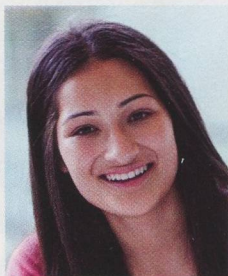


 PROFILE

Maria Lopez, 18
Early Childhood Education Major, Lone Star College, North Harris


arek_malang/Shutterstock.com

Maria Lopez always knew she was going to college even though no one else in her family had ever attended any college or university. For Maria, going to Lone Star College was an easy choice, and she is very happy that she chose to attend this college. "The North Harris campus is close to home," she explains, "so I can still help my family, keep my part-time job, and continue my education with some of my high school friends."

Now that her first year is under way, Maria has learned there are some key differences between high school and college, specifically the amount of time she spends studying. "In high school, I studied maybe five hours a week," she explains. "Now I study many more hours, something I learned was important right away in my first-year-experience course. I also quickly learned the importance of organizing, managing my time, and staying on top of my assignments. Setting goals and finding a purpose for being in college have also led to my success."

Maria enjoys attending her college. "Here everyone guides you," she says. "You can ask for help from your instructors, other students, and a lot of other people like tutors or counselors. I think I would be lost at a university in my first year, not having anyone to teach me about the rules of the college and how it is different from high school."

"[I]n my first-year-experience course . . . I . . . quickly learned the importance of organizing, managing my time, and staying on top of my assignments."

Do you hope to graduate from college and find a good job? If so, you have something in common with Maria and many other college students. Today, the workplace is changing so much that most people will need some education beyond high school to support themselves and their families properly. In the United States, more than 67 percent of high school graduates (approximately 21 million students) attend college. As the job market changes, people of all ages are constantly changing career directions and beginning or returning to college to get the training or education they need to further their aspirations and reach their goals.

This book will present you with a set of strategies to help you succeed at one of the most important things you'll ever do—get a college education. As you settle into your new college routine, we want to welcome you, or perhaps welcome you back, to the world of higher education.



To access the Learning-Curve study tool, Video Tools, and more, go to LaunchPad for *Understanding Your College Experience*.
macmillanhighered.com
Zgardnerunderstanding

THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

Depending on who you are, what your life situation is, and why you decided to enroll, college can mean different things. Some students choose to attend college to learn a specific set of skills, receive training for specific careers, and earn a certificate or diploma that allows them to get jobs in their field of interest after graduation. Some attend college to complete their associate degree perhaps close to home and at a lower cost and then, if their college does not offer the higher degree they wish to obtain, to transfer to a four-year college or university for a bachelor's degree. Some come to college after a major life event or personal transition, such as divorce or loss of life partner. Others start or return to college after retirement for the sheer love of learning.

College is some students' top priority; for others, it can be an additional priority on top of family or work obligations. Some students already have jobs but want to change their careers or improve their chances for a promotion. Some students come to the United States from other countries just to study. College is really far more than any single image you might carry around in your head about why students attend and what the college experience actually involves.

Whether you have just graduated from high school or are an older student with a job and a family, college will be a time when you take some appropriate risks, learn new things, and meet new and different people—all in a supportive environment.

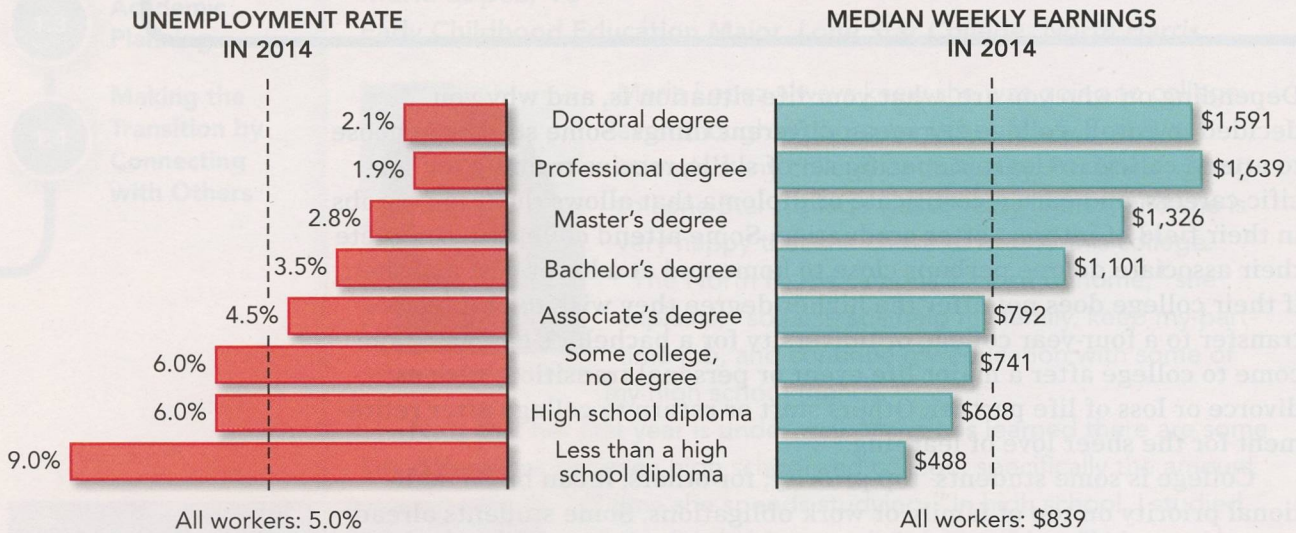
Did You Make the Right Choice to Attend College?

