How to do Really Well in College

A Guide for Freshmen

Copyright © (1996-2004) SUNY Oswego Honors Program

Contents

Introduction

For several years, I've been looking for a book for my freshmen on how to succeed in college. It turns out that there are a lot of them, but none of them do quite what I had hoped they would. They talk about study techniques, using the library, keeping a project calendar -- that sort of stuff. Now, all of this is useful, but it doesn't get to the heart of what I think students need to know in order to really thrive in college -- not just survive. So, what follows is based on my almost-thirty years as a professor, my work with students, and my discussions with other professors.

None of my ideas are new, and none of them are original with me. In fact, they're probably things you already know. But I encourage you to pay attention; the ideas are important. Why? Well, there are two levels of answer to that. At the philosophical level, whatever is worth doing is worth doing well. Otherwise, don't bother. Surely you have better places than here to hang out. If you don't want to be in college, get a job. That way, you'll be earning money instead of spending it. And when you're ready for college, come back. In other words, wherever you are, be there. Be committed to it. And be determined to do the best job you can do. Otherwise, you're wasting your time.

At the practical level, following my advice will lead you to a better job when you graduate. Notice I didn't say "may" lead you. Will lead you. Guaranteed. Despite what you may have heard, there are jobs out there. Yes, they are tougher to get than in the past, but that's the point. Who do you think is more likely to get a good job: the person who wanders through college in a haze and graduates with a 2.4 GPA or the person who works hard and graduates with a 3.4 -- or better? Sure it's possible to graduate from college without much effort, but

then you'll be like most other college graduates: half-educated and worried about getting a job. So I guess I'm back to my original point. If you're going to do a half-assed job in college, why bother? You're here; do it well.

If you follow the advice below, you will accomplish three things. First, you will learn more and get a better education than someone who doesn't follow the advice. Second, you will convince your professors that you care about what they teach. Third, you will convince your professors that you care about your own education. Why do all this? Simple: at the end of the semester your professors give you grades. Professors give better grades to students they think are working hard and doing their best. This won't move you from a D to a B, but it may move you from a C+ to a B-. Professors care about students who care. If you don't care about what I teach or even about your own education, why should I care about your grade? It's simple self-preservation: be nice to your professors and there's a real good chance they'll be nice to you. At the very least, don't do anything to draw attention to yourself in a negative way. In other words, don't piss-off your professors. Your fate is in their hands.

Go to Class

Probably the most basic thing you can do to thrive in college is go to class. Go to all your classes. Every day. Pretty obvious, huh? But you'd be amazed at how many students don't do it. I take attendance (I'll tell you why in a moment), but my colleagues who don't tell me that they always have large numbers of students who just don't attend, students with ten or more absences in their courses every semester. And then, they tell me, these students can't understand why they don't do well!

Most professors aren't trying to make their courses a mystery. They're trying to give you new information, new ideas, new ways to look at things. When you go to class every day, you get all the information, all the ideas, all the ways to look at things. You get a sense of your professors' expectations and perspectives; you begin to understand where they're coming from and what they want from you. All this is vital if you're to thrive in college -- and it isn't something that anyone is likely to tell you directly. It's something you have to be in class to pick up. You can't get it second-hand.

There's another good reason to show up: it will convince the professor that you care about your education. Really. This doesn't mean that you have to suck up to the professor in class. Just show up. (It will also convince your professor that you respect him or her, which can only work in your favor.) At the end of the semester, if your professor sees that you've missed eight or ten classes, he or she is going to assume that you didn't care. As I said before, if you don't care, why should they care? This will affect your grade. Depend on it. (Bear in mind that

perfect attendance won't make up for rotten work, but it might make the difference between failing and just passing. Professors are likely to give a break to a student who's made the effort; they'll never give a break to someone they see as a screw-off.)

If you're in class every day, you don't have to rely on someone else's almost-certainly-incomplete notes. You get to hear it all, from the horse's mouth, as it were. You get to hear about exams and papers and ask questions if you don't understand. You can't do that if you're not there. Sometimes professors give hints and suggestions about what to study or what to focus on for exams; in fact, some professors do this to reward those students who do come to class regularly. So, go to class. It pays off. As Woody Allen said, "Ninety percent of success in life comes from just showing up." The same is true for college.

I want to emphasize that going to class isn't just a matter of convenience on your part. It's a matter of necessity. If you were in the labor force and you missed ten or twelve days of work in a three-month period, you'd get fired. Knowing that, you'd pull yourself out of bed except in the direst of circumstances. Do that in college. Haul your tired, hung over, wheezy head out of the sack and get to class. Will you learn anything that day? Maybe not -- but maybe yes. And the professor will be impressed as hell.

And get to class on time. Few things irritate a professor more than a student who's chronically late. It's disrespectful of the professor and of the other students -- even if that's not how you intend it. And it interrupts the flow of class. Late once in a while is understandable.

Late every other day is not. Parking problems? Bus problems? Car problems? Snow problems? Get up and get out early enough to deal with them. Keep your professors happy. Happy professors give you better grades.

Now, why do I take attendance? Some professors don't. Their attitude is: if students miss class, that's the students' loss. The only ones they hurt are themselves. If they can pass the tests without coming to class, great. I look at it differently. My view is that everyone in a class loses when students don't show up. Learning isn't just a matter of I-talk/you-take-notes; it's accomplished best in an atmosphere of exchange between students and professor -- and among students. If a lot of students don't show up, it's dispiriting for the ones who do. It's not education; it's note-taking. So, I require attendance. But, how well do students learn if you have to compel them to come to class? A helluva lot better than if they're not in class. Besides, regular attendance is a habit, and, just like other good habits, such as manners, people sometimes have to be dragged to it kicking and screaming to start with. That's OK; it gets easier before long. (As an aside, if you have a course where you can pass the tests without coming to class, how much do you really learn? How much do you care about the subject? How much do you respect the professor? Honestly. I know it's probably a cheap, easy grade, but, jeez, what a waste of your time and education!)

Pay Attention

OK, you're in class every day. Now what? Well, being there is better than not being there, but being there and paying attention is better still. Listen to what the professor says; think a bit; take notes. I don't really need to explain why paying attention in class is a good thing, do I? I mean, if you've gone to all the trouble of going to class, you might as well be part of it, as long as you're there anyway. Still don't understand why you should pay attention? You did just read "Go to Class", didn't you?

Some other tips about paying attention. Don't sleep in class. Don't read the newspaper in class. Don't balance your checkbook in class. Don't study for another class in this class. Don't sit and giggle with your friends. Or chat constantly. Or pass notes. This isn't middle school! If you want the professor to treat you like an adult, act like an adult. The object is to get the professor to respect you as a serious student. So act like a serious student.

