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## How to Understand Emerging Adulthood

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Chapter 2 contextualizes the changing life course within larger economic, social, and cultural trends, and discusses the role of contemporary higher education in understanding those changes. The second chapter helps to make sense of modern college students by explaining the life stage of emerging adulthood, along with the changes that have created an elongation of life course development, including longer periods of transition into adulthood. In chapter 2, students learn how experiences with moving, changing identities, and romantic partnering and breakups all fit within the life stage tasks of establishing identity while forming intimate romantic relationships and friendships. Achieving a better grasp of how transitioning into adulthood looks for young people today makes it easier for students to understand themselves and explain themselves to others.

This chapter explains in more detail how contemporary college students are different from students who enrolled a generation ago. First, we introduce more stories from students who describe in their own words what it is like to begin college today. Next, we summarize research on the changing economy, workforce opportunities, and an increasing number of moves as people relocate for jobs. We also talk about changes to marriage and families, discussing what some scholars call the “marriage-go-round.” All of this affects what it means to grow up, and cause delays in the forms of “settling down” that most people consider signs of adulthood. Plus, we discuss changes surrounding higher education, including rising costs and questions about whether the financial investment in college will pay off. These trends and questions underline the need for critical thinking skills, which this chapter’s advice will help students develop.

## STUDENT STORIES: WHAT WE EXPERIENCE

We begin with stories of three students—**Sanjana**, **Troy**, and **Derrick**—who explain several of the experiences that are common for incoming college students and that are often experienced by emerging adults in general.

**#movingagain:** I’m moving again, caught up in a whirlwind of always changing situations, wondering if I am—or how I could possibly be—the same person I was two years ago.

**Sanjana** explained this in her own words with the following:

I still remember the uneasiness I felt in my stomach as I boarded a plane for the first time, leaving my hometown of twelve years and starting a new life in California. Flash forward 8 years, two more moves, far too many flights, and I am preparing to move all over again. However, I can’t help but notice how different I have become within those 8 years. Moving to different states has been the single biggest influence of who I am today. Each state had

its own unique culture, people, and life experiences that have permanently changed me as a person.

**#changingidentity:** Wow, high school seems like ancient history! Hard to believe that just four months ago I was in homeroom wondering when the bell would ring. Now I can go to class when I want to, have a totally new group of friends, and can barely remember my home address.

**Troy** explained the dramatic shift that most students feel from their high school identity to the new version being shaped in college: “In the past year, a lot has changed in my life as I have made the transition from high school to college. Since I moved out of state, I have two completely different lives in two entirely different social environments. As a result of this, I sometimes feel caught between two places.”

**#brokenhearted:** Anybody else having trouble concentrating? I’m still not over her, and I just can’t focus. But I have a test tomorrow. Help!

**Derrick** and Serena split up. He had followed her to college because they dated throughout senior year and talked about their future together. Within the first six weeks of their first semester though, she said they each needed space to become who they are meant to be but that they would always be an important part of one another’s lives. Derrick was more reserved, while outgoing Serena made friends easily, and he didn’t realize how much he depended on her personality to meet new people. He has not only lost his girlfriend, but much of his circle of friends too. He had only chosen to go to this school because she wanted to, and now he is stuck. Derrick recognizes the tremendous opportunity a college education affords him, and he does not want to take that for granted. But he can’t help being distracted. Every time he tries to write a paper, his mind wanders to Serena, and where he went wrong. How did it all just evaporate? This all comes to a head when he forgets to submit an assignment and finds himself in his professor’s office trying to explain how he is still the A student he has always been, despite having an F.

