are a supermodel and all you need is an enticing photo, your written description is very important to display who you are.

Your résumé should capture who you are, your skill set, education, past experiences, and anything else that is relevant to the job you hope to obtain. Knowing your audience is a key factor in crafting the perfect résumé. Logically, if my online dating profile presented studious and quiet personality traits, I would likely start receiving messages from potential mates who are looking for someone who is seeking those traits. By taking a similar approach while writing a résumé, you can easily determine the tone, language, and highlighted skills and experiences you should feature. The tone of your résumé is dictated by the nature of the position you hope to obtain in the future. For example, hospitality jobs or positions that require you to interact with many people on a daily basis should be warm and welcoming while analytical jobs, such as accounting or research positions, should reflect an astute attention to detail. Your choice in language follows similar logic—use appropriate terms for the position you are seeking.

Unlike online dating profiles, your résumé should include your important contact information, including email address, telephone number, and mailing address. Some advise refraining from listing a mailing address, as this could create a bias due to some organizations that are looking

for a new employee who is already in the area. Unfortunately, this bias cannot be foreseen, which means you should use your best judgment when listing your contact information. If you include this contact information on your dating profile, you may have some very interesting text messages in the morning.

### *Finding Love—The Job Hunt*

Simply crafting an online dating profile doesn't necessarily mean you will find your one true love, and the same applies to your career. Once your résumé is crafted, it is equally as important to search the job market to find what you think would be a good fit based on your skills and preferences.

An important part of online dating is setting the appropriate search filters. Sites allow users to search by gender, location, age, religious beliefs, or social practices. All these are small pieces that affect the overall compatibility between two people, with some factors being more important than others. By carefully choosing which filters are most important, you're sure to have better luck finding a perfect match that will make you happy and excited.

As you begin the job hunt, it is important to determine your filters when it comes to a career or first job. Some of these filters, like dating, may hold more weight to you than others. Many job search sites allow users to find job listings as defined by these filters, and they can include: location, type of organization, starting salary, potential for promotion, job responsibilities, etc.

Always establish filters. You may say, "I don't care what I find, as long as I find *something*." All of us have a preference in our love lives as well as our careers, and being honest with yourself about these filters will increase the likelihood for happiness in the end. These filters also allow you to more quickly read through job postings, because you will be focusing on positions with the qualities that you already determined are the most important to you.

When you are searching for a posted position using an online service, enter your filters and try a variety of search phrases to find as many postings as possible. Even changing "school counselor" to "guidance counselor" or only "counseling" may produce a different set of job postings, depending on the website.

It is also important to remember, like online dating sites, not every job posting will be on every employment site. Experiment with different search techniques and websites, and seek the advice of others for the best resource for recent postings. It's easy to save these filters and search results on most job search websites, allowing you to check back on a constant basis without resetting your filters. Most sites also allow you to create a free account, providing you a way to receive email alerts any time a new job is posted and fits in with your filters.

After the filters are set, it is time to start the exciting and nerve-wracking part: scrolling through profiles.

### *Scrolling through Profiles—The Job Postings*

You will find attractive potentials with no description provided, others who exclusively take selfies, and a whole list of people who simply are not right for you based on their description. But then, it happens. You find someone who may be a match, and your heart starts to flutter.

Reading through a job description is equally as exciting. A good job posting provides a robust description of responsibilities, minimum qualifications, and desired qualifications for candidates. Knowing your own skill set, you can determine if you're a match or not. By having honest filters set before searching, it's likely that you are.

Sometimes, online dating simply doesn't work. Many will then turn to speed dating to meet new people in the area. This method allows for daters to quickly determine whether or not there's any chemistry, without spending time searching through online profiles. Similarly, job fairs provide this quick face-to-face advantage. If you're attending a job fair, be sure dress appropriately and have copies of your résumé or business cards on hand. Through job fairs, you'll be building your first impression right away, and may even be offered an interview on the spot.

### *Sending a Message—The Cover Letter*

After searching through dozens of profiles, online daters generally find a handful of people they can picture themselves with. There's only one way to find out more about the person, and that's by sending the first message.

