Welcome to college! This will be a time of change for you, but be assured that many people are there to support you along the way. Knowing what to expect will be the first step in transitioning from your "other" life, whether high school, family, or the workforce, into a life of classes, readings, assignments, and growth. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce you to this new culture, to reveal the truths about higher education, to debunk the myths, and to prepare you for meeting the challenges that you will inevitably face. This chapter also provides you with information about what this
new environment will look like and what you can expect in terms of communication between the college and you.

More specifically, after completing this chapter you will be able to do the following:

- Identify the transitional issues of going to college.
- Describe the expectations of college.
- Explain the processes of college.
- List and define the resources on campus.

**TRANSITION**

**and Transformation**

This is an exciting time as you transition into college life. The definition of *transition* means a change, a modification, and you will find that going to college creates a change in you—and not just in your schedule and your workload. You will find that your concept of yourself will change, your relationships will change, and your outlook on your future will change. Each of these changes will require an investment of your time and reflection to make it happen. At the end of your college experience, you will find yourself *transformed* into a new person. You will most likely be more thoughtful and more confident about your
abilities; most certainly, you will be more aware of what it takes to earn a degree. However, this change or transformation won’t be easy; the following section on transitioning from where you are now to where you want to be will give you a better understanding of what you need to do to make change happen.

For some students, the move from high school to college seems fairly simple—both require reading, writing, testing, and attending class. Students who are taking the step from work to school may also see some similarities between their jobs and classroom work—both require working hard, keeping motivated, and following the rules. If the differences between high school or work and college are that similar, then why do so many college students have difficulty making a successful transition?

The answer to that question can be given by the instructors who see smart, competent students have trouble adjusting to the climate and culture of college because they do not understand what is expected of them. In other words, in order to be successful, students must know how they should be preparing beyond the questions on the next test; they need to know how college works and how to navigate through not only their courses, but also the common challenges that they will face as they work toward a degree or certificate.

Table 1.1 illustrates some of the differences and similarities between high school, a full-time job, and college. Notice that the greatest differences occur between high school and college. There are some similarities between a full-time job and college, although there are also distinct differences.

HIGHER EDUCATION, Higher Expectations

The degree programs at community colleges are shorter than at universities, usually requiring one or two years, but the reality is that you may need to take more time to complete a degree program if you plan to enroll as a part-time student. Also, if you need developmental or remedial classes before you can start on the required curriculum, completion of the program will be delayed.

Community college classes and degree programs are as demanding as their equivalents at four-year universities. Because of technical and industrial standards and career licensing, many courses and programs are, in fact, very challenging. Instructors who teach in the technical, industrial, and business fields are expected to graduate students who can pass licensing exams, which means the standards in the class must be high. If the courses were “easy,” then the graduates would be unemployable. Likewise, students who intend to transfer to four-year universities after they complete their general education requirements would not be successful if the courses they took at the community college were not challenging. Commu-
Community colleges want well-prepared and successful graduates; thus, it is in their best interest to provide courses that require the best work from their students.

**GO FOR THE GOLD BY REMEMBERING SILVER**

Making a successful transition will not only include comparing where you have just come from (home, work, or another institution of learning) to college life, but it will also involve breaking down the experience into parts that you can master. To remember what you need to start and end well, remember this simple acronym: SILVER. This stands for Supplies, Instructors' Expectations, Learning, Vocabulary, Effort, and Responsibility.

**Supplies, or “The Right Stuff”**

Making sure you are adequately prepared for the journey you are about to take is the first step in being successful. You wouldn’t head out on a trip to unknown lands without a map, proper gear, and plenty of food and water! Think of your