## SCIENCE: WHAT WE KNOW

These students provide a glimpse into common difficulties among young adults, including moving, changing romantic partnerships, and grappling with identity as their lives are splintered across multiple locations and significant others. In a book called *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*, Robert Putnam<sup>1</sup> summarizes the broader context to which these students refer. People are getting married and having kids later in life, so romantic partnerships change—often multiple times—throughout emerging adulthood and beyond. College-educated women delay childbearing more than less educated women, while Americans in the lowest third of the income distribution are more likely to have children outside of marriage than within it. Moreover, blended families and “multi-partner fertility” scenarios, in which children in the same household were born of different parents, are more common today. In *Labor’s Love Lost: The Rise and Fall of the Working-Class Family in America*, Andrew Cherlin refers to marital turnover as the “marriage-go-round.”<sup>2</sup> People are increasingly getting on and off the carousel of marriage, or choosing to cohabit with romantic partners instead of marrying at all. Some scholars refer to this as relationship “churning,” to reflect the degree of mix-up and stirring that occurs as people sort their relationships.<sup>3</sup> But these trends are not merely the result of people deliberately choosing to marry and have kids later; they are likely also the outcome of economic changes.

Emerging adults are experiencing these changes to romantic partnerships and family life in the midst of a changing economic context. The US economy has undergone a “structural shift” in which the available jobs and skills needed for most jobs have changed markedly in the past decade.<sup>4</sup> In a report on the economy called *Failure to Launch*, Anthony Carnevale and colleagues state the following:

The model of the labor market that presumed entry at age 18 and exit at age 65 is obsolete, and instead, young people often start their careers later, after developing more human capital from postsecondary education and training, and work experience from internships,

work-study, mentorships, fellowships, job shadowing, and part-time work. Young people today change jobs more frequently between the ages of 18 and 25 and only one out of 10 describes his or her current job as a career (Carnevale et al. 2013: 4).

These delays in establishing career paths mean that the significant adult developmental markers happen less in the early 20s today than they do in the 30s, and often after multiple moves.

Taking these trends together, the ways that people transition into adulthood are more variable: there are multiple options for when, how, and in what order to take on adult roles, such as completing education, establishing careers, forming long-term romantic partnerships, and having children. In fact, one study found that there are more than 60 possible sequences in the timing and order of acquiring adult roles.<sup>5</sup> Sociologists view all these options as a combination of personal choices and available opportunities shaped through a process of personal agency (individual choices) within larger social forces (such as family background, economic changes, culture of origin, global and national political policies).<sup>6</sup> Many young people may prefer to have children later in life than their parents did, but it is unlikely that they prefer to put off earning a stable income. Plus having kids later may be a choice made in response to difficulties establishing economic stability. In essence, it takes young people longer to become adults not only because they want to spend a long time developing themselves but also because of limited and changing economic options, shifts in cultural values regarding the centrality of work and family, and a rising need for advanced education.<sup>7</sup> Coupling this with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the longer time spent with unsettled belongingness, love, and esteem needs can delay a focus on self-actualization: fulfilling one's potential, in college and in life after college.<sup>8</sup>

For individual students in the midst of chasing these markers of adulthood, the process can feel disorienting. Students are juggling multiple senses of self in that the different social groups with which they interact can bring out one kind of personal identity or another, not always feeling like these different identities fit together into a coherent whole. Identities are also renegotiated

as new friend groups and romantic partners<sup>9</sup> emerge, or as old friend groups or previous romantic partnerships dissolve. In the midst of these changes, emerging adults are attempting to form their college-enabled professional identities, all while also forming intimate connections, in friendships and with potential long-term romantic partners.<sup>10</sup> Many studies find that the academic and career goals of romantic partners and friend groups are strong predictors of an individual's school and career goals.<sup>11</sup> Some of this may be because people tend to hang out with others who are similar to them, including finding friends and romantic partners who have similar levels of academic achievement and career identity. But it is also likely that this is due to causal relationships, meaning that people are influenced by the people they hang out with, and the choices for leisure with friends and romantic partners can directly impact the amount of time people invest in school work, as well as the extent to which students form particular career paths.

Thus, dismantling an emerging professional identity may spill over into pressure to dissolve a new romantic relationship, or a split with a romantic partner may result in a move, a change of friends, or a new job, or, in the most impactful of circumstances, a change in all of these simultaneously. Such turmoil in work and personal life can lead to emerging adults experiencing “existential crises”—the psychological distress of having to reconsider foundational senses of meaning. “Meaning frameworks” guide people's ability to make sense of new situations, but collisions in ways of making meaning can cause disorienting confusion and take considerable effort to resolve. The many changes of emerging adulthood can cause people—like Sanjana, Troy, and Derrick—to reevaluate all that they once took for granted, questioning what they thought they knew, what they want to believe, and who they want to help them make sense of it all.<sup>12</sup> Broadly, this means emerging adults are learning how to balance their ability to personally choose their own paths while building awareness of all the different social influences that surround their individual choices, including social media interactions. In this way, navigating college, and life generally, is a *social construction*. We return to this issue more in chapter 5.