You have joined more than 20 million other students enrolled in about 4,400 colleges and universities in the United States. American society values higher education because receiving a college degree gives you opportunities for success regardless of your race or ethnic background, national origin, immigration status, family income level, family history, or personal connections. One marker of success is the amount of money that you earn both immediately after earning a degree and over a lifetime. What you earn in the future will depend on what you learn and do now. As Figure 1.1 shows, the more education you have, the more likely you are to be employed and the higher your earnings will be.

In addition to increasing your earning power, college is about helping you become a better thinker and a leader in your community, company, or profession. In short, college can change your life for the better.

FIGURE 1.1 > Education Pays

Note: Data are for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers.
Data from: *Current Population Survey*, U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015. U.S. Department of Labor.



What Opportunities Does College Provide?

Two-year colleges and some four-year institutions offer certificates, associate in arts (AA), associate in science (AS), associate in applied science (AAS), and bachelor in arts (BA) or science (BS) degree programs (see Table 1.1). These institutions play an important role in providing students with educational opportunities because they accept and work with all students regardless of their past academic performance. In addition, students can get a great education at a much lower cost than at a college or university that awards only four-year degrees. The education that you receive will help you start, restart, and be successful in your future career and life.

> Explore Your Options

College is a great place to connect with others, take some risks, and explore careers such as business, law enforcement, or nursing.

Steve Debenport/E+/Getty Images



TABLE 1.1 > Guide to Degree Programs

Degree	Refers to the type of diploma students receive after graduation and differs based on the number of credit hours students complete.
Credit Hours	Represent the number of clock hours you spend in each class every week during a term and the number of credits you will earn if you satisfactorily complete a course. For example, a one-credit course generally meets once a week for 50 to 60 minutes.
Degree Programs	
Certificate Program	Certificate programs include a set number of courses (usually 30 credits) that prepare students to complete a specific task or educate them about one particular aspect of a field to be able to obtain entry-level positions. For example, an Emergency Medical Technician certificate program prepares students to enter the field of emergency medicine and start working as first responders.
Associate in Arts (AA) or Associate in Science (AS)	These programs carry about 60 credits and allow students to transfer to four-year programs to obtain bachelor's degrees.
Associate in Applied Science (AAS)	These programs carry about 60 credits focused on training students for a specific profession or career. The AAS degree has fewer transferable credits than the AA or AS degrees.
Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelor of Science (BS)	Four-year programs that carry about 120 credits.

In addition to being a pleasant experience, college is a lot of work. Being in college means studying for hours each week, staying up late or getting up early to complete assignments and prepare for class, going to class, taking exams, and possibly working harder than you ever have. For many students, college becomes like a job with defined duties, expectations, and obligations. If you already have a job, this will be your second one. And if you have a family of your own, college will be your third job!

Getting involved in campus life improves your college experience and your chances for a good job, so make sure to take advantage of student activities on your campus. For example, some clubs are related to professions; an education club may include students who plan to become teachers, or a business club may give students an opportunity to learn more about companies in their area and to interact with business professionals and leaders. The most important type of involvement, however, is with fellow students who you can get to know, study with, and share mutual support.

College will also provide you with numerous opportunities to

- complete the basic skills training you didn't master in high school.
- develop social networks both in person and online.
- explore student organizations and take advantage of leadership opportunities.
- participate in many exciting activities and events.
- network for improved employment opportunities.
- go to college after serving in the military.

What Is Your Purpose for Attending College?

Having a purpose for going to college is essential. Without a purpose, you won't know where you're going or how to get there. While some students come to college with a clear sense of purpose, others do not. For many students a strong sense of purpose builds over time. College will be a set of experiences that will help you to clarify your purpose and achieve your own goals. It is possible that as you discover more about yourself and your abilities, your reasons for coming to college will change. In fact, a majority of college students change their academic plans at least once during the college years, and some students find they need to transfer to another college or university to meet their academic goals.