---

**TABLE 1.1 Differences between High School, Full-Time Work, and College**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High School</th>
<th>Full-Time Work</th>
<th>College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance mandatory in order to meet requirements; at least 6 continuous hours spent in class each day</td>
<td>Attendance mandatory in order to stay employed; at least 8 continuous hours spent at work each day</td>
<td>Attendance possibly not mandatory; different amounts of time spent in class and between classes each day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very little choice in what classes you take and when you take them</td>
<td>May have little choice in work assignments and when the work is to be completed</td>
<td>More flexibility in when you work on assignments and how soon you complete them before the due date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate to no outside work necessary to be successful</td>
<td>Moderate to no overtime work necessary to complete job duties</td>
<td>Substantial amount of outside work to complete assignments and to be successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers to check homework and keep you up to date on progress; will inform you if you are not completing assignments and progressing well</td>
<td>Supervisors to check completion and quality of work at regular intervals; will inform you if you are not meeting the standards for the position</td>
<td>Professor choice whether to check all homework or provide feedback on progress at regular intervals; may not inform you if you are not meeting the standards of the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher review of material and expectation that you remember facts and information</td>
<td>Employer provision of basic information and expectation that you use it to complete the job effectively</td>
<td>Professor presentation of concepts and theories and expectation that you evaluate the ideas, synthesize the ideas with other concepts you have learned, and develop new theories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent tests over small amounts of material with opportunities for grades to be raised if needed</td>
<td>Employee improvement plans to allow you to improve your ratings if needed</td>
<td>Professors’ standards and grading criteria, often allowing only a few chances (through infrequent testing/assignments) to meet them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
college supplies as part of your survival gear, too. The most important items that you will need at the beginning of the semester are required textbooks and course materials. You can find out what books and materials you will need either through the bookstore or through your professors. Usually an exact list of course materials is included in your syllabus. In high school books and course materials are provided for each student, but in college, you will be responsible for obtaining and purchasing your own materials—and you will need to do that before or at the very beginning of the semester. Trying to get by without the textbook or required calculator or software can seriously hurt your chances of success and is not recommended. If you find yourself unable to acquire or buy needed materials, then you will need to talk to your instructor immediately to ask about alternative arrangements.

In addition to books and materials, you may also need access to a computer. Your professors will expect that you have a working knowledge of how to use one. If you do not have the skills needed, then seek help from computer lab technicians, special computer classes, and classmates. Having the necessary computer skills as well as regular access to a computer will be integral to your success. Most colleges provide computer labs, email accounts, and printers for student use, but the hours may be limited, they may be crowded at busy times during the semester, and you may have to pay for the pages that you print.

Other “right stuff” items include paper (for both note-taking and printing purposes), pens, a dictionary, a writing handbook, and a thesaurus. As you take more classes, you may need graphing reference books and supplies, such as a graphing calculator, to help you study and complete assignments. A good, sturdy backpack that allows you to carry all your books and notebooks will also be essential. Because you will not have a locker or place to store your things between classes, you will have to find a bag that holds up to the task of carrying heavy materials over a period of weeks. One other item that new students need, which is becoming more essential each year, is a portable storage device that will hold your computer files and allow you to access them at any computer. Thumb drives, also known as flash drives and pin drives, are increasingly popular because they hold a large amount of data and are easy to carry.

**Instructors’ Expectations**

In addition to your supplies, knowing and meeting your instructors’ expectations will make a great foundation for success. One essential expectation that instructors have is preparation—yours. You should be ready before you get to class by reading the assigned pages or completing the homework. Instructors who prescribe these tasks expect students to prepare—they may even administer quizzes to ensure that students have prepared—and to ask questions about anything they do not understand. Instructors may assume that if you don’t ask questions or participate in a discussion, you understand the assignment. They may also hold you accountable on exams for assigned reading that has not been discussed in class.

Another expectation is that out-of-class assignments must be typed; in fact, unless otherwise stated, assume that all outside assignments should be word-processed, because they are easier to read and look more professional. If you
don’t know how to use a word processor, now is the time to learn; relying on others to word-process your work could put you at a disadvantage. You may not be able to control when the person will complete the work, which can make you miss assignment due dates.

Instructors also expect college students to be able to access technology regularly and use it competently. What this means is that your professor will expect that you have consistent access to a computer and the Internet. She will also assume that you have an email account and can send emails—even messages with attachments—successfully. If you lack these skills and equipment, you will need to find out where you can access a computer on campus or off campus and make sure that you have the ability to use it properly.

One last expectation—but not the only one left—is that instructors expect you to use their office hours, the time they are scheduled to be in their offices, to meet with them if you have any questions or need anything. This is a time not only to address any concerns you may have about your progress, but it is also a wonderful chance to get to know your professors better.

Learning
Taking responsibility for your learning is the cornerstone for college success, and in college you will be actively involved in the learning process. Being an active learner means that you are no longer a passive participant in your education, listening to a lecture or reading recreationally. Instead, college classes require that you participate in your own learning by reading actively and critically, by completing assignments, by working with other students, and by making connections between the courses you are taking and your life. Active learners also seek out more information about topics and look for ways to improve their understanding of concepts by finding help when needed. In essence, active learners make their education a top priority.

