

# 1

iStock.com/CargriOgner



## Beginning Your College Journey

**Why Go to College?** 8

**Navigating a New College Culture** 11

As you begin your college journey, you may feel especially eager and excited. Or you might be quite nervous about the challenges ahead. Whether this is your first time attending college or you're coming back after a break, you may have a lot of anticipation, mixed emotions, and questions as you embark on this new chapter of your life. How will college change me? What will be expected of me in my classes? Where can I find support if I need it? Give yourself time to answer these questions. And recognize that the transition to college is a big one. You will be spending your energy in significant ways as you make an enormous investment in your future. You will be asked to stretch beyond your comfort zone both personally and academically, but if you rise to meet the challenge, new opportunities can open up in your life. In addition, you'll likely have many new experiences and meet people from all walks of life. This chapter also explores how to navigate a new college culture and expectations as well as the steps you can take to begin carving out your place in college.



**LaunchPad Solo**  
macmillan learning

To access the LearningCurve study tool, video activities, and more, go to *LaunchPad Solo for College Success*. [macmillanlearning.com/collegesuccessmedia](http://macmillanlearning.com/collegesuccessmedia)

7

## Why Go to College?

You are likely attending college for a variety of reasons. Perhaps college feels like the logical next step after graduating from high school. Maybe you're excited to be the first in your family to go to college, or you're returning to school after a break to pursue a new career. Or maybe you don't know yet what you want to do and hope that college will help you find your passion or teach you the skills necessary to get a good job in the future. Whatever your reasons, this experience can open up new opportunities, and help you grow academically and personally.

### More Opportunity

Your decision to attend college is a powerful one and something to take great pride in. Pause a moment to congratulate yourself and reflect on the path ahead. *Your* college path will be unique and distinct from the paths of those around you. The academic, social, and personal experiences that come your way will push your thinking, challenge your beliefs, and open up more opportunity for you in a number of ways.

To appreciate how your decision to go to college will likely impact your future, it's helpful to look at a number of factors. Studies have shown that higher levels of education positively affect earnings and economic growth, job status and satisfaction, health and security, and parental and civic engagement. For example, recent reports reveal that college graduates compared to high school graduates often experience the following benefits:

- Higher earnings<sup>1</sup>
- Lower rates of unemployment and poverty<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>National Center for Education Statistics, "Annual Earnings of Young Adults," ch. 1 in *The Condition of Education 2015*, May 2015, [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cba.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cba.asp).

<sup>2</sup>Pew Research Center, "The Rising Cost of *Not* Going to College," Feb. 11, 2014, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/02/11/the-rising-cost-of-not-going-to-college/>.

- More full-time job security
- Opportunity to climb socioeconomic ladder
- More satisfying career
- Health insurance benefits and pensions<sup>3</sup>
- Healthier lifestyles
- More volunteerism and voter participation
- Children experience more engagement and education at home

These benefits are significant when you consider the positive impact they have on your standard of living and your family's well-being, not to mention the potential community and societal benefits. Going to college is a transformative experience. It is a privilege that will help you grow in significant ways if you open up your mind to all that's possible, and work hard to make those future opportunities a reality.

### Academic, Social, and Personal Growth

Opportunities for growth are abundant at college. Academically, you might be challenged by new information and explore subjects brand new to you. Socially, you may also experience growth by meeting new people from a variety of religious, ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, and political backgrounds, as well as from different parts of the country or world. And the opportunities for personal growth and development are plentiful as you take on new challenges, manage complicated schedules, and learn how to prioritize and balance work, school, and sometimes family responsibilities.