Amid these struggles to establish themselves, young people are also confronting a changing array of available careers. The kinds of jobs available

to most current college students are fairly different from those available to their parents, and the skills that most contemporary employers desire are also distinct. Most important is establishing transferable skills: talents built in college and other experiences that can later be transferred to career skill sets. In an article called “Voices of Employers,” Varda Konstam<sup>13</sup> reports that many employers, often from the Baby Boom generation, view emerging adults (who are from the millennial and younger generations) as “intelligent and flexible,” but found that they “did not bring valued skill sets to the work place.” Konstam explains:

Employers are increasingly privileging the learning ability of their employees, that is their “ability to put together disparate bits of information” on demand, as the need emerges (Friedman 2014, para. 3). They are interested in employees’ capacity to solve problems, using their leadership skills when appropriate, and having sufficient humility to know when to take a back seat and relinquish power if a fellow employee has a better solution to the presenting problem. Employers are looking beyond traditional metrics such as GPA, and are devising metrics that will predict on-the-job skills such as flexibility, humility, leadership, and know-how within a context of a team of fellow employees (Konstam 2015: 163–164).

Echoing this, Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, in their book *Aspiring Adults Adrift: Tentative Transitions of College Graduates*,<sup>14</sup> discuss how many disgruntled employers are critical of college graduates for not having the skills they desire. Employers place emphasis on needing a generic set of skills produced by higher education. Rather than emphasizing job-specific training, which is likely to be outdated within a few years, employers say they want recent hires to have the ability to learn, ensuring they will acquire the knowledge they need on the job over time. They want college graduates with evident critical thinking abilities:

Recent surveys of employers have highlighted dissatisfaction with the preparation of college graduates, noting that only approximately a

quarter of college graduates entering the labor market have excellent skills in critical thinking and problem solving, and only 16 percent have excellent written communication . . . “Woefully unprepared” is how one employer described college graduates . . . employers tended to ding bachelor’s-degree holders for lacking basic workplace proficiencies, like adaptability, communication skills, and the ability to solve complex problems (Arum & Roksa 2014, pp. 19–20).

The majority of young people in the United States show up for a college education, but many of these students begin college thinking their primary task is just to be there. Since the prior generation was more likely to go to college than the generation before it, many entering students expect to go to college merely because their parents did<sup>15</sup> (see the student story about **Ellie** in chapter 8 for more on this). But this is not enough.

Succeeding in college is about acquiring the skills needed to establish stable careers. Showing up and doing just enough to wind up with a degree is not sufficient. Students need to develop lifelong critical thinking skills. Achieving this, however, is difficult during the highly volatile stage of emerging adulthood, during which students experience tremendous fluctuations in identity and intimacy, especially within the context of engagement on social media. This is why George Kuh (2008)<sup>16</sup> recommends “high-impact educational practices” for incoming college students (see further reading section), all of which share an approach to helping incoming first-year students adjust to the hidden curriculum of college. Also key is Bloom’s taxonomy of critical thinking skills. (e.g., Anderson et al. 2000).<sup>17</sup> For example, in high school teachers often give review sessions for exams, and these reviews often reveal many of the answers for the exam. In college, however, many instructors do not provide review sessions at all, and when they do, they are often more focused on reviewing the key topics, less close to answers on exams, and instead expect students to fill in the topics through studying outside of class time. Similarly, on the job a boss often expects an employee to meet a deadline with little to no guidance.