Here are some questions to ask yourself about your purpose for being in college:

- Am I here to study a subject that interests me?
- Am I here to develop new knowledge and ideas?
- Am I here to complete a certificate, a diploma, or an associate or bachelor's degree?
- Am I here to prepare myself for employment or to improve my skills in a job I already have?
- Am I here to meet new people?
- Am I here so I can better serve my community and country?
- Am I here to better understand myself and society?

Your honest answers to these questions will drive most of the decisions that you make in college, decisions that will likely impact the rest of your life. Because knowledge expands all the time, college classes won't teach you everything you will ever need to know, but college, as a process of formal education, will teach you how to think and how to keep learning throughout your life.

YOUR TURN > WORK TOGETHER



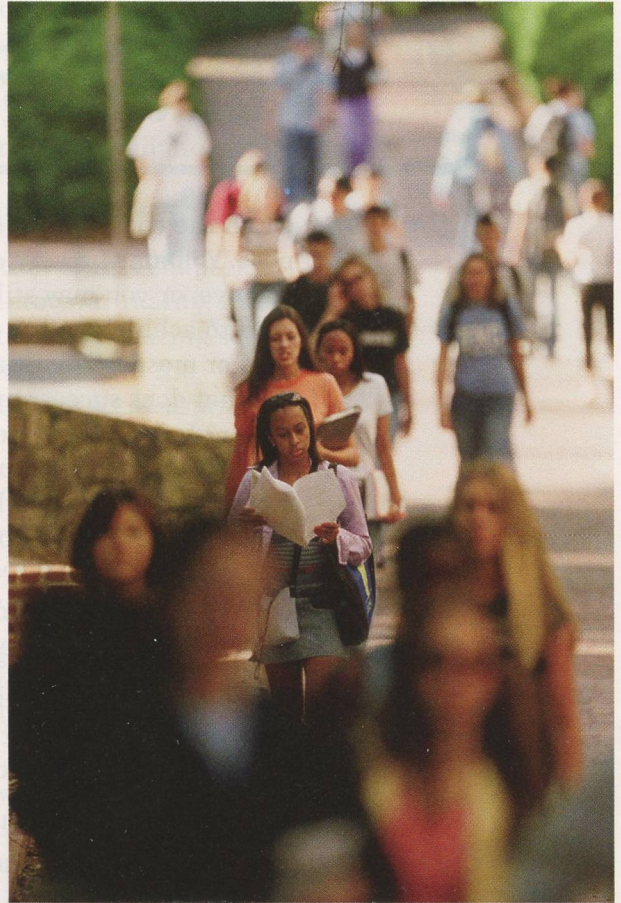
Ask a couple of your classmates why they decided to attend this college and what they expect college to be like. Compare your reasons and expectations with theirs. Do you find similarities or differences?

How Is Your College Committed to Helping You Succeed?

Each college has two main objectives: to help its students graduate and to support them in becoming successful in their future careers. To do that, colleges provide support services to students at no additional cost. For

example, most colleges have academic advisers who provide students with information about their courses and help them register in the appropriate courses every term. These advisers are available to students throughout the term to provide guidance and support and to answer questions students might have. Colleges also have financial aid advisers who can assist students and their families in understanding how to pay for college.

Additionally, most colleges have learning centers, providing free tutoring to students in nearly all subjects, and career centers that help students with career planning and job hunting. Remember that the faculty and staff of a college are there to serve students and meet their needs and help students to become successful, so do not be shy—ask for help. To assist you in identifying and using your college resources, at the end of each chapter in this book, we provide a list of resources typically available at colleges—resources that offer additional help related to chapter topics. Students who seek help are the ones who are the most successful, so take advantage of the support available to you.



What Will You Get Out of Your College Success Course and This Textbook?

Research shows that college success courses, such as this one, will help you and other first-year students avoid some of the mistakes—both academic and personal—that many beginning students make, such as not taking advantage of the helping services and resources, not developing certain college-level study skills, and making choices that you would have made differently if you had the knowledge you really needed.

This course will provide a safe place for sharing your successes and your challenges, getting to know other first-year students, beginning a lasting relationship with your instructor and other students, developing your academic plan based on your strengths and interests, and shaping or reshaping your career after graduation.

As individuals with many years of experience working with first-year students, we know that starting college can be challenging. However if you apply the ideas in this book to your everyday life, you are more likely to enjoy your time in college, graduate, and achieve your goals. In this textbook, we cover a lot of topics. For instance, you'll read about managing your time, taking notes, making the most of the way you learn, preparing for tests, building relationships, and planning for your future career.