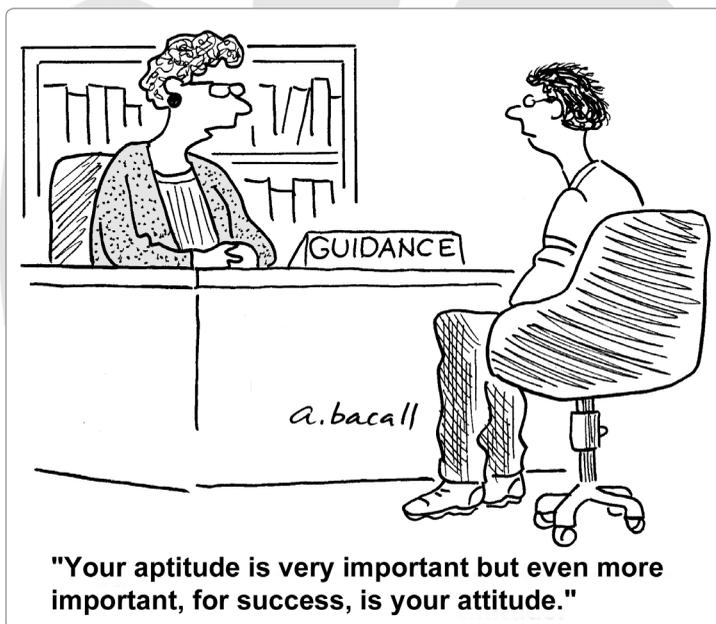
**Recognize your academic opportunities.** You will take many classes during college. Some will be interesting, while others may be courses you are required to take that aren't thrilling for you. Whatever the case, try to get the most out of your academic life by delving into course material in a thorough and deep way. Complete

---

<sup>3</sup>Baum, Sandy, Jennifer Ma, and Kathleen Payea, *Education Pays 2013: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society*, College Board Trends in Higher Education Series, 2013, <https://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/education-pays-2013-full-report.pdf>.

assignments on time, study for tests, and debate class topics outside of class with your peers. When you make your academic opportunities meaningful, you will get the most out of them.

**Be open to social learning.** So much can be gained from exposure to new people who have completely different life stories and experiences. College could be the first time you're interacting with students, instructors, or college staff who come from a variety of backgrounds that may be very different from your own. You may feel uncomfortable with this type of difference at first if you've never experienced it before, but expanding your social life to interactions with people not like you will open your eyes to various cultures, beliefs, traditions, and ways of seeing the world that will likely enrich *your* way of seeing



© Aaron Bacall/CartoonStock.com

Keep a positive attitude and be open to new experiences during college. Yes, studying and academics are important, but college is about taking charge of your personal and social growth as well. Finding success in college is possible if you push yourself to try new things, face challenges with perseverance, and learn from those who have come before you.

the world. Be a listener, share your own story and background, and take time to ask questions. It's okay to disagree; just show respect as you express your own views.

**Take charge of your personal growth.** College can push you out of your comfort zone. College experiences are fundamental to helping you become more independent, as you have to manage new and challenging aspects of life. Whether you're beginning college for the first time, or returning to school after time away, personal development happens as you tackle a difficult class and figure out how to deal with its challenges, or determine how to balance a job with academics, volunteerism, and family responsibilities. And don't forget the challenge of budgeting and taking care of your own finances, deciding how to spend your valuable time, and making choices that could impact your future or health and well-being.



### Academic, Social, and Personal Growth Opportunities in College

- Taking courses in unfamiliar and challenging subjects
- Interacting with students from a variety of backgrounds, including different parts of the country and the world
- Learning how to prioritize and balance several responsibilities while managing a complicated schedule
- Financial decision making and budgeting
- Facing and overcoming challenges
- Pushing yourself out of your comfort zone

## Navigating a New College Culture

Feeling comfortable academically, socially, and personally on campus takes time. You will find that your new college culture has specific expectations. Some expectations and aspects of this culture will be apparent right off the bat, while others won't become apparent until

weeks or months later. Your job during your first year is to adjust to those new expectations and begin to carve out your place within the college culture that surrounds you. Making your college experience your own is an important part of feeling connected and invested on campus.

## Meeting Expectations

In addition to academic and social expectations, you'll likely have your own personal expectations related to how you'd like to perform academically, the way you'd like to get involved on campus, and what you'll get out of the college experience. It's important to understand the expectations you are facing and to figure out how you'll manage them, along with the expectations you have for yourself.

**Learn about academic expectations.** Every college has certain academic expectations that are detailed in a student handbook or on an academic Web site. (See the Visual Walkthrough in this chapter.) Find out what type of grading system is used and learn how grades are calculated over the course of each term and each year so you will understand your grade point average (GPA) throughout college. Also, find out if you can take classes pass/fail (that is, classes you can take and have either “Pass” or “Fail” recorded on your transcript rather than the actual numeric or letter grade you earned). Be aware that if your course load becomes too difficult to manage or if personal circumstances get in the way, you can consider withdrawing from a course (which means officially deciding to stop taking the course in the middle of the term). Be sure to know what policies your college has in place around withdrawals.