While there is a progression in both the freedom and responsibility expected of emerging adults, many incoming first-year students (and later, upper-level students ) struggle to make the adjustments needed as they advance to higher levels. These students, like those in the stories at the start of this chapter, are beginning to socially construct their own identities. Identity construction is done within a new recognition that emerging adults have freedom to choose their path. At the same time, past experiences and backgrounds shape opportunities to some degree. Notably, digital footprints are a relatively new aspect to self-and-social identity construction, which like other aspects of identity formation also deserve conscious thought and attention. As with other social representations, reputations online can leave positive footprints that help to support a strong academic and professional identity, or alternatively can cause damage.<sup>18</sup> Thus, emerging adults can be empowered to shape society as they develop into adults while, at the same time, they leave behind any naivety that everything is within their power and controlled by them alone. Society shapes what it means to be a person of different ages, and wise emerging adults consider these social influences even while they navigate their choices through college.

#### ADVICE: WHAT WE PROVIDE

The advice sections of each chapter are intended to help students develop needed critical thinking skills, in this case about themselves and their college pathways. Based on research about employers and changing labor markets, we—in particular the portion of our authorship team that are student development and student support practitioners—advise students to treat college as an opportunity to explore how different majors can lead to various careers after graduating. While college is not about vocational training specifically—since its purpose is to facilitate the development of well-rounded people who can work in a variety of careers in their lifetimes—it is important to talk in the classroom and outside of class about how majors serve careers and aid transitions to work. Through a

somewhat hidden curriculum, college teaches students how to put up with doing things that others tell them they have to accomplish. In the course of studying for an exam or writing a paper by a certain date, students are learning much more than the content for the exam or paper. They are also building “soft skills” that employers value: the ability to fight boredom, to put up with mundane tasks, to cope with aspects of working and learning that are not fun, and to work with people from a range of backgrounds.

We—in particular the portion of our authorship team that are faculty members who teach many students in class and visit with many students in office hours—advise students to think of college as practice in perseverance. Especially in the early years, college helps students acquire tenacity, the ability to stick it out stubbornly to achieve the desired end result. Rather than pressuring professors for rubrics and step-by-step instructions on how to get an A, we encourage students to view confusing assignments or classes as opportunities to learn how to navigate through vague work assignments. Future employers are unlikely to give rubrics, and “get it done by Friday” may be the extent of the instructions from a boss. Knowing how to write the best report, even without specific instructions, is an important tool for college-educated workers. This is part of developing the general critical thinking skills that employers want, and successful students rise to the occasion. That said, college students do encounter many difficult situations that we do not mean to write off. In what follows, we offer some specific advice related to each of the classic emerging adult experiences our students described at the beginning of this chapter.

**#movingagain** Students who find themselves in a similar situation to **Sanjana** should know they are in good company. It is normal to be impacted and changed in various ways by passing through diverse social environments and encountering new situations. We commend students like Sanjana for their awareness of this process. It is a wonderful thing to be able to understand how social environments actually affect a person—who they become, how they interact with others, and their future. Our first piece of advice, then, is to understand such an experience as normal, even desirable.

We advise other students to learn from Sanjana by recognizing that different social environments affect people in unique ways; the new social environment of college is going to affect everyone.

At the same time, one must recall that the places that students have already been impact them now as well. Sanjana is aware of the change in her life, but she also needs to be aware of the stability. College may be new and exciting, but all of the old influences from previous places are still part of who people are and continue to affect them during college. Emerging into adulthood is a socially constructed process that involves the freedom to choose one's own path, while also recognizing that one's path is affected by social forces that are not fully controlled or chosen by any one person. Our third piece of advice, then, is to reflect on how previous experiences still play a role in students' new and evolving selves. Engage self-awareness to assess feasible choices within real social constraints and opportunities. Do not pretend to have full power, nor to be powerless.

**#changingidentity** Students who resonate with **Troy** should also understand their experiences as normal aspects of college. When students come to college, they begin to adapt to the new environment, the new social settings. We advise students to understand that this comes from a feeling of wanting to belong, to fit in, and to make new friends. It is also common for students to recognize that having new experiences on campus means they are not sharing those experiences with people in their hometown. Many students feel, to a certain extent, that they have left their old friends behind, or that they no longer have much common ground with them. After people have been away from a place for a while and go back, the conversation with old friends can revert to the last set of shared experiences, which could have been two, three, however many years ago. There is so much of life that happened in between that it can highlight what is no longer shared in common. There is nothing wrong with this feeling of separation, of having two different identities—the feeling of fragmentation that Troy describes.