One of the most important shifts in thinking about your learning experience in college is realizing the various ways and places that learning and student support can take place outside the classroom. Professors routinely direct students to learning labs, tutors, or supplemental instruction to help bolster the learning that takes place in the classroom. Consider, then, that classroom learning is only a fraction of the time and activity making up your college experience. In fact, if you follow the standard model for using the number of hours you are in class to determine how many hours a week you should spend studying, class time is only one-fourth of the time you should be devoting to learning. The rest of that time, of course, will be spent preparing for class, but it can also be used working one-on-one with a tutor or reviewing notes and studying with a group. That means that 75% of your college time should be for activities that contribute to your learning when you are in class.

Vocabulary
With a new environment comes a new language. It won’t be too long before you are talking about an AA, GPA, and FERPA all at one time. Knowing what terms mean when they are used will make communication clearer. For example,
do you know what a credit hour is? It is the unit of measurement that colleges use that usually equals the amount of time you are in class each week during a 16-week semester. What about FERPA? This acronym stands for Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, and it is important to know because it determines who can access and discuss your grades or other official records. In college, if you are age 18 or over, only you can discuss your grades with a professor. If others, such as a spouse, parent, or employer, wants to know how you are doing, then you can allow them access to that information by letting a college official know. The feature titled Your Terms of Success in the accompanying box, as well as in each of the following chapters, provides some of the critical vocabulary you will need in college.

**Effort**

The comedian and writer Woody Allen once said, “Eighty percent of success is showing up.” Definitely, in college classes, you can’t be successful unless you attend regularly. College professors may not take attendance or make an issue of students who are not present; however, it is still your responsibility to attend. If you are receiving financial aid through grants or loans, your attendance may be important to continued funding in the future. Some colleges even require students to pay back funds received if they fail to attend classes regularly.

Irregular attendance will not only mean missed lectures and jeopardized financial aid, but also result in missed information about assignments, tests, and grading. Especially in courses that build on concepts (such as math, foreign languages, and writing), your lack of attendance can lead to problems with successfully doing assignments and performing on tests later in the semester.

If you miss a class or intend to miss a class, you should mention this to your professor. Although you may not need a doctor’s excuse, you should be prepared to justify your absence, especially if you have missed an exam. Most professors, though, may not care why you were absent or may not distinguish between excused or unexcused absences. Instead, they will simply insist that you find a way to come to class and keep up with the work.

Attending class is just part of the effort you will put forth; you will also need to produce quality work. Writing a paper and turning it in is only part of the requirement. You also have to adhere to the standards of the course. If your professor asks for a 10-page paper that argues a contemporary topic and uses five sources, you must follow those guidelines. In some instances, you may receive no credit for completing an assignment if you have not followed the requirements.

Spending more time to complete an assignment usually translates to better quality, but this is not always the case. For example, someone who types 30 words a minute will need less time to produce error-free assignments than someone who “hunts and pecks” at the keyboard. The quality of your work is what you will be graded on, not the number of hours you spend doing it.

**Responsibility**

No doubt you already juggle numerous responsibilities, and going to class and studying are just more tasks that you must complete each week. Handling your
### WHEN YOU SEE . . . IT MEANS . . .

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Associate of Arts; a degree program offered by community colleges, consisting of about 60 credit hours; usually transfers to a four-year institution as part of the core curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAS</td>
<td>Associate of Applied Science; a degree program offered by community colleges, consisting of about 60 credit hours; usually does not contain as many core courses as an AA and is not designed for transfer, but is intended for students who will enter the workforce after graduation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic integrity</td>
<td>Doing honest work on all assignments and tests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS</td>
<td>Associate of Science; a degree program offered by community colleges, consisting of about 60 credit hours; usually transfers to a four-year institution as part of the core curriculum; emphasizes science courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core curriculum</td>
<td>Also called general education requirements or basic courses; the common courses that almost all students who earn a bachelor’s degree complete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corequisite</td>
<td>A course that can be taken at the same time as another course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course content</td>
<td>The material that will be covered in a course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course objectives</td>
<td>The goals of a course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit hour</td>
<td>The unit of measurement colleges use that usually equals the amount of time you are in class each week during a 16-week semester.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree plan</td>
<td>A list of classes that you must complete successfully in order to be awarded a degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability accommodation policy</td>
<td>A policy that states how accommodations for documented disabilities will be handled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FASFA</td>
<td>Free Application for Federal Student Aid; a form that is completed each year to determine financial aid eligibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FERPA</td>
<td>Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act; Federal law that regulates the communication and dissemination of your educational records.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>Grade Point Average; each earned grade is awarded grade points that are multiplied by the number of credit hours taken; dividing total grade points (quality points) by total credit hours results in the grade point average.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grading criteria</td>
<td>The standards by which an assignment is graded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prerequisite</td>
<td>A course that must be taken before one can take another course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality points</td>
<td>The points determined by a grade point multiplied by the credit hours for a course; an A (4 grade points) in a writing class (3 credit hours) will equal 12 quality points; used to calculate grade point average.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syllabus</td>
<td>The contract between an instructor and a student; provides information about the course content, course objectives, grading criteria, and course schedule.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
responsibilities skillfully will take a positive attitude, respect for yourself, and maturity. Laura knows how important being responsible for herself and her son is. She has spent many years relying on herself and a few family members to meet her responsibilities. Obviously, as a student she has the responsibility to take notes, study for tests, and attend classes regularly. But she also has the responsibility to ask questions when she doesn’t understand or to resolve any conflict that may occur.

