

Now That You're Here

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- 1 Starting college! You may feel as if you have been preparing for this day forever. You've taken a college preparatory curriculum in high school, you've talked with friends or siblings who are already in college, and you may have visited several campuses before deciding which school to attend. Or you may be returning to college after several years of working, having already gone through careful life assessment and financial budgeting. Regardless of your situation, you are probably excited about what the next few years have in store for you. And some of you may even be a little wary and unsure of yourselves as you begin down the college path.
- 2 In this chapter, we will discuss some of the ways in which college differs from high school. In addition, we will present eight situations that you are sure to encounter in college sooner or later and will offer suggestions about how you might deal with them. Keep in mind as you read this chapter that campuses differ in size and in the expectations they have of students. For these reasons, some of the generalizations and solutions offered here might not apply exactly to your particular situation.

How Does College Differ from High School?

- 3 How many times since high school graduation have you heard one of your relatives say something like this: "Oh ____ (insert your name)! Enjoy these college years. They will be the best of your life." Although this statement is probably true—college is enjoyable and memorable—it is also demanding and, in many instances, just plain different from high school. It's a time in your life when you will go through many changes as you prepare for the world of work that follows. In this section we will discuss some of the reasons why high school and college differ.
 - **Reason 1: College Requires Greater Independent Learning.** Your high school teachers may have been willing to give you lots of test preparation help. They may have prepared study guides or even provided the exact questions that would be asked. Although college instructors also want you to be successful—we have never met a professor who wants students to fail—they don't give students as much study help.

Sure, most professors will answer questions about course content and things you don't understand, but they will not provide you with a variety of supplementary learning materials, and they certainly will not give you test questions. They expect that you know effective and efficient study strategies, and if you don't know how to study for their courses, they expect you to learn how.

- **Reason 2: College Courses Move at a Faster Pace.** If you ask first-year college students about the differences between high school and college, one of their most common responses would be that college courses move much faster than high school classes. What might have taken a full year to cover in high school will probably be covered in a semester in college. It's not uncommon for college professors to move through three, four, or more chapters in a week, expecting you to keep up. In addition, more topics are generally covered in greater detail. However, college professors may go into detail on just a few points and expect you to fill in the rest of the details on your own.
- **Reason 3: College Courses Require You to Think Critically.** In your high school classes, perhaps you were required to memorize lots of facts for exams. You may even have been discouraged from questioning either your high school textbooks or your high school teachers. But as you proceed through college, you will find yourself in classes where your professor wants you to do more than memorize. You might have to critique an essay on gun control, read and respond to a historian's view of the Vietnamese conflict, or compare and contrast conflicting scientific theories. All of these tasks require you to think critically because you need to go beyond memorization to applying or synthesizing the information.
- **Reason 4: College Classes Have Few Safety Nets.** Usually on the first day of a college class your professor will give you a syllabus. The syllabus outlines the course requirements and also generally tells you how your grade will be determined. Something that will become clear as you read your syllabus is that many of the safety nets that you had in high school, such as extra credit assignments or other bonuses to improve your grade, have all but disappeared. This means your course grade will be determined by the grade you earn on a limited number of tests or papers. So you'll need to give every assignment your best effort.
- **Reason 5: College Requires You to Study Longer and More Effectively.** You will probably find out pretty quickly that both the amount of time you put into studying and the way you study in college will have to change if you want to earn high grades. Many of our students tell us that they really didn't have to study in high school. "Studying" was reading over a study guide or reading over class notes for about a half-hour. Many students begin college without ever having to read their texts, and some have never taken essay exams. It is important to realize that studying in college requires not only more time, but also having a variety of study strategies at your disposal.
- **Reason 6: College Provides Fewer Chances for Evaluation.** In high school, it may have seemed as though you were always taking tests or writing papers. Chances are, you were tested over small amounts of material (only one or two chapters) and you had numerous chances for evaluation. If you did poorly on one test, you could usually make it up on the next one. In college, on the other hand, you will probably have fewer chances to be evaluated. At first, the idea of taking fewer tests per course in a term may seem appealing. But think about the big picture. If you have only three exams, you are going to be held responsible for much more information at one time than you were in high school. What at first seems to be an advantage—fewer tests, homework that goes unchecked, a longer period of time between exams—may actually work against you, unless you know how to stay on top of things.
- **Reason 7: College Gives You Great Freedom and Greater Responsibility.** Legally, you become an adult at age 18, which just happens to be about the same time you

graduate from high school. In college, no one makes you stay on top of your schoolwork or keeps track of your comings and goings or checks to see that you have done all of your reading and studying before heading out for a night on the town. This freedom comes with a tremendous amount of responsibility. It is your responsibility to prioritize the tasks you *have* to do against the things you *want* to do.