Though to some extent this can be a sad realization, we urge students to understand it as a normal part of college and of life afterward as well. That does not mean that we suggest dismissing the experience. Instead,

students should reflect upon the different social contexts that they are part of and consider what that means for the life they are shaping during college. There is no rule that says people have to act a certain way in college, or that people can only be friends with a certain kind of people. We therefore advise students to notice the relationship (both similarities and differences) between experiences in their hometowns and in college. It is also understandable to view different places as separate pieces of a self, so long as students know their task is to work on integrating them.

Troy and students like him would benefit from talking with a caring instructor with whom they feel a sense of connection. Talking in person would help an instructor get a sense for Troy's perspective on the situation. It could also lead to inviting a faculty mentorship. When students view such an experience negatively, we would encourage them to spend some time thinking about the significance of different relationships in their life, to consider where they get emotional stability or emotional fulfillment. We advise students to evaluate the value of these relationships, what they bring to their life, and how important they are to them. Based on that evaluation, we advise students to decide how much energy they want to devote to maintaining these older relationships and how much to growing new relationships.

Most importantly, all students, especially in their first year, must recognize that they need a strong support network, which has to be actively created. Whether that means maintaining ties with friends from home or developing new friends in college, or both, finding emotional stability and enjoying support from one's friends will be crucial in navigating college. Having a good support network enables students to do many things that they would struggle to do without it. A second key takeaway for students who resonate with Troy is that—even while feeling like they are being two different people—they may benefit from reflecting on the ways they are the same person in both places. Identifying one's core self provides a sense of continuity across geographic lines.

**#brokenhearted** For students like Derrick, it is vital to speak with a supportive adult on campus regarding what is getting in the way of

academics. If Derrick showed up to one of our offices to talk about his poor performance in class amid the relational challenges he is facing, we would focus on conveying three points to him. First, we would recognize and offer an empathetic understanding of the intense experience he is now immersed in. Specifically, we would acknowledge the pain that Derrick is feeling as he works to dismantle the dreams he had established in his relationship with Serena. In a way, Derrick and Serena shared a marriage-like experience, beginning to form their lives together and envision a shared future. Yet, they had not made a mutual commitment to be married, or participated in a ceremony to demarcate their lives in a shared direction. This can make Derrick's loss more challenging to understand, as some could view him as going through just another breakup. But to Derrick, more was lost than that. The first step then to helping Derrick regain focus on his academic dreams is to acknowledge that he lost something more than a simple romantic relationship; he lost a potential life partner.

Second, we would want to normalize Derrick's experience for him. Drawing on research on emerging adulthood, we would share that one reason that this life stage is both so fantastic and so troubling is that identity and intimacy formation overlap. For prior generations following the normative life course development process, identity construction reached near completion during adolescence, and intimacy formation followed in young adulthood. But now identity formation and intimacy occur in the same period. Throughout life, people have to make decisions based on a particular set of circumstances, but those circumstances can change. When that happens, people need to sit down and reevaluate their lives, goals, objectives, and their sense of self. We advise students in similar circumstances to Derrick to view this challenge as an opportunity to rethink who they are and figure out what they want, or at least to spend some time thinking about these questions. Once people figure out what they want out of life, it is easier to remain focused in the face of adversity. Of course, most of who Derrick is and will be is still the same. Experiencing unsettling experiences present an opportunity to reshape one's identity,

but people are also fairly stable underneath. Much like the turbulence of the sea that can be found on the surface, as compared to the calmer waters beneath, people can experience life storms without total devastation to their calmer undercurrents. Yet, a small thunderstorm is different than a hurricane. To the extent that a romantic relationship took on characteristics of a long-term partnership, it can be a hurricane-level devastation. Important here is to understand that this long-term romantic identity is not necessarily represented in the actual duration of the relationship, which may have been quite short, but in the intimate identity the person imagined for the future.