With responsibility also comes maturity, which is the foundation for many of the other components of college culture. Without a mature attitude and outlook, the other parts are unattainable. Even simple, seemingly obvious actions can help you present yourself as a dedicated, mature student—for example, paying attention during lectures, presentations, talks by guest speakers, and videos. Although this sounds self-evident, it is sometimes forgotten after the first few weeks of the semester. Work on looking at the front of the room and avoiding distractions. A common barrier to paying attention, besides staring out the window, is doing homework in class. Instructors frown on students who use class time to study for other classes or complete assignments that were due at the beginning of class. Just remember that the instructor sees what you are doing—that you are not paying attention—and will make note of it.

“One of the biggest differences between college and high school is that professors expect you to be totally responsible for everything—your work, your progress, your degree plan, and your job search.”
—Cornelius, 20, student

Your college transcript, which includes your grade point average, can reveal more than just the grades you earned in courses. It can also disclose academic integrity issues, should you have them. For example, some colleges make notations on students’ transcripts if they have failed a class because of plagiarism or cheating. Sometimes referred to as “FX” grades, these marks can be evidence that a student did not follow academic integrity policies.

In some cases, these marks can be deleted from transcripts if the student successfully completes an academic integrity workshop or successfully completes a certain number of semesters without any other violations.

**YOUR TURN**

What is your college’s academic integrity policy? ■ How does the registrar’s office designate failing grades that are due to academic integrity violations? ■ Are there any programs at your college to help students understand and follow the academic integrity policy?
Small but important actions that convey maturity and readiness to meet college expectations include staying for the duration of the class, limiting off-topic conversations with classmates, refraining from eating or participating in distracting activities, and getting ready to exit class only after the instructor has dismissed everyone. One everyday activity that causes big problems in class is the use of cell phones, headsets, and other electronic communication devices. In some classes, such as a chemistry lab, the distraction can be dangerous. Some colleges have strict policies forbidding the use of cell phones and pagers in class. There may be exceptions, however. For example, if you work in a field that requires your immediate attention in the event of an emergency or if you have a gravely ill family member, ask whether you may leave these electronic devices turned on. If your college does not have a policy, turn off your cell phone and pager in class anyway. Students who answer social calls in class appear immature and unconcerned about their education.

A more important way to demonstrate maturity in college is to understand and appreciate constructive criticism from your instructor. When you receive advice or comments about your work or progress in the course, look at it as an...
opportunity to learn more about yourself and the expectations of college. The instructor’s job is to educate you and help you learn more about the world; it is not the instructor’s job to undermine those efforts by cutting you down.

Although it is a great confidence builder, positive feedback does not necessarily challenge you to do better or indicate where you can improve. Be open to the challenge of receiving constructive criticism about the quality of your work. It takes a mature person to value constructive criticism and learn from it and to remember that your professors, counselors, and advisors want to help you be successful, so they will often set high standards that they know you can achieve.

Chapter 4 discusses diversity and relationships in depth, but it is worth mentioning here that dealing with diversity, conflict, and controversy takes a certain level of maturity. Effectively meeting any challenge to your belief system or values will demand that you act with integrity and openness. Because the purpose of getting an education is to stretch your mind and expand your ideas, you will need maturity to help you put all that new information into perspective.

**CONTROVERSIAL CONTENT**

For the most part, college will be a straightforward experience—you will learn the expectations and when you meet them, you will be successful. There are, though, other aspects of college culture that may be uncomfortable or even shocking to you. All colleges value diversity, whether in the student body population or in the backgrounds of its faculty. Most definitely, you will find diversity in ideas and theories among the subjects that are offered, which may challenge your beliefs and values. Still other subjects may contain material that you find disrespectful, offensive, distasteful, or disturbing. Besides the reading and discussing of controversial issues, your college may produce student and faculty work that contains language, images, or situations that you find offensive.