(What students don't seem to grasp is that you can see everything -- everything -- from the front of the classroom. If you've never stood in front of a classroom, try it someday. It's a very revealing experience.)

In a large classroom, don't sit in the back row. Professors have learned over the years that students who sit in the back row are goof-offs. You know, the guys who still think it's cool to wear their baseball caps backwards, the ones who sit there and guffaw or fall asleep or wander in and out to go to the bathroom. If you sit in the back row of a large classroom, for whatever innocent reason, your professor will assume you are a doof. Do not do this!

Instead, sit in the middle of the classroom -- or towards the front, gaze attentively at the professor, chew thoughtfully on your pen, take perceptive notes, nod as if you're really caught up in the discussion, laugh at the professor's jokes, and volunteer the occasional insightful answer. Do this and the professor will get to know you in a positive way. Sitting in the middle of the classroom also means that there's a greater chance that you really will pay attention.

(And don't feel compelled to answer every question or to ask a question about every point the professor raises. Professors aren't real crazy about students who monopolize the discussion. It doesn't show us that you're bright; it shows us that you don't know when to shut up. So, think before you speak. Engage brain before putting mouth in gear.)

Paying attention also means paying attention to the course syllabus or outline that the professor is supposed to hand out the first day of class. (If a week goes by and the professor still has no syllabus, get out of the class, unless you have a very high tolerance for ambiguity. This professor is not someone who's well-organized, and you and the other students are likely to be the ones who have to deal with the consequences.)

The syllabus is, in effect, a contract: it tells you what you can expect from the professor and what he or she expects from you. It should tell you what you'll read, what subjects the professor will cover, and when assignments are due. It should tell you how you'll be evaluated, how often you'll be evaluated, and about when during the semester you'll be evaluated. It should tell you the professor's attendance policy and anything else the professor thinks you should know right away. Read the syllabus carefully. If you're unclear about any aspect of it, ask the

professor immediately. (If you don't like the professor's policies, find a different section or a different course. If it's the only section of a required course, grimace and bear it.) And during the semester, consult your syllabi (plural of "syllabus") frequently. Professors assume that part of your job is to read the syllabus regularly, so your excuse of "I didn't know" or "You didn't tell us in class" isn't going to win you much sympathy.

Study

Obviously. The big question here is: How much should you study? Well, I've heard two rules of thumb. One rule says you should spend two hours studying outside of class for every hour you spend in class. If you have 15 hours of classes a week, you should plan on 30 hours of studying a week. If you study five nights a week -- leaving yourself two nights a week for, uh, relaxation -- that's six hours of studying a night.

The other rule was my father's. (He gave me a lot of advice before I went to college, some good, some bad. This one proved to be rock solid.) College is your job for four years. A job takes 40 hours a week. If you spend 15 hours a week in class, that leaves 25 hours a week that you should be studying -- because it's your job. (My father also used to say that if I didn't like the job of going to college, I could always quit and find another job.) Five nights a week, five hours of studying a night.

(I talk about studying at night in all this discussion, because it seems to me that that's when most serious studying is likely to take place. On the other hand, a colleague pointed out to me that a lot of studying can be done during the day -- before, between, or immediately after classes, while material is still fresh in your mind. I agree, provided that the block of time is large enough -- at least one full class period. A half hour isn't enough. You can reduce, perhaps significantly, the number of night hours you need to study, if you can effectively manage some daytime hours. Non-traditional students do it all the time.)

Five hours. Six hours. That's a lot. But is it really? Compared to the amount of studying you probably did in high school, it is. But -- repeat after me -- this isn't high school. As I said earlier, it's easy to sleep-walk through college, doing as little work as possible. But the payoff is a poor education and a mediocre GPA. If you think about it for a moment, five or six hours of studying a night is only an hour or so per day per subject. At the end of each week you will have studied each subject for five or six hours. That's not excessive. Just keeping up with your reading, your studying, and all your other work -- and keeping up is essential -- should take you about five to six hours a night. (OK, maybe three to four on some nights.) If it's taking you only one or two hours every night, you aren't doing it right.

And I'm talking about serious studying here, not just sitting with your book open on your lap staring at it. Studying, not homework. Homework screams, "High school!" Homework is a task you do to keep your teacher happy. Studying is something you do for yourself. Studying means thinking about what you're reading, thinking about your lecture notes. My dictionary defines studying as "applying one's mind purposefully to the acquisition of knowledge." I couldn't have put it better myself.

I don't have a lot of tips about study techniques, because I think that different things work for different people and different courses call for different techniques. But I do have a couple of ideas that you might find useful. First, I think it's a bad move to take notes on your readings then study only these notes. What if you've missed an important point? What if you've misinterpreted a point? What if you've missed the point of the reading altogether? If all you read are your notes, you'll never know. You'll never have a chance to get it right.

You'll be studying something filled with holes and errors. So, stick with the original sources.

(Bear in mind that I'm referring to notes you take on your readings, not your class notes. Do study your class notes. Class notes orient you to your professor's "take" on the course material. Does your professor accept what the assigned reading says? Does he or she disagree with it? Have new ideas that enlarge on it? Your class notes can answer these questions. Successfully completing a course means more than just mastering the readings; it means understanding the professor's point of view. You get this in class; you learn it from your class notes. Class notes allow you to compare your understanding with your professor's. It will become quickly apparent if you're off on the wrong track. Also, class notes are where you can write down other students' questions and the professor's answers -- valuable stuff to have when you're trying to study for a test at 11 p.m.)

Second, here's how I focus my attention when I'm studying -- when I need to read material that, let's admit it, isn't always fascinating. Select a section to read, say a chapter in a book. Read through it once -- straight through -- trying to understand the author's main idea or ideas. Get a sense of the whole. Ask yourself, "What is the author trying to get me to know here?" If you come across a word you don't understand, look it up in the dictionary -- buy a dictionary if you don't already own one -- but otherwise, read the section straight through. Now, right after reading it this first time, read it again, this time with a pencil in hand. Underline what you think are the important points. It may be that you underline a sentence or two in each paragraph, or you may go for several pages without having to underline anything. Your goal is to underline enough to help you make sense out of the

material at a later date, just by reading what you underlined. You should underline whatever you think will help you remember the author's ideas later, without having to reread everything. After you've read the material this second time, go on to something else. A few days later, go back and reread just the material that you underlined. If this doesn't recall the author's ideas, read beyond your underlining and underline other things. Now ask yourself, if my professor asked me what the one or two most important ideas are in what I read, what would I say? Take a highlighter and mark those ideas. Then ask yourself why you think those are the most important ideas.