▲It's an Adjustment

You may feel alone during the first few weeks in college. You may not immediately meet others who look, dress, or think like you, but your college will offer many ways for you to connect with other students.

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SETTING GOALS FOR ACHIEVING YOUR PURPOSE

Of all the components of college success, the most essential is having a purpose. You may be very clear on why you are in college and what you hope to achieve, or you may still be trying to figure that out. Wherever you are, the road to achieving your purpose requires that you set goals along the way.

For most students, a central component of purpose is being successful. So what does success mean to you? Is success about money, friendship, or power? Is it about achieving excellence in college, employment, or life in general? For most people, success is a combination of all of these factors and more. While luck or “who you know” may play a role, first and foremost, success will be the result of your planning, your decisions, and your hard work.

Consider Your Strengths

To achieve your purpose and become successful, where do you begin? First, you need to think carefully about your strengths. Everyone is good at doing something, and your strengths, whatever they are, can help you choose the path that is right for you. Your strengths might be in these areas:

- **Intrapersonal:** You make friends easily.
- **Mechanical:** You have always been able to figure out how to fix things around the house.
- **Organizational:** You keep your family on track with their duties and chores.
- **Leadership and persuasion:** You are able to convince others that you are right.
- **Persistence:** When you want something, you never give up.

All of these characteristics and many others are strengths that you can apply to your college experience. You should also use your strengths for excelling in college while you work on the areas you need to improve. For instance, if you have good interpersonal skills but need to improve your organizational skills, make friends with students who have excellent organizational skills and ask them to help you improve yours.

Get Started with Goals

It is important to establish goals—personal and career goals for today, this week, this month, this term, this year, and beyond. Students who prefer to go with the flow and let life happen to them are more likely to waste their time and less likely to achieve success in college or in a career. They are more likely to get distracted and not stay focused. So instead of simply reacting to what college and life present to you, think about how you can take more control over the decisions and choices you make now, literally every day, to achieve your goals. While it is easy to make general plans, you need to determine which short-term steps are necessary if those plans are to become a reality. A short-term goal might be to read 20 pages from your history text twice a week

to prepare for an exam that will cover the first hundred pages of the book. An intermediate-term goal might be to begin predicting which elective college courses you could choose that would help you attain your career goals. A long-term goal would be to make a decision about a degree program and to make plans for what are you going to do with your degree after you graduate.

Follow the SMART Goal-Setting Guidelines

You'll read about academic planning in the next section of this chapter, which will help you map out how to turn your goals into your reality. But first, here are guidelines that break down the aspects of goal setting so that you are smart about how you approach it. In fact, these are the SMART goal-setting guidelines—to set goals that are *Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely* (SMART):

1. Be **specific** about what you want to achieve, why, and when.
2. State your goal in **measurable** terms. That means how many steps you should take to obtain your goal and how you know when each step is complete.
3. Be sure that the goal is attainable. If you don't have the necessary skills, strengths, and resources to achieve your goal, change it. Be sure you really want to reach the goal. Don't set out to work toward something only because you want to please others. Plan your steps carefully and within a reasonable timeframe.
4. Know how the goal is **relevant** to your life and why the goal matters. Make sure your goal helps your larger plan and gives you a sense of moving forward.
5. Consider whether the goal is achievable within the **timeframe** you desire and what difficulties you might have. Plan for ways you might deal with problems. Decide which goal comes next and how you will begin. Create steps and a time line for reaching your next goal.

For instance, let's assume that after you graduate you might want to get a good job or advance in the job you currently have. This goal isn't very specific, however, nor does it state a particular time period. A much more specific goal would be to decide which program of study you want to complete to prepare you for the job or position you are interested in obtaining after you graduate. What are some short-term goals that would help you reach this goal? Once you choose your program of study, the next goal might be to look through the course catalog to identify the courses that you need to take to complete the program to prepare for the career of your choice or for advancement. An even more specific goal would be to prepare your academic plan and identify which courses you should take each term. You might discover that the job(s) that interest you most will require a four-year degree. If so, one long-term goal would be to prepare for transfer. You can see an academic adviser who can help you create a program plan, specifying which courses you need to take and in what order. Remember that dreaming up long-term goals is the easy part. To reach your goals, you need to be specific and systematic about the steps you will take; understanding the fundamentals of academic planning by working with an academic adviser will help you plan these steps. Use Figure 1.2 on the next page to set SMART goals for this term. Think through this exercise and then return to it so that you can apply what you learned in the section on academic planning.