- **Reason 8: College Provides Greater Anonymity.** If you attend a moderate-sized to large college or university, you will be faced with being somewhat anonymous—and in some cases, very anonymous. By *anonymous* we mean that you can become just another face in the crowd. Most of you probably attended high schools where you got to know your teachers and your classmates fairly well. Your teachers not only knew your name, but also were concerned about whether or not you were learning and understanding the information presented in their classes. For the most part, in college, your professors have few opportunities to get to know you well. All is not lost, however. Most of the time, students are anonymous only if they want to be, regardless of how large or small their campus may be. You can become more than a “face” to your professors by making appointments to talk with them. You can join clubs that have faculty sponsors. You can take part in a variety of campus activities with other students who share your interests.
- **Reason 9: College Requires You to Be Proactive.** Being proactive means that it’s your responsibility to take the initiative in a variety of situations. In high school, either your teachers or your parents may have insisted that you get help if you were having problems with a particular course. And you may have followed their advice reluctantly. In college, however, it becomes your responsibility to know the resources that are available on your campus, so that if you do run into difficulties or need the services of some office, you’ll know how to find the information you need or where to go for assistance. If you are proactive and find out a little about them before you need their services, it will save you time in the long run. You don’t want to wait until you are in dire need of these resources before seeking them out. Some of these services may include:
 - **The Library.** In addition to providing resources, the library is a great place to study, to do research online, or to meet your study group. Most campuses have library orientations that help students learn to navigate large and complex systems.
 - **The Learning Center.** The campus learning center can be an excellent source of assistance because most offer a variety of services, from academic counseling to assistance with writing, studying, and mathematics.
 - **Tutorial Services.** Like learning centers, most campuses offer tutorial services for a broad range of courses. Generally, tutoring is provided by undergraduate students who earn top grades in the areas in which they tutor. This tutoring is usually free, but appointments are often necessary.
 - **Health Services.** Because getting sick enough to need the services of a doctor is inevitable, know where your campus health facility is and what the rules are to be able to see a medical professional. Don’t wait until you feel as if you’re on your deathbed. Find out where to go and what to do early on.
 - **Counseling Center.** More and more students are enlisting the help of a trained professional from their campus counseling center. If you find that you have problems that are getting in the way of your academic success, you should seek out help. Sometimes talking with a friend works. If it doesn’t, find out more about the services offered through the counseling center.
 - **Student Center or Student Union.** On most campuses, the student center is the hub of campus where you can meet friends, but most also offer a wealth of resources. Sometimes campus organizations and clubs have offices in the student center. Social event and concert tickets can be purchased there. You can get general information about the campus, such as bus schedules, campus maps, and event

schedules. Often, the campus bookstore is located in or near the student center.

When you don't know where else to turn, the student center is a good place to start if you need information about your campus.

- 4 So, college is different from high school in many ways. You must think differently about the expectations, learning conditions, level of responsibility, and studying methods than you did in high school. This is not bad. It simply means you will have to make some transitions in the way you learn and study in order to be successful.

What Special Situations Can You Expect to Encounter Sooner or Later?

- 5 Now that you have seen some of the ways in which high school and college differ, let's examine this transition from another perspective. We'll present eight situations that most college students will encounter sooner or later, and we'll also examine how you might cope with or handle each situation. All of these situations will be addressed again throughout this text, so you will be able to explore these ideas in greater detail.

- 6 In a perfect world, none of the following situations would occur. All students would go to class every day, distribute their study time over several days, stay on top of their reading, and make the dean's list every term. However, the world of college is an imperfect place. So, let's discuss some of the situations that you might encounter in college, some for which you might not be prepared. As you read each section, think about how you might handle the situation and what additional information might help you cope better.