For a student like Derrick, who had plans to build a life with Serena, this breakup is not only emotional, it also disrupts his identity: who he thinks he is and why he is here. Derrick is in the midst of adult-like life experiences (such as excelling in college, working toward graduating, and getting committed to a career), but now he feels he has had the roots he was growing chopped out from under him. No longer on solid ground, he wonders how he can keep growing and moving forward. We encourage students in Derrick's shoes to go to counseling services, as a way to gain a new perspective from an outside observer. Such counseling services are often readily available on college campuses. In these counseling sessions, students can learn good coping strategies for how to maintain focus when they are working on a paper and find their mind wandering and beginning to relive the breakup. It is worth acknowledging that relationship turmoil and low coping skills can interfere with academic progression. Yet, it is also the case that academic support is not meant to offer primary responses to relationship and coping issues. Rather, it is appropriate to share with a professor or academic advisor that this romantic relationship disturbance occurred, and to ask for help in navigating the pain. However, it is not appropriate to treat the professor or academic advisor as the counselor. Rather, academic support can be helpful for referrals to counseling services. Understanding this difference is key for empowering students with knowing what to ask, and what not to ask, when sharing this devastation with academic support. In addition to seeking counseling services

to work through the personal issues surrounding relationships, we also encourage students to do some self-evaluation, by considering how to make the best of the situation, to grow and learn from the experience, and to become a better person as a result. This kind of thinking, not just following breakups but about any experience encountered during college, helps set students up for a better future. It also gains students power over what can seem to be a powerless situation.

Third, returning to the academic issues that he is facing, Derrick and similar students should try to think strategically about how to (a) access campus resources and other social supports to attend to the emotional issues involved in this identity-intimacy resorting, and (b) work with professors and campus support staff to get caught up on schoolwork and maintain a successful academic record while sorting through next steps. Students should know that their heart sometimes needs mending in the midst of all their new experiences. Also, when life circumstances change abruptly and disrupt academic focus, it remains important to ask how to meet obligations to ourselves, to others, and to society. The world does not stop turning for one's personal loss, and academic expectations must continue. In this regard, students need to acknowledge the ways that their personal experience does not globalize to a collective experience. In life after college, people still need to show up for work, or they will not get paid. Sustained lack of participation in work can result in loss of a job. In this respect, college is no different. Dropping out of class participation entirely is likely to result in a low grade. Professors cannot, and should not be expected to, completely alter the course design because of one person's tragedy. Yet, just as people can take a personal day at work, there can be some short-term accommodations made to provide students the opportunity to work through their loss and remobilize themselves back to the academic tasks at hand. Key to sorting this out well is to understand the distinction between these two points: (a) students can access campus counseling resources to work on their coping skills and recover from their personal loss, and (b) students can talk with professors and academic advisors to arrange short-term academic accommodations.

## ACTIVITIES: WHAT WE (CAN) LEARN

To help students work through developmental tasks of emerging adulthood, while challenging them to break down preconceived notions regarding college, we recommend the following kinds of activities. In the first set, we recommend that students discuss with each other the trends identified in the science section of this chapter, regarding increased churning in jobs, locations, families, and romantic partnerships. The key here is to normalize experiences as emerging adults and give each other permission to talk about these issues. One option is for students to read the student stories at the beginning of the chapter and then ask each other with which of these students they most identify. This could be done as an icebreaker for student groups or at orientation, and could be adapted for classroom use as well. (See appendix C for more instructions on implementing such an activity in class.)

Second, we recommend that students orient themselves to the higher education system. They can do so through a number of approaches. One is to find the organizational charts of the university (typically available by searching the university website), and to discuss with professors and others on campus the various roles, including chancellors or presidents, deans, and department chairs. Another activity is to review academic and university terms, since many students—especially those unfamiliar with universities—are taken aback by the sheer number of acronyms and confused by the whole vocabulary. Sometimes universities compile their own lists of vocabulary and acronyms, and there are also several general lists available. (See appendix C for class activities to orient students to higher education.)

Another way to orient students to campus is to invite them to review university identity on the web, reading about and discussing the history of the mascot or other important campus traditions. As some of the students throughout this book report, fraternities and sororities are often effective in building strong groups because of the ways they join students to each other through their connection to campus. Other student groups can also



engender similar kinds of campus identity through exploring campus together (see appendix C for a class activity involving a campus scavenger hunt). The key is to investigate higher education and to connect with other students.