My personal rule for online dating is to always send a thoughtful first message to those I want to meet. It's easy enough to send a short, impersonal "hey," but it's important to make a good impression. It's obvious that the message I send, combined with my well-written profile, is going to continue to form a first impression of me. First impressions are very important in dating, job-hunting, and life overall.

The challenging part of the first message I send through online dating sites is determining what to say. I've never met these people before, but I do have access to their dating profiles filled with their hobbies, hometowns, and more. This is a perfect starting point for my message, especially if we both root for the same football team or if the other person likes to run as much as I do.

Your cover letter serves as an introduction to your future employer and should compliment your résumé to create a shining first impression. It is incredibly challenging to sit in front of a blank screen trying to find a good starting point, which means you should look at the job posting and organization's website for ideas about what to include.

Generally, these job postings provide a set of *hard* skills (such as proficiency with certain technology) and *soft* skills (such as public speaking, teamwork, or working in a flexible environment) required and desired for the posted position. This information provides you a list of what should be explained in your cover letter. Demonstrating your hard skills is a simple enough task by using examples or stating certifications, but describing your soft skills may require a little more thought. These soft skills can be exhibited by discussing specific examples of past experiences in previous jobs you've held, volunteer work, or work you've done in college classes.

After you have crafted your cover letter, you should send it to a few people you trust for their opinion and overall proofreading along with the job posting for their reference. It's obvious that your cover letter should be free of spelling and grammar errors, but these trustworthy individuals will also be able to provide helpful insight about the examples you've used to display your soft skills.

### *The Hard Part—Waiting*

You just sent your first message to the love of your life, but now what? You wait. You will undoubtedly feel anxious, especially if you sit refreshing your inbox for hours at a time, but if you made a good first impression and they like you as much as you like them, you will hear back.

While you wait, take the time to do a little research. Search for the organization online and view what information they provide. You will be storing up some good facts about your future partner, which is something you can bring up when you're on your first date. This research will

also allow you to understand the company better. The organization displays their values, work ethic, and personality through online and print resources, which allows you to see if their values match with yours.

Unlike online dating, it is helpful to follow up with an organization you've applied to. Generally, the Human Resources department of an organization is the best place to start if you are unsure whom to call. This phone call is another piece of your first impression, which means you should be prepared to talk. Have any materials that you need ready, and be sure you are in a quiet place.

### *The First Date—The Job Interview*

After what may feel like forever, you hear back from the love of your life. Congratulations! In the online dating world, you may chat about common interests (because you wrote a stunning first message), but in the world of work, you'll be asked to visit the organization for an interview.

I have been on many first dates, and whether it's in a coffee shop or over dinner, the first face-to-face meeting is tremendously important. If someone I am meeting for the first time looks like they just came from the gym or rolled out of bed, my impression instantly changes. This same theory can be directly applied to your first date with your future employer. You have worked hard on your cover letter and résumé, and you should not taint the sparkling first impression you have created with the wrong choice in dress.

What you wear to a job interview may change based on the position you have applied for, but there are a set of basic rules that everyone should follow. Similar to meeting someone on a first date for coffee, you want to be comfortable. Some interviews may take place with multiple people in an organization, meaning you will be walking to different locations, sitting down, and potentially sweating from a broken air conditioning unit. Consider these factors when choosing your outfit for your interview, and if you're concerned about being underdressed, remember to always dress a bit nicer than how you'd dress for the job itself.

There is nothing worse than sitting alone at a coffee shop waiting for a mystery date to show up. It's uncomfortable and affects my overall first impression of whom I'm about to meet. Avoid making your mystery employer annoyed and waiting for you by leaving at least ten minutes earlier than you need to, just in case you get stuck in traffic. Arrive at least ten minutes early. The interview will start out much better if you are early rather than nervous and running late. Arriving early also gives you the time to have some coffee and review materials you may need for the interview. Coming on time to an interview or a first date shows you respect the time of the person you plan to meet.

On a first date, it is all about communication. Sometimes, there may be silences that cannot be filled or the person I have just met discloses their entire life story to me in less than an hour. If we cannot achieve a proper balance, there will not be a second date. Communicating effectively in a job interview is equally as important, especially if you want a job offer!