- **Professors Who Take Roll.** Someone may have told you that the only time you really *have* to show up for classes in college is on test days, or that if you can get the information on your own, professors don't really care whether you are in class. Although many professors don't take attendance, eventually you will run across one who does, and, in reality, most actually do want you present in class. Many professors truly believe that attending class will help you learn. We believe this as well; so even if your professor does not take roll, it's still a good idea to attend class.
- **An Early Morning Class.** Most college students are not morning people. In fact, there's even scientific evidence to indicate that the biological clocks of college-aged people are preset to stay up late at night and to sleep late in the morning. However, the college officials who determine the times of class periods evidently are unaware of this research. Unfortunately (for most college students), a time will come when you will have to take an early morning class. If you do have that early class, try to juggle the rest of your schedule so that you can go to bed earlier than usual. Additionally, try to take one that meets only two or three days a week, thus allowing you a little more flexibility on other days.
- **A Course or Professor You Don't Particularly Like.** It's sad but true—there will be courses you don't like, and professors with whom you fail to connect. Even if you have a wide range of interests and you can get along well with almost everyone, at some point you'll probably have to make it through a rough class. You can take one of two routes when this happens.

Route A: You can think of every excuse imaginable not to do the work or go to class. You can blame your attitude on the professor or the boring material that you are expected to learn.

Consequences of Route A: You could receive a poor course grade, develop a bad feeling about yourself, or have to work doubly hard in another course to bring up your overall grade point average.

Route B: Acknowledge that you really don't care much for the course or the professor. It's one course, however, and you can make it through. Study with

someone who seems to like the course. Try to motivate yourself with small rewards. Tell yourself that this is temporary and the course will soon be over.

Consequences of Route B: Perhaps you will not earn an A in the class but you will emerge with your ego and your grade point average intact.

- **Cramming for a Test.** Imagine you have a big test in a couple of days (or worse yet, tomorrow) and you've done very little preparing. Now it's *cram time!* Personally, we've never met a student who didn't have to cram at some time. And cramming occasionally probably isn't a horrible thing, but it shouldn't become the way you live your academic life. If you have to cram occasionally, try to use the strategies you'll learn in this book to study to your advantage. And, as soon as possible, regroup so that you don't have to cram again.
- **Difficulty Maintaining Motivation for Academics.** Most college students experience motivation problems at some time or other. It usually doesn't last long, but for some students the decline in motivation is long enough and severe enough to interfere with their schoolwork. Other students experience a lull in motivation in just one class—generally a class with which they are experiencing difficulty. Still others begin the term with good intentions, yet quickly develop general motivation problems in every class. If you are having motivation problems, try setting some specific, reachable goals. Whether your lack of motivation is concentrated in one particular course, occurs at a specific period of time (such as around midpoint), or is generalized across all your academic courses, goal setting can help you stay focused and improve your motivation to learn.
- **Personal Problems and/or Illness.** No one plans on getting sick or having serious personal problems, but at some point you will likely experience both predicaments. However, there are some things you can do to salvage even a bad situation. First, as you plan your schedule for the term, build in some flexibility, just in case. If everything goes according to plan, the worst thing that can happen is you'll have some extra time to study, work, or play. Second, as mentioned earlier, use the services that are available on your campus. Third, develop a set of reliable peers who can be there for you in times of illness or other problems. Often, knowing that some other person can help you makes all the difference in the world.
- **Frustration.** It's a given that you will experience frustrations and stressful situations, but it's how you deal with them that makes the difference. Try not to let things build up to the point where you can't cope. As much as possible, deal with frustrations as they arise. Evaluate all the alternatives. And try not to become stressed by things you have no control over. So... take a walk. Go work out. Spend a few minutes venting to a friend. In time it will work out.
- **Juggling Too Many Responsibilities.** College students tend to be busy people—going to class, studying, attending meetings, working, exercising, taking part in campus organizations, and the list goes on. Add to all of this family responsibilities, social interactions, and some good old time to play, and you can easily become overcommitted. Although you certainly want to get the most out of your college experience, try to think about how new responsibilities will affect you. Remember that your primary job in college is to be a student. Then you can ask yourself: "What other kinds of responsibilities can I take on?" Will you have so much to do a month from now that you will constantly feel stressed out and frustrated? If you can think about this in advance and learn to say "No" when you find yourself maxing out, you will be able to keep all those balls in the air and be a much happier student.
- **Having Problems Organizing Course Materials Even If You Are a Very Organized Student.** With all of the advances in technology, more and more professors are making students responsible for a wider variety of materials from a broader range of sources. Rarely will you have just a textbook in your courses. The more likely scenario is that you will be responsible for information from not only one or more texts and lectures, but also any or all

of the following: WebCT, CD Rom supplements, on-line materials, workbooks, computerized homework assignments, and lab manuals. Being responsible for learning materials from a variety of sources in the same course requires you to keep up with a lot. You may have to be creative and find new ways to organize so that you can keep it all straight.