What have you accomplished with all this? Well, you've studied the material -- not just read it -- at least three times. Each time you've studied it, you've looked at it in a more focused way. You've thought about the material. You've examined it in the context of some of your other work. And, when it comes time to study for the test, you don't have to read everything all over again -- or desperately cram to get it all in. All you have to do is review your underlining and your highlighting. Try this method. It may work for you.

(After a colleague read the section above, she wrote: "Your advice about how to study makes a great deal of sense. It might be useful, however, to consider what this study regimen means for the slow or poor reader. Something has to happen or this student is in big trouble. In courses that demand a lot of reading, such a student may have difficulty reading all the material once, let alone doing what you recommend. If a slow or poor reader is going to study as you say it should be done, he or she is going to have to devote many more hours to studying than the average you suggest and probably will need to make greater effort all around to succeed. That person will have to (1)

allot more time to studying; (2) take a study skills/critical reading course; or even (3) take fewer courses per semester until he or she builds up his or her reading skills.")

Follow the Rules

This means that you hand in your assignments on time. Not a day late; not an hour late; not after class if they're due in class. On time. If your professor says no hats in class or no chewing gum, remove your hat and your gum before coming to class. If your professor holds office hours only on Mondays from 2 to 4 p.m., go on Mondays from 2 to 4; he or she won't be there on Tuesdays. If your professor wants your papers typed, get them typed. If your professor wants your report on green paper, do it on green paper. One more time: your goal is to keep the professor happy.

Let me give you some insight into the professorial mind. Most professors love teaching. They really do. (They may not be good at it, but most do enjoy it.) But many professors, if not most, hate correcting papers and exams. We have to correct them; it's part of our job. We do it at home, at night and on weekends, when we'd really rather be doing almost anything else, like working in the garden, playing with our kids, surfing the net, reading a mystery novel, playing tennis, watching TV. Hell, I'd rather watch Barney than correct papers and exams. In other words, at best it is not a task we come to with a light heart.

When we ask you to type your papers, to set them up in certain ways, to use certain formats, whatever -- it's often to make them easier for us to correct. Picture this: your professor has a stack of 60 papers to read and one of them -- against the professor's rules -- is handwritten. It sticks out like an elephant at a tennis match. The professor thinks, "Everyone else in the class managed to follow the rules except for this one idiot." The professor is not happy. The professor is not going to be

happy when he or she grades this paper. Do you want to be the one idiot the professor is steamed at? Bad idea. Keep the professor happy. Or, as I put it before, don't draw negative attention to yourself.

When you follow the rules, it makes your life easier -- for example, no lowered grades because of missed deadlines -- and it makes your professor's life easier. Easier means unhassled. Unhassled professors mean unhassled students.

Think about professors this way: they were undergraduates once. They know all the student tricks and excuses, because they've been teaching for a while -- and because they used them themselves. Here's what it means: you can't get away with much, and you don't fool them for long. Moreover, professors are usually highly dedicated to their work. They've had to be; it takes as much time and effort to become a professor as it does to become a physician. Consequently, they respect students who demonstrate diligence, reliability, intelligence, hard work, and good sense. In other words, students who give it their best effort.

Read

Read your assignments, of course. As important, read the newspaper. Read magazines. Read mysteries. Read science fiction. Read romance novels. Read anything, but read.

Read the *New York Times*. Read the *Wall Street Journal*. Read *USA Today*. Read *Newsweek*. Read *Time*. Read *Sports Illustrated*. Read *People*. Read Michael Crichton. Read Stephen King. Read Tom Clancy. Read John Grisham. Read Danielle Steele. Read anything, but read.

Reading for pleasure -- a contradiction in terms for some people, I realize -- has a number of benefits, most of them unintended. First, you learn a lot of information by reading for pleasure. For example, you learn about the CIA from Tom Clancy. You learn about the law from John Grisham. You learn about -- well, I'm not sure what you learn about from Danielle Steele, but I'm sure you learn something. The point is that you pick up a lot of information and ideas painlessly by reading for pleasure.

Second, you learn how to write well by reading for pleasure. Although John Grisham isn't Ernest Hemingway, most people who get published for a living write better than the rest of us. By reading a lot, you soak up good writing, clear writing, polished writing, concise writing, effective writing. The very day I was writing this section, I picked up the current *Time* magazine. Almost immediately I came to an article on a rash of teenage suicides in California. It begins like this:

If one were to do the senseless thing -- to take the path of least resistance, to give it all up for the void -- it is easy to see why one might choose to go by leaping from the cliffs of Point Fermin. There is

not much in the way of natural beauty in the port town of San Pedro, at the southern end of Los Angeles. Almost everywhere, the views of the Pacific are cluttered by the oil tankers, the container ships, the canneries and the flaming smokestacks that provide the jobs in this working-class town. But at Point Fermin there is a pretty little park where one can hop the crumbling concrete fence, stand at the edge of the cliffs, shut out the life-affirming sounds of dog walkers and picnickers and gaze out upon the Pacific without seeing any of that industrial ugliness. There is a clear view of nothingness from here, and that view is stunning. (Elizabeth Gleick, *Time*, July 22, 1996, p. 40)

This is excellent writing, by turns poetic ("to take the path of least resistance, to give it all up for the void") and gritty ("the oil tankers, the container ships, the canneries and the flaming smokestacks that provide the jobs in this working-class town"). The author lulls you with the first sentence, moves you along with the second, wakes you with the third, calms you with the rather long fourth one, then bangs it home at the end. Reading for pleasure exposes you to writing like this and helps improve your own writing.

Third, reading for pleasure gets you into the habit of reading. It makes reading for assignments in college easier; it makes reading for work after college easier. Reading is an acquired skill and -- as with any other skill -- practice improves it.

Fourth, reading for pleasure relaxes you. It unwinds you from the day's work and stress. It detaches you from your immediate concerns. Believe it or not, reading for pleasure for about a half hour before you get to bed helps you sleep better. Try it for a week or so. You might get to like it.

Look at Your Grades

All through the semester, your professor is giving you grades. In some courses, you get a grade as often as every week; in some you get a grade only at mid-semester and at the end; still others fall somewhere between these two extremes. (I'm told that some professors give students no indication of their progress during the semester. If by about mid-semester you have no idea how you're doing, ask your professor. If you don't get a satisfactory answer, see your Dean immediately. [By satisfactory answer, I don't mean that you necessarily like your grade, but that your professor did give you an idea of how you're doing rather than an "I don't know."]) Whichever is the case, you do get grades periodically, and you need to pay attention to them and understand what they mean.

Here's a conversation of the sort I've had many times over the years with students.