All of the rules of dating apply to how you should behave in a job interview. The interviewer will ask you questions, which means that you should look at them and focus on what is being asked. Your phone should be on silent (not even on vibrate), and hidden, to show that you are fully attentive and engaged in the conversation you are having. Much like having a conversation on a date, the answers to your questions should be clear and concise and stay on topic. The stories I tell on my first dates are more personal than what would be disclosed in a job interview, but the mindset is the same. You are building the impression that the organization has of you, so put your best foot forward through the comments you make.

To make that great impression, it is really important to heavily prepare and practice, even before

you have an interview scheduled. By brainstorming answers to typical interview questions in a typed document or out loud, later during the interview you will easily remember the examples of your past experiences that demonstrate why you are best for the job. You can continue to update this list as you move through different jobs, finding better examples to each question to accurately describe your hard and soft skills.

This interview is as much a date for your future employer as it is for you. Come prepared with questions that you have about the company, the position, and anything else you are curious about. This is an opportunity for you to show off the research you've done on the organization and establish a better understanding of company culture, values, and work ethic. Without knowing these basics of the company or organization, what you thought was a match might only end in a tense breakup.

After your interview is over, you continue to have an opportunity to build on the positive impression that you've worked hard to form. Sending a follow up thank you note to each person you interviewed with will show your respect for the time the organization spent with you. These notes can be written and sent by mail or emailed, but either way should have a personal touch, commenting on a topic that was discussed in the interview. While sending a thank you note after a first date may sound a little strange, you might not get asked to a second interview without one!

### *It's Official—The Job Offer*

In the online dating world, it takes a few dates to determine if two people are a match. In the corporate world, you may have a one or two interviews to build a relationship. If your impression was positive and the organization believes you're a match for the open position, you'll be offered a job.

With a job offer also comes the salary for the position. It is important to know what a reasonable salary is for the position and location, which can be answered with a bit of research. One good place to look is the Bureau of Labor Statistics website: <http://stats.bls.gov/oes/current/oesrcst.htm>. At this point, it is not uncommon to discuss your salary with your future employer, but be sure to do so in a polite way.

Online dating sites provide the means for millions of people to meet future partners, and the number of people who use online dating is so large that there are sure to be disappointments along the way. I have met people who I thought were compatible with me, but they did not feel the same, and vice versa. This happens frequently while searching for a job, which can be discouraging, but should not hinder you from continuing to search! There are a great number of opportunities, and sometimes all it takes is adjusting your filters or revising your résumé and cover letter. The cliché "there's plenty of fish in the sea" may be true, but there is definitely a way for each person to start their career off right.



# Learn What You Don't Want

Jamie Edwards

For a long time, my plan had always been to be a kindergarten teacher. But when I began my undergraduate degree I fell into that ever-growing pool of college students who changed their major three times before graduation. I was swayed by family members, my peers, and the economy, but I eventually realized that I was investing my education in the wrong areas for the wrong reasons. It shouldn't just be about salaries and job security. I needed to find that personal attachment.

At eighteen, it's hard to see your entire life spread out before you. College may feel like a free-for-all at times, but the reality is that it's one of the most defining times of our lives. It should never be squandered. I started to imagine my life beyond college—what I found important and the type of lifestyle I wanted in the end. I started thinking about the classes that I was actually interested in—the ones that I looked forward to each week and arrived early to just so I could get a seat up front.

A turning point for me was when I took the advice of a campus mentor and enrolled in a career exploration course. I learned more about myself in that class than I had in my entire three years at college prior to taking it. It showed me that my passion was something I had always thought about but never thought about as a career. In high school, I could sit in the Guidance Office for hours on end. I enjoyed listening to others—hearing and helping people work through their struggles.

I had seen firsthand how detrimental the absence of career classes can be to someone's future. Through this realization and my participation in my career exploration class, I saw a viable future in the Higher Education Administration field. As I dove deeper, I was opened to an incredible amount of unique and diverse opportunities to work with students. My main approach was to get a taste anything to do with student services: I shadowed a career counselor in a career services office, attended graduate school fairs and informational sessions, discussed the Higher Education Administration Program with several staff at my college, and most importantly, I talked with my internship coordinator (my mentor). From there, I completed an internship in my prospective field, which gave me a wealth of insight and skills that directly related to my future career goals.