FIGURE 1.2 > Practice Setting SMART Goals

What are your goals for this term? Using the SMART goal-setting guide, try to set one goal in each of the four areas listed: academic, career, personal, and financial. Follow the goal through time, from immediate to long-term. An example is provided for you.

	S	M	A	R	T
Type of Goal	SPECIFIC goal	How many MEASURABLE steps?	Why can I ATTAIN the goal?	How is this RELEVANT to me?	What TIMEFRAME do I desire? What potential difficulties will arise, and how will I deal with them to stay on track?
Academic	Complete my academic plan this term based on my chosen program of study.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In the next 2 weeks, review the college catalog to select a program of study or major that interests me and prepares me for my future job/career. 2. Select my required courses and map every term. 3. Choose my elective courses. 4. Meet with an academic adviser to make sure my academic map makes sense. 	<p>I am organized.</p> <p>I have a manageable range of interests.</p>	<p>I can't use my time in college well if I don't know where I am headed.</p> <p>An adviser can give me ideas for how I can apply my interests to a program of study.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with an academic and a career adviser by the middle of the term. • Obtain all the necessary signatures to finalize my academic plan. • Have the plan all ready to go by Thanksgiving break. <p>Potential Difficulties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do not know an academic or career adviser. • I have not made a decision about the major I want to study. <p>How to Deal with Difficulties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit the academic and career advising centers to work with advisers. • Discuss my academic and career goals with the advisers and ask for their advice regarding the major I should select.
Academic					
Career					
Personal					
Financial					

FIGURE 1.2 > Practice Setting SMART Goals

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Academic					
Career					
Personal					
Financial					

ACADEMIC PLANNING

Now that you have had some practice with goal setting, we'll turn to the topic of academic planning, which will provide you with a roadmap to achieving your goals. Some students come to college with clear direction; they know what they want to study, what jobs and careers they would like to enter after college, or whether they want to transfer. Others enter college as undecided (sometimes also called “undeclared” or “exploratory”), understanding that their experience with different academic subjects will help them make an academic choice. Still others start a program of study but are uncertain how that program can help them find a job later. Each of these situations is normal.

Programs of Study

Even before you have figured out your own purpose for college, you might be required to select a program of study, sometimes referred to as a major, in an area of study like psychology, engineering, education, or nursing. Every program of study includes required courses and electives. Required courses are the ones directly related to the area of study as well as general education courses such as college-level math and English courses. Electives are courses that you get to choose because they interest you. An electrical engineering major, for example, would be required to take courses related to that area of study, like Circuits and Systems, and general education courses like English and world history. The student can also choose electives such as music appreciation and fine arts. Although it's hard to see the direct connection between some of the required courses and what you want to do with the rest of your life, you may discover potential areas of interest that you have never considered before, discover a new career path, and find a new sense of purpose.

Many students change their majors or programs of study as they better understand their strengths and weaknesses, learn more about career options, and become interested in different areas of study. Some colleges allow you to be undecided for a while or to select liberal arts as your major until you make a decision about what to study. An early selection does allow you to better plan which courses you need to take and with which instructors and students within your program to connect. An academic adviser or counselor can provide you with proper information and guidance to help you make the right academic decisions.

Even if you are ready to select a major, it's a good idea to keep an open mind and consider your options. You might learn that the career you always dreamed of isn't what you thought it would be at all. Working part-time or participating in co-curricular activities such as joining a student organization can help you make decisions and learn more about yourself in the process.

Transfer Considerations

If you are planning to transfer to another college or university, it makes sense to choose your major early and select your courses based on the requirements of the college or university of your choice for transfer. Completing courses that you can transfer will help you save time and money. Most colleges that award associate degrees have a transfer center or, at the very least, a transfer counselor whose job is to provide academic advisement and prepare students for a successful transfer to another institution. All two-year colleges have agreements with four-year colleges and universities to ensure that their students can transfer their credits without difficulty. Some of the four-year colleges or universities even offer their degrees on the two-year college campus.

When you begin college, if you know that you will need to transfer, make sure that the courses you take will be transferable—that is, will be accepted for credit at the new college or university. Good academic planning involves an awareness that your major and career ultimately have to fit your interests, life preferences, personality, and overall life goals.

Connecting Programs of Study with Careers

Earlier in the chapter, we asked questions about why you are in college. Many students would immediately respond, “So I can get a good job or education for a specific career.” Yet some academic programs or majors do not lead directly to a particular career path or job. You actually can enter most career paths from any number of academic majors. Only a few technical or professional fields—such as accounting, nursing, and engineering—are tied to specific majors.