### QUICK TIP

#### **Don't Make Course Decisions Alone**

If you feel you might need to change the status of a course to pass/fail or believe it's better to withdraw completely from the course, consult with your instructor or campus staff *before* making your decision to be sure you have considered all possibilities and are getting the support you need.

Meeting academic expectations takes a lot of hard work, persistence, planning, and support, given the new challenges of college-level course work which is more rigorous than high school work. Learning about academic expectations will help you understand what grades you need to earn to stay in school, how you're expected to fulfill certain requirements, and what you need to do to complete a major or minor field of study in order to graduate. Your major field of study is the primary field you will focus on during college by taking the majority of your classes within that discipline or related disciplines and fulfilling specific class requirements; a minor is a secondary field of study, for which you will also have to fulfill specific course requirements.

**QUICK TIP****Class-Specific Expectations**

Each of your classes will also have its own specific academic expectations, so it is up to you to read the course syllabus (or course outline) carefully to be sure you understand what instructors expect of you. The syllabus, typically distributed on your first day of class, will outline how to do well in the course, how much each assignment and test is worth to your overall grade, and what the expectations for specific assignments might be, among other helpful information. Read your syllabus after the first class and check it frequently throughout the term. If you have any lingering questions, ask your instructor about them.

**Be aware of the unwritten expectations.** To do well in college, you will need to take a great deal of personal responsibility and initiative. This is expected but may not always be made explicit. For example, all students are expected to be active learners. Being an active learner means engaging with your course work in a deep way to analyze, draw connections, and apply this rigor to all aspects of class—discussions, lectures, assignments, and tests. Instructors expect students to attend class and to take responsibility for understanding the material, which means also taking the initiative to ask questions or get help if difficulty arises, and to follow up as needed. Instructors will not chase you or accept excuses if assignments are not handed in on time.

## **5** Ways to Use Your Course Syllabus to Meet Expectations

### **1.** Course Objectives

Usually the instructor outlines the general gist of what the course is about and what students will explore, discuss, and learn, giving you a good sense of what to expect in the course.

### **2.** Course Schedule and Instructor Office Hours

Pay attention to the course schedule that details class topics, assignments, and tests, as well as when you might be able to talk with your instructor during his or her office hours. Also check to see if there are other ways to reach out (such as via e-mail or a course Web site) during the term.

### **3.** Course Evaluation/Grading

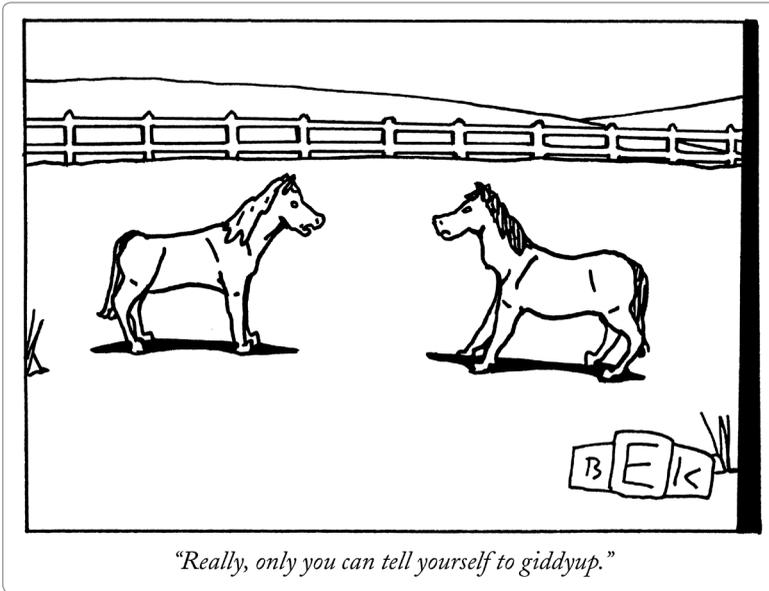
Be sure you understand how you will be evaluated in the course, how much each assignment and test is worth, whether class participation will play a part in your course grade, and how much your final exam/project/paper is weighted. This will help you determine where to focus most of your time and energy in the course.