What should you do if you encounter college “culture shock”? First, remember that the purpose of college is to provide you with a wider worldview and understanding of diversity—even if that diversity involves different ideas and theories. Second, remember that you have the right to an opinion and a feeling about what you encounter in college. There is no reason you should hide your feelings or attitudes about what you are learning and experiencing. With this said, the third point to remember is that with your right to an opinion, you also have an obligation as a college student to examine your previously held beliefs and evaluate how they are being challenged in your courses or as you participate in college activities. You also have the responsibility to appreciate that there is more than one way to view an “offensive” idea or image. Figure 1.1 provides a list of possible subjects that could be controversial to you or other students.
HOW College Works

Now you know what to expect and what is expected of you in college, but knowing a few other customary practices will help you go from being a “tourist” to a “native.” The following information will provide you with a better understanding of how college works beyond what happens in the classroom.

SCHEDULES

First, it is helpful to note that colleges organize class time around semesters or terms, which can be as short as 4 weeks, usually during the summer, or as long as 16 weeks. Many colleges have at least four semesters: fall, spring, first summer term, and second summer term; the summer terms are shorter than the fall and spring terms. Other colleges organize the academic calendar around 10- or 11-week terms. If you are unsure how many weeks the semester is, count the number of weeks from the first day of class until the last day of finals. You can find the information in the college catalog or in the course outline of your syllabus.

College classes are scheduled on different days during the week. This arrangement may differ significantly from your high school schedule. In college, you may take classes once a week, as is the case for evening or night classes, or you may take them on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays or just Tuesdays and Thursdays. Usually, colleges do not offer classes on Friday nights, so if you take classes in the evening, you will take them either once or twice a week, Mondays through Thursdays.

Exceptions to this schedule occur during shortened terms such as summer semesters or intercessions.
in which you may go every day during the week. Also, you may have a lab or special class that meets only once a week but is tied to another class such as biology or chemistry. The best advice for new students is to read the schedule of classes carefully before registering, and as always, ask an advisor, counselor, instructor, or fellow student if you have trouble reading your schedule.

Colleges award credit hours (remember this term from earlier in the chapter?) based on how many hours a week you are in class during a regular semester (summer or intercession terms will double or quadruple the number of hours a week as compared to a regular semester). Thus, a three-credit-hour class will require that you spend about 3 hours in class per week—some classes may last only 50 minutes three times a week. Exceptions do exist: Labs are often worth one credit hour, but they may meet for more than one hour one day a week.

Figure 1.2 shows a typical schedule of a full-time student. Notice the “TR” under the “Days” column; “T” stands for Tuesday and “R” for Thursday. Thus, the biology class meets both Tuesday and Thursday whereas the lab meets on Thursday only. As noted, labs and other special classes may meet for more than one hour a week, but they are usually worth only one credit hour. Although the classes in this schedule meet two-and-a-half hours each week, they are given three credit hours. Three hours is often an approximation of the time spent in class.

If the schedule in Figure 1.2 reflects a 16-week semester, this student will spend over 40 hours in class for the semester. During summer or intercession terms, you will spend about the same number of hours in class but will attend class more often and for a longer period of time.

Because Figure 1.3 is a schedule for a 4-week term, the classes meet for more than three hours a week. In this case, students meet for 10 hours a week for 4 weeks, which will equal 40 hours or the equivalent of the total number of hours a three-credit-hour class will meet during a 16-week term.

### FIGURE 1.2 16-Week Class Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course ID</th>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Credit Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engl 030</td>
<td>Composition Fundamentals</td>
<td>MWF</td>
<td>8:00–8:50 A.M.</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biol 110</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>TR</td>
<td>8:00–9:15 A.M.</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biol 112</td>
<td>Biology Lab</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>9:25–11:25 A.M.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math 034</td>
<td>Intermediate Algebra</td>
<td>MWF</td>
<td>10:00–10:50 A.M.</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coll 101</td>
<td>Freshman Seminar</td>
<td>TR</td>
<td>12:15–1:30 P.M.</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Hours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GRADES

What is a discussion about college expectations without mentioning grades? For sure, grades are an important part of your education, and at the same time they are unimportant. How can something be both important and unimportant? Grades are important because they often reflect your level of achievement on an assignment or in a course; they are also important for obtaining and maintaining scholarships and financial aid. Additionally, grades are important to family, friends, and employers who may be supporting you financially and emotionally. Many people view grades as a reflection of a level of success. For instance, most of the people you ask would view a student who has straight A’s as someone who is smart and successful. Earning good grades can motivate you to do your best and give you more confidence as you earn them.