From where I sit now—my former personal and professional struggles in tow—I offer up some pieces of advice that were crucial to getting me where I am today. Whether you're an undecided major who is looking for guidance or a student with a clearly defined career path, I suggest the following:

1. *Find a mentor*—For me, everything began there. Without my mentor, I wouldn't have done any of the other items I'm about to suggest. Finding the right mentor is crucial. Look for someone who can complement your personality (typically someone who's the opposite of you). My advice would be to look beyond your direct supervisor for mentorship. It's important to create an open forum with your mentor, because there may be a conflict of interest as you discuss work issues and other job opportunities. Potential mentors to consider are an instructor on campus, your academic advisor, a professional currently working in your prospective field, someone you admire in your community, or anyone in your network of friends or family that you feel comfortable discussing your future goals with.
2. *Enroll in a Career Exploration/Planning course, or something similar*—Even if you do not see the

effects of this course immediately (such as dramatically changing your major), you will notice the impact down the road. Making educated career choices and learning job readiness skills will always pay off in the end. Through my career exploration class, I learned how to relate my personality and values to potential career fields. These self-assessments changed my entire thought process, and I see that influence daily. Beyond changing the way you think, the knowledge you gain about effective job search strategies is invaluable. Learning how to write purposeful résumés and cover letters, finding the right approach to the interview process, and recognizing your strengths and weaknesses are just a few of the benefits you can gain from these type of courses.

3. *Complete a Job Shadow and/or Informational Interview*—No amount of online research is going to give you the same experience as seeing a job at the front line. In a job shadow or an informational interview, you're able to explore options with no commitment and see how your in-class experience can carry over to a real world setting. Additionally, you're expanding your professional network by having that personal involvement. You never know how the connections you make might benefit you in the future. My only regret about job shadowing in college is that I didn't do it sooner.
4. *Do an Internship*—A main source of frustration for recent grads is the inability to secure an entry-level position without experience. "How do I get a job to gain experience when I can't get a job without experience?" This is how: do an internship or two! Most colleges even have a course where you can obtain credit for doing it! Not only will you earn credits towards graduation, but you'll gain the necessary experience to put on your résumé and discuss in future interviews. Having completed four internships throughout my college career, I can't say they were all great. However, I don't regret a single one. The first one showed me the type of field I didn't want to work in. The second confirmed that I was heading in the right direction with my career. My third and fourth internships introduced me to completely different areas of higher education which broadened my knowledge and narrowed my search simultaneously.

My takeaway is that sometimes you have to learn what you don't want in order to find out what you do want. The more informed you are about career options through real life conversations and experiences, the better prepared you will be for your future and the more confident you will be in your career decisions. Always explore your options because even if you learn you hate it, at least you're one step close to finding what you love.

## Conclusion

In the text, the authors told true-to-life stories about their own academic, personal, and life-career successes. When reading *FAS: WōW*, you explored the following guiding questions:

- How do you demonstrate college readiness through the use of effective study skills and campus resources?
- How do you apply basic technological and information management skills for academic and lifelong career development?
- How do you demonstrate the use of critical and creative thinking skills to solve problems and draw conclusions?
- How do you demonstrate basic awareness of self in connection with academic and personal goals?
- How do you identify and demonstrate knowledge of the implications of choices related to wellness?
- How do you demonstrate basic knowledge of cultural diversity?

Now that you've read *FAS: WōW*, it's time to pay it forward by composing your own *Words of Wisdom* story to share with college students of the future. Reflect on the lessons learned during your own college experience this term and use the guiding questions to develop a true-to-life story that can help other college students connect the dots between being a college student and being a *successful* college student. Submit your story to be considered in the next edition of *Foundations of Academic Success: Words of Wisdom* by emailing your name, institution, and a draft of your short story to [opensunyfas@gmail.com](mailto:opensunyfas@gmail.com). Submissions will be reviewed as they are received, and you will be contacted directly if your submission is reviewed and selected for publication.

The options for textbooks focusing on college student success in college are overwhelming; many textbooks exist at varying levels of rigor and cost (some well over \$100). The *FAS: WōW* series of textbooks provides college students open access textbooks that are student-centered and readable (dare I even say enjoyable). *FAS: WōW* supports the open access textbook philosophy to help students reduce the cost of attending colleges and universities.