Me: How are you doing in math?
Student: Pretty good.
Me: How good is "pretty good"?
Student: B-, C+.
Me: Have you taken any tests in math yet?
Student: Yeah.
Me: What were your grades?
Student: Uh, a C- and two Cs.

Big news now: a C- and two Cs are not pretty good nor do they average out to B-/C+ . I find that most students tend to overestimate their grades, because they think they'll pull it out at the end. While

this is admirably optimistic, many students assume it will just happen. You need to be realistic about what your grades mean in order to do something about them.

Let me try and explain grading to you. Grades are part of a process of evaluation. When your professors give you an exam or ask you to write a paper (or whatever your professors do), we are, in effect, asking you to show us what you know, to demonstrate how well you understand the material. Your work on the exam or paper or whatever is your chance to show us what you do know, to demonstrate how well you do indeed understand the material. It's your opportunity to shine. Then, we evaluate your work and give you feedback on it. That feedback is your grade. Your grade is a message from your professor to you, a message that says, "This is how well you really do -- or really don't -- understand this stuff." It is our attempt to communicate our evaluation to you.

Now, there are three ways to respond to that grade. One way is to shrug and assume that that's the best you can do -- which seems to me to be selling yourself short. There's always room for improvement, especially if the grade wasn't a very good one. Another way is to say something like, "A C-! Screw that! I knew this stuff better than that!" and throw the paper down in disgust at the professor's inability to recognize your brilliance. While it's true that a few professors grade unfairly, for whatever reason, if you got a grade not to your liking, it's probably because of something you did -- or didn't do. Blaming your professors may make you feel better in the short term; it certainly relieves you from having to do any additional work. But it won't raise your grades.

(Or how about, "I knew it; I just couldn't communicate it very well." I've found, when I dig a bit with students who say this, that they really didn't know it. They have ideas in their heads that are vaguely accurate but insufficiently thought out. Knowing which lane to run in isn't the same as being able to finish the race. Still, communication sometimes is a problem. If that's really the case, learn how to write better. Your good ideas aren't worth a damn thing if all they do is sit in your head. You need to be able to communicate them to others in some meaningful way.)

The third way is to go to your professor and ask, "Why did I get this grade? What did I do wrong, and what can I do to improve? " (Notice that I didn't suggest you ask, "Why did you give me this grade?" As professors are fond of saying, we don't give you grades. You earn them. In other words, you are responsible for the grades you get, not your professors. This is a good thing to remember.) Rarely have I seen a professor who won't try to help a student who comes for help. (Something else to learn: sometimes, professors can't meet with you at the exact moment you want them to. "Can you come back and see me next week?" isn't a blow-off. Ask when next week would be a good time, then keep that appointment.) Even if talking to the professor -- after each exam or paper, if necessary -- doesn't improve your grades during the semester, professors are impressed with students who try hard, who work hard to get a handle on their difficulties. This may make the difference between a C+ and a B- at the end of the semester. "Hey, this kid really plugged away. That's worth something."

Several pointers here. First, before you go in to discuss your paper/exam/whatever with your professor, reread it carefully. Pay attention to the professor's comments, and try to figure out for

yourself what went wrong. Was your work incomplete? Was your information incorrect? Was your answer unresponsive to the question asked? Professors hate it when a student comes in with a paper covered with comments and says, "I don't understand how I got this grade."

Second, unless you're absolutely sure, don't make the mistake of saying to the professor, "You never covered (or assigned) this material." Check with some classmates first. If they all knew about it, you should have too. Yet this happens to professors all the time. We then wind up pointing out that the assignment was on the syllabus or that the material was discussed when the student was absent or that the question was covered in the book.

And third, never go to discuss your grade with your professor when you're angry or upset. You won't be getting your concerns across to the professor nor listening to what he or she has to say. That's why I never discuss exams or papers with students on the day I give them back. Everyone needs time to think about their work clearly and a bit objectively.

I've discovered over the years that most students have very little idea about what their grades mean and almost no idea about how their professors think when they grade. A lot of students assume that everyone in a course starts off with an A. In other words, if you do minimally what's required of you, you'll receive an A; if you do less, then your grade goes down. This is not the way most professors think. Let me explain. (It's easier if I write in the first person here.)

In my mind, everyone starts out with a C. C is average. C is not a sin. My dictionary defines average as "typical, usual." It's about what I

expect most people to do. A C answer is adequate; an adequate answer is worth a C. If your answer contains nothing out of the ordinary, that's worth a C. Average. Adequate. OK.

As I read your answer, I adjust the grade up or down from C. If you put ideas together well, the grade goes up. If you make mistakes of fact, the grade goes down. If your examples are unusually useful, the grade goes up. If you don't cite the source for a quotation, the grade goes down. If you write clearly and concisely, the grade goes up. If your grammar is bad and your sentences are incomplete, the grade goes down. And so on. When I'm done reading, in my head I say something like, "Hmm. Very thorough. Really put a couple of ideas together from different readings without my pointing out the connection. Shows a lot of thought. Still, there were a couple of times when examples would have been helpful. B+."

So, a C is average. D means that you have some sense of the subject but didn't even put down what I expect most people to know. In other words, a start but very incomplete. An E means that you didn't show me any more understanding than someone who isn't taking the course. Or you didn't answer the question at all. B means that you're starting to give me some original insights, some original examples, some original way of connecting ideas. Better than what most people do. An A is about as close to perfect as I can expect from a student at your level in college: clear, complete, thoughtful. It's a B with no flaws. It has a coherent structure: it starts with a strong idea, it explains that idea and elaborates on it, then it draws sound conclusions. An A answer shows me that whoever wrote it is thinking, that they aren't just parroting material back to me, that they're taking what they've learned and can generalize from it or can apply it to a

situation we've never discussed in class or can relate it to seemingly unconnected material. An A answer doesn't merely address the question, "What's going on here?"; it always focuses on the more important question, "Why is this going on?"

Pick a Major You Love

Or at least like a lot -- because you're going to live with it for four years. Let's face it: too many students pick a major because they think it will get them a job. So they go into something that's hot right now, like computer science or marketing, because that's where the jobs are. Or because Mom and Dad encouraged them to. Or because their guidance counselor suggested it.

Bad reasons.

You won't excel at something you don't enjoy. You'll be unhappy, your work will be a struggle, and your grades will be mediocre. The mere fact that you get a degree in something doesn't guarantee you a job in that field. You'll be in competition with a lot of people who love the field, who excelled in it, and who got great grades. Who's an employer going to hire: the passionate person with a 3.5 GPA or the unhappy camper with a 2.6? (And if you don't love it as a student, what makes you think you'll be able to stand it as a job?)