Although good grades feel great when you earn them, grades are not always an indication of your success or lack of success in mastering a subject. James M. Banner, Jr. and Harold C. Cannon (1999), in their book *The Elements of Learning*, define grades as follows: “Grades are evaluations of your work, not of your character or intelligence. You may be a wonderful person but a failure as a biologist. You may find it impossible to do satisfactory work in history but may excel in all other subjects” (p. 160). Banner and Cannon assert, therefore, that grades have limitations. They are a necessary part of evaluation, much as you are evaluated on your job. However, as Banner and Cannon point out, grades do not show the whole picture of who you are. Grades, then, are only part of the story of your education.

If grades only sometimes indicate a level of success in a course and sometimes not, what are you to do? How will you know when to worry about your grades and when to concentrate on learning the material? The purpose of this chapter is to help you answer these questions for yourself by explaining how professors grade and how you can make good grades in college. The chapter also discusses what you can do to deemphasize making a good grade and increase your attention to mastering the material of the course. This is not to say, however, that grades are never important. They are significant because they are a way to describe the work you have done in a class. However, grades alone are not the magic carpet to success in college; they are only part of
the story of your achievements. Your goal should be to strike a balance between caring about your grades and caring about improving your skills and increasing your knowledge.

As stated earlier, college professors grade a student on his or her ability to meet the standards of the course or of a particular assignment. Effort is definitely a necessary part of earning good grades—and you will earn the respect of your professor and fellow students by demonstrating an intense effort to master the concepts of a class—but it is only one part of achieving success in a course. College professors expect you also to meet the standards, sometimes called grading criteria, of the course. Figure 1.4 shows a potential set of criteria for a college-level paper. In this case, the criteria are for an A paper.

Knowing how your college assesses student performance is a start to improving your overall outlook on grading. The following is a typical grading scale in college:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90–100</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89–80</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79–70</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69–60</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59–0</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some colleges may use a plus or minus next to a letter grade such as A– or C+. Usually, colleges that allow for pluses and minuses will also alter the grading scale to designate the different grades. Here is an example of a grading scale that includes plus and minus grades:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94–100</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93–90</td>
<td>A–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87–89</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84–86</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83–80</td>
<td>B–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each semester, the registrar will calculate your grade point average, or GPA, and post it to your transcript. Because the calculation of your GPA requires a little

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**FIGURE 1.4  Grading Criteria for an A Paper**

- An excellent introduction with engaging hooks, setup, plan for essay, and/or main idea
- An original, significant thesis that offers insightful interpretation or thought
- An inventive and logical organizational plan
- Smooth and varied transitional expressions, phrases, and sentences that provide unity and coherence
- Strong conclusion that ends the essay effectively
- Expressive, clear style with sophisticated sentence structure and word choice
- No more than three major grammatical errors
mathematical skill, it is important to know how your registrar figures it. Hours are the number of hours you are in class each week. As discussed previously, classes are usually worth three credit hours. Science or specialized classes that have labs usually carry four credit hours. Depending on the course and the program, credit hours can be as many as six or as few as one. To know how many hours a course carries, check the description in the college catalog, because some classes meet for more hours a week than they are worth in terms of credit. Letter grades carry a point value called quality points. Table 1.2 shows how many quality points each letter grade is worth.

Courses that are designated developmental or remedial usually do not figure into your grade point average, so they do not carry any quality points. If you audit a course or receive AP or CLEP credit for a course, you will not receive quality points either. In other words, although you receive credit on your transcript for taking the course or taking an equivalent of the course, the class will not factor into your grade point average. Before you figure your GPA, you will need to figure your grade points for each class (see Table 1.2). You arrive at your grade points by multiplying the quality points for the grade you received by the number of hours the class is worth. For instance, if you took a four-hour class and you made a B, then you will multiply 4 (hours) by 3 (quality points for a B).

Evan is taking 15 hours (five 3-hour courses) this semester; if he receives an A, B, and three C’s, then his grade would be calculated as shown in Table 1.3.

Finally, divide the grade points total by the hours total (39/15). Evan’s GPA would be 2.6.

### COLLEGE Resources

Now that you have a better understanding of college culture and what is expected of you, it is time to examine how your college looks. Getting to know the layout of the campus and the people who work there is important to understanding the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1.2</th>
<th>Grades and Quality Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letter Grade</td>
<td>Quality Points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1.3</th>
<th>GPA Calculation Table</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hours</td>
<td>Grade (Quality Points)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>B (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>C (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>C (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Hours</td>
<td>39 Grade Points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Collaboration exercise 1.3

Working within a group, discuss why you think attendance is important to success in college. Besides information and assignments, what can students miss when they do not attend class regularly?
culture. For example, knowing where to go when you need to use a computer will make your ability to complete an assignment a little easier. Finding your professor’s office may save you time and stress when you need to talk to him about an upcoming test. Of course, the more you are on campus, the better able you will be to find people and places that will help you no matter what you need.