Exploring your interests is the best first step to identifying an academic major as well as career paths or jobs that are right for you. Here are some helpful strategies:

- **Know your interests, skills, values, and personality.** Assessing your skills and personality is particularly important if you have no idea what you are interested in studying or what career paths are related to your choice of major. For example, if you like science and helping sick people, you may want to consider a career in health care like nursing, physical therapy, or dental hygiene. If you like to talk, read, solve problems, and stand up for yourself and others, you may want to consider a career in the legal profession as a paralegal or a lawyer. If you like to work with computers and design games, you may want to think about computer science or game design. Your campus career center can help you discover your unique strengths—and weaknesses—that can influence your direction as you explore career choices.

- **Pay attention to grades.** Employers and four-year colleges and universities want candidates with good grades. Good grades show that you have the necessary knowledge and skills and a strong work ethic.
- **Explore career paths.** Talking to or observing professionals in your areas of interest is an excellent way to try before you buy. Participation in “job shadowing” or “a-day-in-the-life” programs is time well spent. Many college graduates enjoy being career mentors for current students. This is also a great way to network with those working in your area of interest. Ask your career center about scheduling one of these opportunities.
- **Develop computer skills.** Most of today’s college students are comfortable with technology; however, not all technology experience is equal. As you begin to make decisions about your career path, become familiar with technologies used in your field. Take advantage of the computer courses and workshops your college offers, or learn by experimenting with different software programs on your own.
- **Build communication skills.** The ability to communicate verbally and in writing with people inside and outside an organization is one of the most important skills that employers look for in new graduates. Take every available opportunity to practice communicating, whether through classroom presentations or group work or on the job.
- **Take advantage of experiential learning.** Experiential learning is learning by doing and from experience. Internships and service-learning courses are two common forms of experiential learning, but they are not the only ways to gain experience in your area of study. Find opportunities to apply what you learn in your courses to what you do outside the classroom.

YOUR TURN > STAY MOTIVATED



With two or three other students, discuss where you imagine working after college. Will you be employed in an office, a hospital, a studio, or a lab? Or will you be working outdoors? How can you use the environment in which you desire to work as motivation to get into the career of your choice? If any of your classmates already have careers, find out why and how they chose those careers. How do they feel about their work settings?

Working with an Academic Adviser

Academic planning is a necessary step in your college career, and it should be an ongoing process that starts early in your first term. An **academic plan** lists the courses you need to take and complete in your program of study to graduate with a degree. Before you register for classes next term, meet with your academic adviser. Your academic adviser can help you choose courses that are required, weigh career possibilities, and map out your degree or certificate requirements. Advisers can also recommend instructors and help you simplify the different aspects of your academic life. Here are a few ways to make sure that your first meeting with your adviser is a valuable experience:

- **Look at your college course catalog and think about the available majors.** If you haven't already decided on a major, ask your adviser about opportunities for taking an aptitude test or a self-assessment to help you narrow down your options. Often these are administered free in your career center (Read more about self-assessments and self-exploration below).
- **Prepare materials to bring to the meeting. Even if you submitted your high school or other college transcripts with your college application, bring a copy of your transcripts to the meeting.** The transcript—your complete academic record that shows your major, when you took particular courses, your grades for each course, and your overall GPA—is an important tool; it shows your academic adviser where you've been, your academic strengths, and your interests. At some colleges, your adviser may also have access to all this information online, but even so, it is still a good idea to bring your own copies along for such conversations.
- **Make a list of majors that appeal to you.** Academic advisers love it when students come prepared—it shows that they're passionate and are taking their future seriously. Being prepared will encourage advisers to remember you and invest more time in working with you.
- **Map out your timeframe and goals.** Do you plan to enroll full-time or part-time? When do you plan to graduate, and with what degree? Do you plan to transfer to another college?
- **Know the right questions to ask.** Once you've chosen a major, you'll need to understand how to move forward in your academic program to meet the necessary requirements. You will have **prerequisites**—the basic courses you need to take before you can enroll in upper-level classes in your major. Your major may also have **co-requisites**—courses you have to take in conjunction with other courses during the same term (a chemistry lab alongside your chemistry class, for example). So, with this knowledge under your belt, here is what you need to find out:
 - How many credits must I take each term to graduate on time? (Note: If you are on financial aid, are doing work-study, or are a college athlete, you will have to take a minimum number of credits per term.)