### **4.** Required Reading, Assignments, and Tests

Check your syllabus frequently to keep on top of any required readings, assignments, papers, problem sets, projects, lab write-ups, and tests to determine what is due each day.

### **5.** Course Policies and Procedures

Instructors have different rules for their classes, so check the syllabus for information on what to do in the case of a class absence, how you're able to use technology in the classroom, what happens if there is academic difficulty or misconduct, and how to request an accommodation you might need.



© Bruce Eric Kaplan/The New Yorker Collection/The Cartoon Bank

Remember, you are in the driver’s seat. Listen closely to your head and heart throughout college as you take personal responsibility for your decisions and engage actively in your learning.

**Be clear about your personal expectations.** You probably have a variety of personal expectations for yourself as you enter college. Some may be academic—related to how well you’d like to perform in your courses or the type of major you plan to pursue. And some may be related to how you spend your time outside of class. Write these expectations down so they can begin to form your academic and personal goals. Do you expect yourself to get a job, join certain types of activities, or try out for a sport or musical group? How do you expect you’ll get involved in social offerings? Write all these expectations down because they can help you find your college niche.

## CHAPTER 1

# Visual Walkthrough

## Academic Expectations

Colleges have academic requirements that you need to know. They are often found on an academic Web site or printed in a student handbook. It is your job to familiarize yourself with these expectations. Use the example below as a guide for what to look for, but be sure to fully understand your own college's academic expectations.

- 1 Academic standards and expectations are essentially the “rules of the road,”—the general guidelines that your college has for student success and how students are expected to engage as active learners and members of a college community.
- 2 An academic honor code outlines, in detail, what students must uphold in their academic lives to maintain their academic integrity and honesty. This includes refraining from cheating, plagiarizing, lying, or stealing in any way, among other expectations. Be sure to read your school's honor code carefully.
- 3 The overall grading policies of an institution will vary, but essentially there will be details about how many credits or classes are necessary to graduate, what is required to graduate in a particular major, and what is needed to declare a minor or double major. There will also be information about what grades are needed to pass courses, to progress to future terms, and to be able to ultimately graduate, as well as the length of time it should take to graduate.
- 4 The Student Code of Conduct is an important set of behavioral expectations that encompasses all aspects of student life on campus and outlines what happens when violations occur. Expectations may include respecting the rights of others, refraining from violence in words or actions, obeying state, federal, and municipal laws, including laws related to drinking and drug use, and so on.

1

**Academic Policies**

2

**ACADEMIC HONOR CODE**

**ACADEMIC PROBATION  
AND DISMISSAL**

**ACADEMIC STANDARDS  
& EXPECTATIONS**

**CLASS ATTENDANCE  
& ABSENCES**

**CLASSROOM  
ATMOSPHERE**

**COURSE  
EXAMINATIONS**

3

**GRADES &  
GRADING POLICY**

4

**STUDENT CODE  
OF CONDUCT**

## Academic Standards & Expectations

- a. College is a time of fundamental growth and development, and so there is a high level of independence given to students, as they are expected to be responsible for their own learning and in charge of their learning process.
- b. Given the increase in responsibility, students will spend much less time in class and are expected to spend much more time outside of class completing work, studying for tests, and reaching out for assistance as needed.
- c. Students should expect material covered to be quite rigorous and fast paced, and so it is imperative that students arrive to class ready to fully participate by completing readings, assignments, and studying on time as instructed.
- d. Students are expected to maintain the highest level of academic integrity and honesty when engaged in any academic endeavor, and so all work in written and spoken word must be one's own or cited properly.
- e. Students are expected to maintain at least satisfactory academic progress each term to maintain their academic standing.

## case study

Casey figures out how to face her academic challenges.

When I came to college, I was pushed much more intellectually than I had imagined I would be. The instructor for my Chemistry 101 course was clear that first day that his class would move quickly and also require that we apply chemistry concepts to novel problems we would investigate in our weekly labs. He explained that he could only cover so much during lecture, and it was up to us to be sure we understood everything in the assigned textbook as we covered each topic.