Knowing where to go to find services and people is only part of learning about your college. Another important aspect is finding and using the information that the college produces for students. College publications are a great place to find information about courses, programs, scholarships, activities, and policy changes. It is important that you regularly read these publications in order to stay up to date with what is going on.

**THE CAMPUS**

Find a map of your campus and study it for a few minutes. How many buildings does it have? How much parking space? How much “green” space or landscaping? Are there any unique features to your campus that make it an inviting and exciting place? Familiarizing yourself with your campus is probably the first activity you did when you enrolled in classes. If you have not taken a tour or simply walked around the campus, do so within the first few weeks of the semester. Locate the library, the student center, student parking, the bookstore, the business office, and the registrar’s office—just to name a few destinations.

The more you know about your campus’s layout, the easier it will be to find what you are looking for when you need it most. Using your map of the campus or your memory, check off in Figure 1.5 the types of buildings or departments within buildings that you know are present at your college.

If your college has more than one campus, familiarize yourself with the layout of other college property. You may have to travel to a satellite campus to take a test or to pick up materials for a class. If you have the time and the other campus is not too far away, ask for a tour. At the very least, familiarize yourself with any of the items you marked “not sure” in Figure 1.5.

**COLLEGE CATALOG**

The college catalog is an essential document during your academic career. All the information that you need to apply for financial aid, to choose courses, and to graduate is contained in the catalog. You will also find out what you are required to do to complete a degree. The academic calendar is usually placed at the beginning of the catalog. There you will find the dates for registering, dropping courses, and taking final exams.

It is important to read and keep your college catalog because if the college changes any requirements of your degree program, you will be able to follow the guidelines that were published the year you began the program. For instance, if you are working on an office management degree and you have taken three semesters of courses so far, you will not necessarily have to adhere to new requirements that are made at a later date.
The student handbook, which provides you with specific information about student conduct, academic standards, and services, is another valuable publication. Usually, the handbook contains descriptions of career services, the bookstore, computer labs, and financial aid offices. Academic information including probation and suspension for misconduct and qualifications for making the dean’s list can also be found in the student handbook. Most schools view the student handbook as a legal document that outlines what students can do in certain situations, so be sure to read it closely and keep a copy at home or in your book bag.

College newspapers differ from the college catalog and student handbook in that students are usually the ones who are responsible for the content. Within a college newspaper, you will find articles about upcoming events; reports on changes on the college campus; editorials on important student issues; profiles of
programs; and advertisements for used books, performances by musical groups, and anything else that students want to announce. The college newspaper is also a forum to explore controversial topics and to discuss sensitive issues.

Newspapers always need students to interview, write, edit, and publish. If you are interested in working for the newspaper, contact the editor or visit a journalism or composition professor.

**BULLETIN BOARDS**

Even with the increased use of the Internet, the bulletin board is still an important way to get a message to students. Found all over campus, bulletin boards usually advertise used books, needs for roommates and part-time jobs, and upcoming campus events. Bulletin boards within academic buildings often announce four-year university programs, summer workshops, and other types of academic activities.

**IT’S IN THE SYLLABUS**

Anything that professors hand out in class is a communication tool. The syllabus is one of the most important documents that you will receive in class, so be sure to read it carefully. In the syllabus you will usually find the following information:

- Instructor’s name; office location, phone number, and hours open to students; and email address
- Prerequisites for the course
- Course description from the catalog
- Textbook information
- Course objectives, or what you will accomplish by the time you finish the class
- Course content, or what topics will be covered throughout the semester
- Assignments and due dates
- Grading criteria
- Attendance and late work policies
- Academic integrity statement (which also appears in the student handbook)
- Disability accommodations policy
- General policies for classroom conduct

The syllabus is considered a contract between the student and the instructor. This means that not only will the syllabus describe what is expected of you during class, but it will also discuss what you can expect from the instructor. Both of you—student and instructor—will be bound by what is stated in the document. Reading the syllabus closely and following it regularly will keep you on top of class policies, expectations, and assignments.

Other essential information that is handed out in class includes directions to assignments, photocopied readings, study questions, and notes. Regard anything that is given to you by the instructor as important, even if you are told, “This won’t be on the test.”
You should also consider the grades and written comments you receive as communication from your instructors. Be sure to read any comments or suggestions that are written on papers and exams, ask questions if you don’t understand them or they are illegible, and save all feedback until the semester is over.