- What are the prerequisites for my major? What are the co-requisites?
- Can I use AP (Advance Placement) credits, CLEP (College-Level Examination Program) credits, or placement exams to fulfill some requirements of my major?
- What career opportunities will I have once I graduate? What will the salary potential be?
- **Know what to take away from your meeting.** When you leave the meeting, take with you a printout of your current course schedule and plans for classes you might take in the next term and beyond.
- **Know these rules of thumb about selecting your classes:**
 - Decide which classes you want to take, find out which days and times they meet, and make sure they don't overlap. Most full-time students take four or five courses a term.
 - Make sure to register as early as possible—in person or online.
 - Resist the temptation to cram all of your classes into one or two days. Aim for a manageable workload by spreading your classes throughout the week.
 - Leave time between courses so that on exam days you can study immediately before the exam.
- **Go for a mix of hard and easy courses.** Especially at the beginning, you might not realize how challenging college courses can be or how much outside work they entail.
- **Know what to do if your academic adviser isn't the right match for you.** If you think you and your adviser are not a good match, go to the advising office or academic department office and ask to be assigned to a different adviser. Asking for alternative advising is one of your rights as a student. Academic planning is so critical to your success in college that it's worth persevering until you find an adviser with whom you feel comfortable. If you don't know where to start in finding a new adviser, talk to your college success instructor.
- **Set up subsequent meetings with your academic adviser.** Check in with your adviser at least once a term, if not more often. It's important to stay connected, especially if you plan to transfer or apply to graduate school. Programs change requirements occasionally, so it's smart to touch base with your adviser periodically in case you need to make any necessary adjustments.

YOUR TURN > TRY IT



Have you explored your college's career center? If you haven't made a visit, what are you waiting for?

MAKING THE TRANSITION BY CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

Colleges can seem to be like large cities, especially if you went to a small high school or grew up in a small town. To feel comfortable in the college environment, it is important for you to find places where you feel that you belong, but it will take some initiative on your part. We know that you have a lot going on, but the time you invest to make this happen now is time well spent.

How Is College Different?

If you just graduated from high school, were home-schooled, or completed your GED, you will soon find that college is different. For instance, in college you are probably part of a more diverse student body, not just in terms of race but also in terms of age, religion, political opinions, marital and family status, and life experiences. You have more potential friends; they may or may not be from your neighborhood, place of worship, or high school.

Also, you can choose from many more types of courses, but managing your time is sure to be more difficult because your classes will meet on different days and times. In high school, you may have had frequent tests and quizzes, but tests in college are sometimes given only twice or three times a term. You will probably be required to do more writing in college than in high school, and you will be encouraged to do original research and examine different points of view on a topic. You will be expected to study outside of class, prepare assignments, read different materials, and be ready for in-class discussions.

› Don't Be a Lone Ranger

You can develop learning relationships with other students in a study group, club or organization related to your major, or even in student activities. It's not wise to be a "lone ranger" as you approach studying; you will learn more deeply by studying with other students. You will also develop friendships that will last through your college experience.

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Your instructors might rely far less on textbooks and far more on lectures than your high school teachers did. They also might allow you more freedom and even push you to express views that are different from theirs. You may also have opportunities to apply some of your personal and work experience to what you are learning and to what is being presented and discussed in class.

Challenges for Online Learners. If you are taking courses online, your experience is going to be significantly different from students who attend classes at your college. Online courses require students to be more disciplined and able to manage their time and study more independently. Without in-person class meetings, you might find it more challenging to make connections with other students, so you might need to make an extra effort to do so. However, your online course will surely provide you with electronic means to “chat” with other students and the instructor. To increase your engagement in such a course, you do need to use such means to communicate, especially with other students. If your online course incorporates a few class meetings, it may provide more structure and allow students and instructors to meet periodically. Also remember that through social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter many students do not need to be physically on campus to be involved in college life.

Issues for Returning Students. If you are a **returning student**—someone who is not a recent high school graduate and may have a job, a family, and who is “returning” to formal education after being out of the educational system for some period of time—you will find that college presents both opportunities *and* challenges. While college can be an opportunity for a new beginning, working full-time and attending college at night, on weekends, or both can mean extra stress, especially with a family at home.

Returning students often experience a lack of freedom because of many important competing responsibilities. You might have a difficult daily commute, or you might have to arrange and pay for child care. You might have to manage work and school responsibilities and still find time for family and other duties. You may also need to let your family know that attending college means that you have to spend time studying and that you may ask them for help or need their support more than ever. You also might find it difficult to relate to younger students whose interests may be different from yours.

In spite of your concerns, you should know that many college instructors value working with returning students because their life experiences have shown them the importance of an education. Your instructors will enjoy interacting with you because they believe you will be motivated, mature, and focused and have a broad range of experiences that will give you a unique and rich point of view about what you’re learning in your classes.

Building Relationships with Your Instructors

One of the most important types of relationships you can develop in college is with your instructors. Frequent, high-quality interactions with

your instructors can have a positive effect on how well you do academically. Your relationships with your college instructors are going to be very different from your relationships with your high school teachers. College students are expected to be more independent and seek the advice and assistance of their instructors; in other words, you should attempt to make connections with your college instructors and get to know them.