"OK," I can hear you thinking, "now this guy is going to tell me about how it's supposed to be about knowledge for its own sake, about the love of learning, all that intellectual bull." Nope. I'm going to tell you about how to get a good job: pick a major you love. "Yeah right," you say. "How's a major like English or History or Theater going to get me any job, let alone a good one? I don't want to be a teacher and nobody can make a living in the theater." (Actually, with the spread of regional theater, more and more people make a living in the theater. If you try, you might succeed. If you never try, you'll never succeed.) The answer is that if you major in something you love -- be it English or Theater or

Zoology or Psychology -- you'll work hard at it, you'll do well in it, and you'll learn usable skills, skills that will help you get a good job. Skills like reading carefully and analytically, like writing clearly and precisely, like presenting yourself and your ideas forcefully and convincingly. Believe me, these are very marketable skills. Employers are desperate for college graduates who can think well, read well, write well, and present well. And you can learn to do all these things in any major. You can go into marketing with a degree in History. You can go to law school with a degree in Philosophy.

You may be skeptical about this advice, thinking, "What does he know? He's in an ivory tower. He's not out in the real world. He doesn't know what they want." But I do know, because it's my job to know. I talk to employers all the time. I send dozens of students into the work force every year, and they tell me all sorts of things. If this were bad advice, they'd be telling me. And since I've been doing this for thirty years, my perspective is probably broader than your parents' or your guidance counselor's.

For most students, college is probably the last time you won't have any serious responsibilities: no family to support yet, no loans to pay off yet, no job to worry about yet. Study what you love. Whether it's Computer Science, Chemistry, or Philosophy, go for it.

Be an Active Part of Your Education

Far too many students are the passive recipients of education -- empty vessels, so to speak. Teachers pour the information in, and the students pour the information back out when they have to. They never process it; they never

think about it; it just passes through. And that seems to be OK for many students. They're just not interested in putting much effort into their education. They got by this way in high school -- indeed, some of them thrived this way in high school because they were smarter than many of their classmates -- and they continue this pattern when they get to college. They take undemanding classes, do as little work as they can get away with, and take whatever grades they happen to get. They don't seem to care. (And a large number of them flunk out eventually.) Will they get jobs when they graduate? Sure, but probably not the jobs they want. As I've said before, a 3.6 beats a 2.4 every time.

I have observed over the years that students who take an active part in their education -- who are grabbed by a field of study, by an idea, by a topic, by a teacher, by the idea of learning, by something -- these are the students who are likely to do really well in college. In fact, if you asked me to pick the most important thing leading to college success, I'd pick motivation. Highly motivated, highly engaged students will do better than students who are smart but uninterested. Natural ability will take you only a short distance in college -- a lot less than it took you in high school. You need motivation (and hard work) to take you the rest of the way.

(Don't confuse hard work and motivation. It's possible to work hard at something you dislike or don't care about. Students do it all the time. For example, they pick a major that doesn't grab them, work hard at it, and still don't do well. If and when they switch to a major that they care about -- that engages them -- their grades go up dramatically -- and all the weight lifts off their shoulders. Hard work is necessary to do really well in college, but it's no substitute for being grabbed by your major.)

What do you do if you aren't an active part of your education? If you're just drifting along, not engaged, not grabbed? Well, the answer depends on the source of your boredom or indifference. (Note before we go any further that in college you will inevitably wind up taking some courses that are boring. There's no way around it. Just like some of the stuff you'll do in your job will be boring. Sorry.) If your major doesn't grab you, change majors -- as I talked about already. If college in general doesn't grab you, ask yourself: Would I be happier at another school? Would I be happier not being in college at all right now?

This is the time to be really honest with yourself. If the school you're at doesn't offer the major you want, or the friends you want, or the weather you want, or is too close to home, or isn't far enough from home, do what it takes to make the change. Get the best grades you can as soon as you can to impress the folks at the school you want to be at so they can admit you. Don't just drift where you are. Work to get out.

Or maybe you're bored because college isn't for you right now. That's OK. Lots of people need a break from school or time to think about their future. Finish the semester on the highest note you can, then go

where you want to be or to where you can sort things out. This may not please your parents, but that's OK too; they'll get used to it.

Bear in mind that leaving college comes at a price. You'll have to find a place to live, or your parents may want you to pay rent. You'll have bills to pay. You'll probably have to find a job -- and it probably won't be the job of your dreams. ("Would you like fries with that?") Maybe you'll get lucky and find a job you'll love right now, like helping to raise horses or working in a pharmacy. Maybe you'll get really lucky and be able to hitch-hike across the U.S. Whatever you do, keep two things in mind. First, millions of people never go to college and lead happy, productive lives. Second, if college is for you, you'll be back. It may take a while, and it may be on your dime and not your parents', but if and when you're ready, it will happen. And this time, you'll be doing something that grabs you.

Be Nice to Secretaries

It always amazes me how many students are rude to secretaries, janitors, and office staff. This is dumb. They are the gatekeepers to the world. They decide who gets in to see the Dean or the Department Chair and how long it takes to get that appointment. They can give you the help you need right away -- or they can simply follow the rules and keep your life on hold forever. Be rude or nasty to them, and you'll never get their help. And you will need their help sometime.

Remember, they don't make the rules; they don't even necessarily agree with all the rules they have to enforce. Hey, the lady in Financial Aid isn't the reason your loan didn't come through on time. Yell at her and she'll just shrug and say, "I'm sorry. There's nothing I can do." Want her to help you? Be nice to her and she might be willing to make a couple of phone calls on your behalf. Act like a jerk, get treated like a jerk. Act like a *mensch* (if you don't know what it means, look it up), get treated like a *mensch*. Remember, everyone else is rude to these people. If you're the smiling, understanding ray of sunshine in their day, they'll feel better and you'll get treated better.

Don't Pledge During Your First Semester

For the last dozen or so years I've been a member of our College's Reinstatement Committee. That's the group that hears the case of every student in the College who's flunked out and now wants to get back in. During this time I must have looked at the records of several thousand students. So, what I'm about to tell you is based on a lot of experience. Some of you won't like what I'm going to say, but -- like it or not -- it's the hard truth. Listen up.

Two things are most likely to flunk a student out of college. One is being a first-semester freshman. This isn't much of a surprise. You're away from the protection of home, you have new friends, new teachers, new demands on you, new academic challenges, new responsibilities, new expectations. You really have to remake your whole life. But most of us get over it. We learn how to manage our time, how to balance school and social life, how to get our laundry done -- whatever it takes. Fortunately, being a first-semester freshman is something most of us get through, but it does require some work, some focus, some attention on your part. Still, what I've learned is that first semester freshman year is a vulnerable time, and students who are distracted or overwhelmed are more likely to flunk out then than at any other time. (Note that I didn't say that most freshmen are likely to flunk out. What I did say is that, if you do flunk out, it's most likely to happen during your first semester.)