In a third set of activities, we recommend spending some time improving skills for studying, taking notes, reading comprehension, and testing. Based on the science section, which describes the value of a college education (beyond income earned) and the kinds of skills that employers desire, we invite students to take ownership of their learning by employing strategies that work. Building from the student story regarding what a big switch college can be from high school, we urge students to realize that university study habits need to be more elaborate than the approaches employed in high school. Keywords to investigate on the Web include the forgetting curve, Cornell note taking, and study skills for college. There are many different approaches to improving study skills that are readily available on the Web and that professors may engage in class. Most important is recognizing that nearly all students need to upgrade their skills for receiving, interpreting, synthesizing, and reporting back information. This skill set is not only crucial for surviving and excelling in college, it is also a key tool kit that employers expect college graduates to have. Begin making changes now.

A fourth kind of activity is to engage with professors outside of class, both by talking with them briefly before or after class, and by making at least one visit to a professor during office hours. Rather than approaching professors to ask, “What do I need to do to get an A?” or “What are the steps for getting into medical school?”, students should try to engage professors as a resource for developing their own plan. Succeeding in college, and in life afterwards, is not like following the step-by-step directions of a recipe. The ingredients and the mixing process need to be created by students themselves. Professors and other professionals on campus are available to facilitate that process, but they should act more like coaches than cookbooks. Instead of looking for a cookie-mold process, ask instead how to embody the college experience.

## FURTHER READING ONLINE

- On greater flexibility in work options: Annese, Lisa, September 19, 2016, “Life Is Messy. If We Want the Brightest Workforce, We Need More Flexible Work,” *Guardian*, retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2016/sep/20/the-future-is-flexible-why-companies-must-rethink-work-arrangements>.
- On reasons to get a college degree: Lucier, Kelci Lynn, April 23, 2018, “Reasons to Get a College Degree,” ThoughtCo., retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/reasons-to-get-a-college-degree-793187>.
- On financial benefits of a college degree: Lucier, Kelci Lynn, March 21, 2019, “6 Financial Benefits of a College Degree,” ThoughtCo., retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/financial-benefits-of-a-college-degree-793189>.
- On challenges facing American higher education today, especially how students can ensure that they are getting out of their college education what they need to in order to develop employable skills: Ebersole, John, January 13, 2014, “Top Issues Facing Higher Education in 2014,” *Forbes*, retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnebersole/2014/01/13/top-issues-facing-higher-education-in-2014/#67b327767489>.

**For specific college tips, see the following:**

- “Keys to College Success,” Student Learning Assistance Center, Texas State University, retrieved from <http://gato-docs.its.txstate.edu/jcr:2c1040cd-a05f-422b-b7c2-c5874f950feb/Keys%20to%20College%20Success.pdf>.
- “SQ3R—A Reading and Study Skill System,” Simpson University, retrieved from <https://simpsonu.edu/assets/doc/ASC/ASC-SQ3R.pdf>.

- On explanations for and advice on taking quality notes on class lectures: [http://thetgi.sae.net/TheTruegentlemaninitiativelibrary/82/Module?module=taking\\_lecture\\_notes](http://thetgi.sae.net/TheTruegentlemaninitiativelibrary/82/Module?module=taking_lecture_notes).
- On tips for improving test taking: “General Test-Taking Strategies,” Lone Star College, retrieved from [http://www.lonestar.edu/departments/learningcenter/General\\_Test\\_Taking\\_Strategies.pdf](http://www.lonestar.edu/departments/learningcenter/General_Test_Taking_Strategies.pdf).
- “Conquering Finals: A 10-Point Plan,” Central Carolina Community College, retrieved from [http://www.cccc.edu/csc/resources/files/Study\\_Skills/Conquering\\_Finals.pdf](http://www.cccc.edu/csc/resources/files/Study_Skills/Conquering_Finals.pdf).
- “High-Impact Educational Practices,” Association of American Colleges and Universities, retrieved from [https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/HIP\\_tables.pdf](https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/HIP_tables.pdf).

## NOTES

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