He wasn't kidding. At first I felt totally overwhelmed because I was having to spend so much out-of-class time working on assignments and studying the material. And even after all my efforts, I was disappointed by my first test grade. But then I realized it was up to me to ask more questions and get more help during office hours and at my academic support office. I had to take more personal responsibility for my own understanding, which was new for me. Once I did, my grades improved and I actually enjoyed the challenge most of the time.

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION** Have you felt more challenged by your classes than in high school or previous educational situations? Be specific about what is most challenging. Is it the actual material, the volume of reading, paper writing, test taking, or something else? Once you determine the specific ways you are feeling challenged, talk to your instructor or an academic support counselor to find out strategies to help you manage the challenges you are facing.

## Finding Your Place in College

There are lots of choices you'll have in college, and many decisions you'll need to make. As you decide what you'll study and how you'll spend your time outside of academics, you'll be finding your place

in college. This will probably evolve over time as the decisions you make and the experiences you have teach you more about yourself. You may even be inspired to make different choices or to try out new experiences.

**Your academic focus may not be what you expect.** If you know what you want to study, that's great. If you don't know what you want to study, that's totally fine, too. Just remember that when you're actually in classes, and learning material, you may end up going a different direction from the one you expected for yourself. In other words, you may really like a subject you never expected or discover that what you thought you wanted to study isn't for you. Whatever happens, prepare to be flexible. You might decide to look into other academic areas that may be a better fit.

**Develop a social circle.** There are lots of ways to be social and meet new people during college. Social activity can develop out of participating in a campus organization or event, forming study groups, or getting involved through volunteering or a job. The key is to find social connections that you enjoy outside of your classes. You'll likely encounter many types of social experiences during your first few months of college, and then figure out where you're most comfortable. You'll also likely learn the right balance between having a social life and keeping on top of your academics. This process may take some time. Don't worry! Keep pushing to find the social life that feels right to you. It's time well spent so that you are honoring who you are and what you want to do.

#### QUICK TIP

##### **Check In with Yourself**

Meeting new people and engaging in social activities can be fun, but it can also be a source of stress. And if you are a commuter student or work full time, you might be frustrated because you can't engage in social life as much as you may want to. Striking a balance is key. During your first few months of college, make sure that you are making enough time for unwinding and relaxing.

**Spend your time in ways that work for you.** Your personal time outside of academic classes and studying is precious. And while there will be other obligations that fill much of your time, such as a job or family needs, there is usually some personal time left over. Be deliberate about how you spend that time. You might pursue a passion in music, volunteer, or choose to spend time with your family. You might leave time to read for pleasure or watch your favorite shows. It's your time, and if you spend that time, even if it's limited, doing things that are meaningful to you, you're helping yourself to find a balance that works.

## **5** Questions to Help You Find Your Place in College

### **1.** What are my academic interests?

Finding your academic place is essential. You'll be spending a lot of time engaged in academic work, so take the time to explore different subjects as fully as you can to determine what suits you.

### **2.** What activities, clubs, organizations, or sports do I want to engage in?

Some schools host an informational fair where clubs and organizations share what they do so that new students can determine what they'd like to join. You can also check out your college's Web site to see what you can get involved with either on or off campus. Whether you're interested in writing for a school newspaper, joining a cultural organization, volunteering, or connecting with other commuter students, there will likely be many options to choose from.

### **3.** What do I want my social life to look like?

Connecting with other people is an important part of your college experience. Often there are college-sponsored social events that happen on campus throughout the year, and you may also be in or near a town or city with opportunities to explore cultural or musical venues. If you are a commuter student, make an effort to connect with classmates outside of class. Schedule time to get coffee in town or go to a movie together over the weekend.

**4. What health priorities do I have?**

Determine if there are things you want to incorporate in your life that involve health and wellness because choices you make could help you meet others who have similar interests. For example, if you plan to make exercise a weekly priority, maybe there is a gym class or sports team you could sign up for. Or if healthy cooking is a passion, see if there's a cooking club you could join or you might make connections by inspiring others to help you in the kitchen.

**5. How can I step out of my comfort zone?**

Maybe you're excited to try something new on campus. What is it and how can you try it out? If you like it, how can you make it part of your regular routine?