The other thing likely to flunk a student out is pledging a fraternity or a sorority. Most students find that their GPAs go down during the semester they pledge. For students with mediocre GPAs, pledging is a disaster. Don't just take my word for it. A national study ("Cognitive

Effects of Greek Affiliation During the First Year of College," by Pascarella, *et al*., *NASPA Journal*, Summer 1996) found that the GPAs of men who pledged went down by almost 8 percentage points and those of women who pledged went down by almost 5 percentage points. Perhaps a third of the cases that the Reinstatement Committee hears involve students who pledged.

Put pledging and being a first-semester freshman together and you have a lethal combination. It's not just skateboarding in traffic; it's skateboarding in traffic with a blindfold on! My very best advice: do not pledge during your first semester.

Now, I know that at rush the Greek organizations will tell you all kinds of things and make you all kinds of promises. They'll tell you that your grades are important to them. They'll tell you that your academic work comes first with them. They'll tell you you'll get a better job because being in a fraternity or sorority will plug you right into an alumni network.

Lies. All lies.

What pledging will do for you is deprive you of sleep, take you away from your academic work, and have you scrubbing someone's bathroom floor with your toothbrush at 3 o'clock in the morning. Fraternities and sororities -- with very, very few exceptions -- don't care a rat's butt for your GPA. They will not give you adequate time to study, and you will not be able to balance pledging and studying -- because you'll be spending most of your time pledging. It's tough to balance pledging and studying anytime during your college career; it's impossible to do it during the first semester of your freshman year. How can you balance something you barely know how to do yet? It's

like learning to be captain of a ship while running a six-week marathon around the deck. It can't be done. (Nor is anyone going to offer you a job just because you both happen to be in the same fraternity or sorority. Wake up; this is the 21st century: prospective employers are going to offer you a job because you can write well, have an excellent GPA, strong campus activities, and related internship experience.)

Every year I give this same advice in one form or another to incoming freshmen. And every year two or three or four ignore me. (Hey, it's advice, not a requirement.) Each one tells me that they know it'll be rough but they can handle it. After pledging I always ask if it worked out the way they thought, and every one of them -- every one, without exception -- has said the same thing: "I shouldn't have done it first semester freshman year." If your first-semester GPA is not what it should be, you'll be digging yourself a hole that'll take you another three semesters just to get out of. Please: finish your first semester in college before you pledge.

I want to be very clear where I stand on all this. I am not opposed to fraternities and sororities. When I was in college, I was a member of a national fraternity. (For the record, I pledged during the second semester of my freshman year.) I loved it. I met a lot of people, went to great parties, and did indeed make a couple of life-long friends (who were my friends before we pledged and would be my friends today even if we hadn't been in the fraternity together). The fraternity was a great place to be when I didn't have other things to do. So, if Greek life is for you, go for it. Just wait until after your first semester.

Get Involved

Some of the best times I had in college were spent outside the classroom. Some of the most important stuff I learned was outside the classroom. The same is true for everyone. (Notice I didn't say that I learned more outside the classroom than in. There's a lot to be learned outside of class, but if you're learning more outside than in -- except for studying, of course -- then you're doing something wrong. Either you haven't figured out what you're supposed to be getting from class -- which is partly your professor's responsibility but primarily yours -- or you haven't been putting in the necessary effort.)

So, get involved. Get involved with a club, with a sport, with campus politics, with the college newspaper, with the radio station, with the Women's Center, with whatever interests you. If something interests you but isn't available on campus, start it. It can be done. A few years ago, a couple of students were surprised to learn that the College didn't have a rowing team. So, they started one; it's still going strong today. Get involved.

Why? Because there are things to learn outside of class. Because college isn't just about studying; it's about becoming a well-rounded person, an interesting person with interests.

And because doing things outside the classroom will help you get a better job. Want a job working with kids? Do volunteer work with kids. Want a job working with victims of domestic violence? Volunteer at the local shelter. Want a job in computer graphics? Design Web pages for local charities. This stuff looks awfully good on a resumé. If you were an employer and had two equally-qualified candidates, which one

would you pick: the one who had already demonstrated their interest, seriousness, and ability or the one who had the opportunity to do volunteer work in the field but didn't? So, get involved.

Doesn't this contradict my advice about not pledging? No. You should get involved, but you shouldn't let any extra-curricular activity dominate your college life. (Remember: you're supposed to be in college primarily to study.) Pledging will take over your life; a sensible level of involvement won't.

Remember: You Are Not Entitled

Your professors have very few obligations to you. They are obligated to teach you their subject the best way they know how. They are obligated to show up at the appointed time, clean and sober, and teach the subject you signed up for. They are obligated to tell you at the beginning of the semester what the rules of the course are. They are obligated to stick to those rules. They are obligated to evaluate you fairly. They are obligated to make themselves available for a reasonable amount of time outside of class to provide you with help.

They are not obligated to be nice to you. They are not obligated to be your friend. They are not obligated to entertain you in class. They are not obligated to be around every time you'd like them to be.

You are entitled to the best education we know how to give you. You are entitled to our courtesy and our fairness. You are not entitled to anything else. Anything you get beyond that you need to earn. If you want favors from your professors -- and understand: anything beyond those few simple things is a favor -- be nice to them. If you want favors from clerks, secretaries, maintenance staff, RAs, residence hall directors, deans, whoever, be nice to them. That's not just the way it is in college; that's the way it is in life.

What do you do if your professor doesn't do the things he or she is obligated to do? If he or she misses a lot of classes? Or always comes to class late? Or doesn't hold office hours? Or evaluates you unfairly? Talk to the professor, as calmly as you can, and tell him or her about your concerns. If nothing changes, go up the chain of command: first to the professor's department chair, then to the appropriate dean.

Sometimes, these people can change things or at least solve your particular problem. But in the end, they can't make the professor into a nice person or even a fair person. (Still, it pays to talk to these administrators. A lot of well-argued, well-documented complaints about a professor are more likely to get acted on than just one or two.) Hence the advice: remember that you are not entitled. Your ability to get along is your best asset.

Some Final Words

Some people make a distinction between the academic world and "the real world," as in "You can't get away with that in the real world!" But, if you think about it for a moment, all the advice I've given you here is real world advice: go to class (to work), pay attention, study (that is, work hard), follow the rules, read, look at your grades (monitor your performance), do work that you love, be an active part of your work, be nice to secretaries, don't pledge during your first semester (give you work the attention it deserves), get involved, and remember that you aren't entitled. These tips apply as much to success in the "real world" as to success in the academic world. The point is that, in all these important ways, the academic world is the real world. What we expect from you here is real. College isn't Fantasy Land. It's a place where hard work pays off.