**PUT IT ONLINE**

The college’s website is where you can find the most current information about classes, academic programs, and contact information for professors. It is easier to update information on a website because it doesn’t involve printing and distribution, so it is more likely to provide the most accurate information. College websites usually list phone numbers and email addresses of professors and deans, which makes contacting them easier.

In addition to general information about degrees and departments, your college’s website may give you access to professors’ syllabi and assignments. This provides a good opportunity to investigate what courses you want to take based on the course objectives and assignments.

**TECH TACTICS**

**Using Technology to Get Ahead**

Numerous websites provide information about succeeding in college. The College Board has many tips for new-to-college students that can help them navigate financial aid and studying. There are even websites devoted to specific groups such as first-generation and Latino college students. There are GPA calculators, too, that can help you calculate your grades. All of these resources are at your fingertips and can greatly enhance your education.

**RECOMMENDED SITES**

- [www.unt.edu/pais/howtochoose/glossary.htm](http://www.unt.edu/pais/howtochoose/glossary.htm) University of North Texas provides an exhaustive list of common terms you may encounter in college. Terms like audit and work-study program are defined so that you can be more knowledgeable about the college experience.
- [www.back2college.com/gpa.htm](http://www.back2college.com/gpa.htm) Back to College’s website provides a handy grade point average calculator that allows you to put in your grades and determine your GPA. The site also provides information and links for raising your GPA.
CAMPUS ORGANIZATIONS

Campus organizations or student groups are another part of college life you will want to learn more about. Depending on how large your college is and how involved the students are, you may find a variety of student organizations and clubs in which to participate. Even if your time is limited, consider getting involved in some way. You may be able to get on an email list or a social networking site to keep up with events and meetings—if you cannot make those same events and meetings every time. Campus organizations include, but are not limited to, student government, student leadership programs, and clubs focused on certain interests (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered issues; political action; community service; academic honors and distinctions; religious or spiritual development; and career exploration). Getting involved will help you transition to the college and provide immediate connections with students, faculty, and staff.

Students who have “the right stuff” such as access to a computer, textbooks, and other materials and equipment that are required for classes are much more likely to be successful.

The information you have already received will help you navigate college more smoothly. Organize the different sources of information by type and answer the following questions: What information have you received by email or the Internet? What information have you received from an advisor? Finally, which kinds of information are most useful to you and why?

Transfer Tips: FROM COLLEGE TO UNIVERSITY

The Changes in Culture and College Services

If you are moving from your community college to a larger, more diverse university, you may experience a slight culture shock despite the semesters you already have under your belt. In addition to a bigger campus with more buildings to find and more students to meet, you may find that a university seems
more impersonal. Many students who transfer from a smaller community college complain that professors do not seem to care about them personally and that they lack the support and guidance they received at their previous school. Transfer students also note that expectations increase—and their grades decrease—especially as they move into their majors and begin working toward a career.

Culturally, you should expect that your new university will offer more activities and groups than your smaller community college. You also should expect some kind of adjustment period as you get used to your new professors’ expectations of you. Statistically, transfer students do experience a slight drop in GPA. This drop, however, is not necessarily an indication that they were not properly prepared for transfer by their community college.

All in all, the culture shock you experience when transferring to a four-year university will depend on how much bigger and how much more different the school is from your community college. Just remember that whatever differences you notice, there are people at the four-year school who can help you deal with the adjustment. Seek out counselors, advisors, faculty, and students to help make your transition smoother. Your campus map and list of faculty and administrators will point you in the right direction.

Transfer Tips: FROM COLLEGE TO CAREER

How the Culture Will Change Again

Just as you had to adjust to college culture, you will have to make a new adjustment to the workforce if you have never held a full-time job. When starting your first job out of college, you will experience a period of getting used to the way the office or business works. You will encounter new terms, new methods of doing things, and new people. In addition, you will experience working in groups or teams to accomplish tasks, and you will be expected to communicate orally and in a written format. You may also rely more heavily on electronic mail and computers to do your work. Certainly, integrity will be an important part of your working experience. There will be less supervision and more expectation that you do the work you say you will do.

Paying attention to how others act on the job can alleviate any anxiety that you may feel. Just as you made friends and found mentors in college, you should look for others who can offer guidance and help as you learn the ropes of a new career. Also, think about how you adjusted to college and use the same strategies to make your new working environment seem less foreign and more comfortable.

References and Recommended Readings