Knowing and Meeting Expectations. While instructors' expectations might be different from course to course, most instructors expect their students to attend class, arrive on time, do assigned work, listen and participate, and not give up when they have to learn difficult material. If you repeatedly arrive late or leave early, you are breaking the basic rules of etiquette and politeness, and you are intentionally or unintentionally showing a lack of respect for your instructors and your classmates.

Instructors also expect honesty and openness. Many instructors invite you to express your feelings about the course through one-minute papers or other forms of class assessment. In addition, college instructors expect you to be motivated to do your best.

The instructor-student relationship should be based on mutual respect and reasonable expectations. In college, it is your responsibility to meet the expectations of your instructors. In return, you should expect your instructors to be organized and prepared, to be knowledgeable about the subjects they are teaching, to provide comments on your papers and exams, and to grade your work fairly. You should be able to approach your instructors when you need academic help or if you have a personal problem that may make studying difficult.

To get a clear sense of the expectations of each of your instructors, pay close attention to the syllabus for each course (see Table 1.2). Make sure

> Exchanging Ideas

Most college instructors love to exchange ideas. Many successful college graduates can name a particular instructor who made a positive difference in their lives and influenced their academic and career paths. Develop meaningful relationships with your instructors. It could change your life for the better.

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you review each syllabus carefully at the beginning of the term, refer to it through the term, and keep it in your course notebook with other course materials.

TABLE 1.2 > The Syllabus and Grades

The Syllabus	
What is a syllabus?	A syllabus is a statement of the requirements of a given course and also a contract between the students and the instructor that the college must honor.
What is on a syllabus?	A syllabus includes basic information about the course, the instructor's office hours and contact information, expectations, and grading criteria for assignments, tests, papers, exams, or presentations. The syllabus will also include the attendance policy, a week-by-week plan for the course, and assignments, exams, papers, and projects and their due dates.
When do I get the syllabus?	Generally, instructors provide the syllabus to their students during the first class session and/or place it online.
Grades	
How are grades calculated?	Letter grades (A, B, C, D, F) are calculated in different ways. Often A = 95-100, A- = 90-94, B = 85-89, B- = 80-84, and so on.
What is a GPA?	The grades you earn will build your grade point average (GPA) . Your GPA is the average of points you receive based on your grades for each course. Generally, college GPAs range from 0 (F) to 4.0 (A or A+). This is referred to as a "4-point scale."
What are the other grade options?	<p>"W" for "withdraw": requested by students who need to drop the course before the end of the term. This grade is typically used for students who have to leave the course because of emergencies or difficulties.</p> <p>"I" for "incomplete": given to students who may need additional time to complete the course because of an emergency.</p> <p>"P" for "pass" or "F" for fail: given in certain courses instead of letter grades.</p>

Making the Most of Learning Relationships. You can visit your instructors anytime during the term, either face-to-face or online, to ask questions, seek help with a difficult topic or assignment, or discuss a problem. Some of your instructors will have private offices and keep regular **office hours**, the posted hours when they are in their offices and available to students. It's up to you to take the initiative to visit your instructors during their office hours or at whatever times and locations they determine, but it is their job to be available to assist students like you. Check with your instructors to find out if you need to make an appointment before going to their offices. Visiting an instructor may seem a little scary to some students, but most instructors welcome the opportunity to get to know them.

The relationships you develop with instructors can be valuable to you both now and in the future—you might find that one or more of them become lifelong mentors and friends. Instructors who know you

well can also write that all-important letter of recommendation when you are applying for transfer or for a job after college. It is often these recommendations that make the ultimate difference in whether a student is accepted or rejected when applying for a new position. Many successful college graduates can name a particular instructor who made a positive difference in their lives and influenced their academic and career paths.

Instructors who teach part-time at your college might be called part-time instructors or **adjuncts**, and they may not have assigned offices. While adjuncts are not usually required to hold office hours, they often make themselves available to meet with their students before or after class or by appointment.

If you ever have a problem with an instructor, ask for a meeting to discuss your problem and see if you can work things out. If the instructor refuses, go to a person in a higher position in the department or college. If the problem is a grade, keep in mind that your instructor has the right to assign you grades based on your performance, and no one can force him or her to change those grades. However, you can always speak with your instructor about your grade, find out what mistakes you made, and see how you can improve your grade in the future. In addition, all colleges allow students to challenge a grade that they believe is incorrect through a formal “appeal” or “petition.” Most important, don’t let a bad experience change your feelings about college. Each instructor will probably be out of your life by the end of the term, so if there are problems, just do your best, focus on your studies, and get through the course.