Still, in at least one fundamental way, college is different from the labor force. While it's true that, just like in the labor force, we want some results, some product, the emphasis in college is on the process, not on the product. College is about learning, about exploring, about becoming. It's about trying out new ideas, new ways of seeing things, new activities, new friends -- even a new you. It's about making mistakes and falling on your butt.

College is where you learn, maybe for the first time, that your actions have consequences -- that if you make a mess, you have to clean it up. If you break it, you own it. In college, you make choices and have to live with whatever results. Go to class or don't go to class. Study or don't study. Do your laundry or don't. You decide; you live with the consequences.

But college is also the last time when, if you screw up, there's someone to help you, someone to bail you out. Because that's what we do in college: help people learn. (But don't screw up too often. There's a limit to how many times you can say, "Gee, I didn't know I had to do that." People's sympathy runs out.) Nobody expects you to get through college without making any mistakes. What we do expect is that you'll learn from your mistakes. In fact, when a student comes to me with a problem, I usually ask him or her, "So what did you learn from this?"

Let me conclude with a thought from one of my colleagues. "The student who wants to thrive in college would be better off to treat it as the real world, but it would be a shame to never experiment or be so afraid of making mistakes that he or she never gets the chance to learn from his or her mistakes." Very true.

But Don't Take Just My Word For It

At the end of every Fall semester, I ask my freshman students to write an open letter to high school freshmen, giving them their best advice about college, based on their own experiences. The results are wonderful: thoughtful, useful -- and sometimes surprising. There isn't enough room to share them all with you, so I picked one that I think addresses not only what middle-school students need to know but also has some useful advice for you. It's by Jean Rinaldi, SUNY Oswego Class of 2000. (I've edited it for length.)

Based on my own experiences as a freshman in college, I would like to share with you my best advice about college and how to prepare for it. At this point, some of the information may seem unnecessary or useless, but I can safely say that it will make sense of the things you are soon going to be facing. . . .

It's very useful to know what you should bring with you to college, so I've made a list of the top 10 things I think you should have with you:

1. A computer
2. A writer's reference book and office supplies
3. An alarm clock and a watch
4. A variety of clothes for all weather conditions
5. A shower caddy, to carry all your bathroom supplies back and forth
6. Medicine for every kind of illness and a first aid kit for emergencies
7. A refrigerator
8. Lamps and plants (to brighten up the room)

9. Quarters for your laundry
10. A good attitude

Now let me tell you what to expect when you get to college. Expect anything and everything! Let me be more specific.

Don't expect to have the privacy you do at home. In college, you have to share a room with a roommate and a bathroom with a lot of other people. You also get to share your phone calls and a variety of other things you're used to having all to yourself. Get used to it.

Expect to deal with all kinds of people. There is a greater diversity of people in college than there was in high school. Among them will be people smarter than you, people who can't deal with their freedom, and people like yourself. For example, when I was in high school, I was in the group that always felt smarter than everyone else, and we were in competition even with each other. When I came to college, I suddenly met a lot of people who were a lot smarter than I ever was, and, at first, it was a little scary. But college isn't like high school, and one of the main ways it's not is that cliques are just not cool anymore. In college, you can have whatever friends you want, as many friends as you want; you don't have to deal with the same people every day. There are more people you can relate to and share your interests with. In high school, I felt like I was the only one in my class that didn't drink or do drugs. Now, in college, I know a lot of people who feel the same way, and it makes me feel a lot more comfortable.

The people who can't deal with their freedom are usually the ones running around in the halls when you're trying to sleep or study, the people who hardly ever show up to class and then try to copy other people's work, and the ones who end up "majoring" in something

other than an academic area. Try to avoid them, so that when they go down, you don't go down with them.

Don't expect to get everything done in one night. It's hard enough to get everything done even if you budget your time. It's impossible if you put things off.

Don't expect to get all the sleep you're used to. There are two main reasons that you'll get less sleep in college. First, you're going to have a lot more work to do in college than you had in high school. Especially a lot more reading, which takes a lot of your time. Second, there's a lot more going on at night in a dorm than in your own house. There are countless things to do in the dorm and on campus, and you'll want to be involved in many of them. Get involved, leave plenty of time for studying, and expect to get less sleep.

And expect diminishing health. You're going to be doing a lot more work, you're going to be getting less sleep, you're going to be running to and from classes in all kinds of weather, and as a result you're going to be getting sick a lot more often. So, my advice to you is to organize your time, get as much sleep as you can, and dress appropriately for the weather.

Not only are you going to have more work, but it's going to require a lot more thought on your part. In college you will still have classes that require memorization, but most of your classes will require you to think and to analyze. That doesn't mean that these classes are necessarily harder, but you may find them harder if you've never really had to think for yourself before. So, expect to study and learn differently.

You know all those college fees you've paid? Well, don't expect that they always guarantee you anything. Even if you paid a parking fee, don't expect that there will always be a parking space available. Also, don't expect that the student activity fee covers all student activities. And expect to stand in line a lot. The key is to check out wherever you're going ahead of time, get there early, and be ready when they are. You can expect to stand in line for books, loan approvals, meals, and anything else that applies to a lot of students at the same time.

Another thing you can expect is that being home won't be the same anymore. Once you have your freedom and can use it responsibly, you'll want to use it all the time. Your parents know you as their child; you know yourself as an independent person. The two sets of expectations don't always coincide. You need to make a distinction between what you can and can't do at home on the one hand, and what you can and can't do in college on the other. Expect that there will come a time when it's really nice to go home for a while, but you don't want to stay any longer than you have to.

Now, I would like to share with you some things you should and shouldn't do in college. Nothing here is too complicated, and once you read it you'll realize that it's merely common sense.

The first thing you should do, as soon as you get the opportunity, is walk through your schedule. It will be a lot easier and safer if you go with someone else. Perhaps you could go with your roommate and spend some time getting to know each other. What I mean by walking through your schedule is taking your schedule and walking around campus to find the locations of the buildings you are going to have classes in. It will give you a feel for the campus, it will make you a

little more comfortable, and it will be one less thing to worry about at the beginning of the semester.

Make an effort to get to know and communicate with your roommate. As with any relationship, the key is communication. Tell your roommate as soon as possible some things that bother you and allow him or her to do the same. Share your feelings about what you like to do, what you expect, what you want out of college, and so on. There is no way to be the perfect roommate or have the perfect roommate; the most you can do is try to respect him or her and hope that he or she does that for you. And if roommate problems persist, see your hall directory right away.

Thoroughly read each course syllabus you receive. Any question you have about a course is usually answered in the syllabus. A syllabus tells you about your professor's expectations for the course, the attendance policy, what books you are going to need, the grading policy, the assignments and when they are to be handed in, and when the exams will be. Take care of your syllabuses, because they're hard to replace and you'll be lost without them. For some classes, you will need to refer to your syllabus every day. For other classes, you will only need to refer to it periodically.

Wait to buy your books until after you go to class and get the syllabus. The bookstore has a list of the books you will need for each class, but that list is not definitive. Believe me, the last thing you want to do is stand in line to buy books and then stand in line to return the books you didn't need. As I said before, the entire student body is buying books the first week of classes, so be prepared to stand in line. Before you go to the book store, get all your syllabuses together and write down a list of all the books you need, including the author, publisher,

and edition. Have this list ready when you get into the bookstore and your search will be a lot easier. Try to buy used books if you can, because they're cheaper. However, make sure they are in good shape and that they are the right edition.

Learn how to use the campus computer system and learn how to send and receive e-mail. You don't need to know how the computer works or how to program it, but at least you should know how to use it for word processing. If you don't know how to use a computer, you can always get help in one of the computer labs on campus. If you don't get the help you need, try to find a friend or classmate who knows a little about computers; often, the help they give you will work best for you. Sometimes, the college offers free computer instruction during the year. If you can can get it, take it, because what you learn will be a great asset to you. You will spend a lot of time on the computer, no matter what your major is.

E-mail (electronic mail) is a fast and inexpensive way to communicate with almost everybody these days. E-mail is great for chatting with others about assignments, for talking with your friends at other colleges, for speaking with your family, and for communicating with your professors. Just be careful not to get so involved with e-mail that it leads to a lack of attention to your studies.

Get into your classes before you start joining organizations or looking for a job. Your classes, and the work associated with them, will take up a significant amount of your time. It is hard to make commitments to other things without really knowing how much time your class work and studying will take. My advice is to explore your opportunities your first semester and then start getting involved in your second semester. For example, I joined the College Biology Club the first chance I got,

and now I wish I hadn't joined so soon, because I haven't been able to make the commitment to it that I wanted to.

One small thing you can do that I have found to be very helpful is to set your clock ahead. Even if you only set it ahead five minutes, you have that much more time to get to class. I know it sounds weird, but it works.

Don't give in to peer pressure. Whatever you may think, you are not in college to drink and party. Using your weekends for the sole purpose of getting wasted is not only sad, it's stupid. Did you or your parents really take out all those loans and pay all that money so that you could spend the next four years with your head in the clouds, failing out of school? And to those of you who answered "Yes," I say "Grow up!" Have fun, but remember why you're supposed to be in college.

Record all the grades you get as you go along during the semester. It will help you evaluate your performance and study habits for each course.

Sit in the front of lecture halls. Sitting in front makes it easier to pay attention and see whatever is on the overhead projector. It is also easier to understand the point the professor is trying to make if you can see him or her. The people who sit in the back tend to fool around more and do worse in the course.

There are going to be a lot of people you have to deal with. Remember, it is your right to get a good education, but you are only one of thousands of students at this college. There are no special privileges that come with being a college student, so, when you have

to deal with all those other people, be assertive, not arrogant, persistent, not pushy. Most important, be nice.

These are the core rules of college: organize your time, don't procrastinate, go to class, be punctual, be alert, follow the rules, and, if someone offers you help, take it! The most important rule is: THINK. Trust your instincts; if you think it's wrong, don't do it. If you think it''s right, stick to it no matter what. You're on your own now, and that means that no one is there to think for you; now it is your turn to think for yourself. You'll be a lot better off if you take the time periodically to ask yourself what you're here. Although people will have a lot of different answers to that question, it seems to me that the most important answer is: because you've made it your job. It's your job to get up every morning, to go to class, to do your work, to do your best, and to do it all again the next morning.

And while you're in college, remember to have fun. You are going to find that there are times when, if you don't let go, you are going to lose your mind. There are tons of things you can do on and off campus to have fun. Just don't go overboard and let your fun interfere with your main purpose: to do your job.

Lastly, I want to share a poem I received through e-mail. I don't know who the author is, but I think it says a lot about what you will learn in college.

Before I came to college, I wish I had known . . .

That it didn't matter how late I scheduled my first class; I'd still sleep through it.
That I could change so much and barely realize it.

That you can love a lot of different people in a lot of different ways.
That if you wear polyester, everyone will ask you why you're so dressed up.
That every clock on campus shows a different time.
That if you were smart in high school, so what?
That I would go to a party the night before a final.
That labs take up more time than all my other classes put together.
That you can know everything and still fail a test.
That I could get used to anything I found out about my roommate.
That home is a great place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there.
That a lot of my education would be obtained outside of class.
That friendship is more important than getting drunk together.
That I would become one of those people my parents warned me about.
That free food until 10 really closes at 9:50.
That Sunday is a figment of the world's imagination.
That psychology is really biology.
That biology is really chemistry.
That chemistry is really physics.
That physics is really math.
That my parents would get smarter as I got older.
That it is possible to be alone, even when you are surrounded by friends.
That friends are what make this place worthwhile.

That a goodbye is necessary before we can meet again.

That meeting again is certain among friends.

About the Author

"How to Do Really Well in College" was written by Dr. Norm Weiner, with help from Dr. Ivan Brady, Dr. Irwin Flack, and Dr. Celia Sgroi. Dr. Weiner is Distinguished Service Professor and Director of the College Honors Program at the State University of New York, College at Oswego, where he has taught since 1971. He is also the recipient of the SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching. You can e-mail him at weiner@oswego.edu.

Credits

This information in this ebook was reprinted with permission from the source as stated below:

We put this document on the Web because we felt it would be of interest to other people. If you would like to download it, reproduce it, and distribute it for educational purposes (only), feel free to do so without restriction.

Source: The Honors Program of the State University of New York, College at Oswego

Copyright © (1996-2002) SUNY Oswego Honors Program

Final section: Jean Rinaldi, which she wrote (except for the poem, which, as she indicates, she got via e-mail)

Contact address is weiner@oswego.edu.

Resources (recommended by College Study Skills)

How to study

Studying For Exams Made Simple

Speed reading

16 Minute Speed Reading Audio Program

The New Science Of Speed Reading

Languages

Rocket French

Surefire German Learning Package

Spanish Help For Your Child

Memory

Memory Training For Students

Writing

Instant Recommendation Letter Kit

Instant College Admissions Essay Kit