



PSYCH LEARNING CURVE



HOT TOPICS

MARCH 11, 2016 | FOCUSING ON THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN THIS WEEK'S NEWS

SEARCH ...

HOME

GRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

Why Your Freshman Year In College Will NOT Be 13th Grade

TOPICS: Educational Programs In Psychology Resources For Students



POSTED BY: DREW APPLEBY, PHD FEBRUARY 8, 2016

According to the most recent data from **American College Testing's College Retention and Graduation Rates**, 32% of all freshmen enrolled in American colleges and universities drop out before their sophomore year. The causes for this appalling statistic have been researched extensively, and they fall into four categories: poor academic preparation, inadequate financial support, lack of campus engagement, and low educational motivation. While these reasons

certainly account for a substantial portion of this high drop-out rate, during my 40-year career as a college professor I also observed that many of my academically well-prepared, financially well-supported, actively engaged, and highly motivated freshmen failed to return for their sophomore year as a result of the culture shock they experienced because they were unaware of the very real and very important differences that exist between the academic cultures of high school and college. As a result of this unawareness, they treated their freshman year in college as if it were their 13th grade in high school and therefore failed to adapt successfully to their new academic environment because they were either unable or unwilling to change the behaviors, attitudes, and/or strategies that helped them to succeed in high school, but which caused them to fail in college.

The strategy I developed to help my students become aware of and overcome this daunting challenge was based on the results of a qualitative research project I performed in which I asked students in one of my freshman learning communities at the end of their first semester to identify the most important ways in which their educational environment (i.e., their classes and teachers) had changed from high school to college. I performed a content analysis of their responses and summarized my analysis in a **PowerPoint presentation** with an accompanying **handout** and **a poster** that I used in my subsequent classes. I invite you to download and modify these three resources in any way that will help your students adapt more successfully during their transition from secondary to higher education.

Academic Expectations Are Much Higher.

In High School:

In College:

Academic expectations are not always high, and good grades can often be obtained with minimum effort. This is especially true for bright students who discover they don't have to do much more than attend classes and remember what their teacher say to earn high grades.

Academic expectations are much higher, and minimum effort usually produces poor grades.



“It was a big adjustment. “In high school, I was one of the ‘smart’ people who never had to read the material before class, study for a final, or write a paper well in advance. Here, I have to spend every free minute preparing the homework assigned for that day.”

“College classes are really hard and much more in-depth compared to high school classes.”

“I had maybe one paper to write during my whole high school career. Here, I had a paper assigned on the first day of classes.”

Student-Teacher Contact Is Less Frequent and More Formal.

In High School:

Teacher-student contact is close and frequent in classes that usually meet five days a week. Teachers are very accessible.

In College:

Classes meet less often (sometimes only once a week) and faculty are usually available only during their office hours or by appointment.



“College professors aren’t as available as high school teachers. I could drop into my high school teachers’ offices anytime and just hang out. College professors have office hours that we have to use if we want to discuss things with them.”

“High school teachers assist you more. They kind of hold your hand and make sure you get everything done.”

“In high school, teachers were supposed to learn our names and to get to know us. In college, I’ve learned that it’s my responsibility to help my teachers to get to know me.”

The Syllabus Replaces Teachers’ Daily Reminders.

In High School:

The teacher prepares a lesson plan and uses it to tell students how to prepare for the next class period. For example, the teacher might say, “Do your homework and read the textbook before class.”

In College:

The instructor distributes and discusses the syllabus during the first class and expects students to read and follow the syllabus.

the next class period (e.g., “Be sure to read Chapter 3 in your textbook.” or “Don’t forget to study for tomorrow’s test.”).

syllabus without having to be reminded about what will be done or what assignment is due during the next class period.



“High school teachers tell students what’s due the next day; college professors expect students to read what’s due in the syllabus.”

“High school teachers told us our assignments; college professors tell us to read the syllabus.”

“College teachers don’t tell you what you’re supposed to do. They give you a syllabus and expect you to follow what it says. High school teachers tell you about five times what you’re supposed to do.”

Homework Is Done After, Not During School.

In High School:

In College:

Students are assigned daily homework, which teachers collect and check to insure that assigned work is being done. For example, a term paper can require many intermediate steps before the final paper is submitted.

Instructors assume students have learned how to “keep up” with their assignments in high school and can be trusted to do course work without being constantly reminded or assigned “busy work” homework.



“In high school, you learn the material in class. In college, most learning takes place outside the classroom.”

“In high school, things were over at 4:00 p.m. In college, things like studying are just starting at that time.”

Students Must Be More Independent and Responsible.

In High School:

Parents, teachers, and counselors support, give advice to, and often make decisions for students. Students rely on their parents to meet their basic needs and must abide by their parents' boundaries and restrictions.

In College:

Students must learn to rely on themselves and begin to experience the results of their own good and bad decisions. It is their responsibility to seek advice when they need it and to set their own restrictions.



“High school teachers teach you what’s in your textbooks. College teachers expect you to actually read your textbooks.”

“College teachers expect students to read the syllabus and the classroom is set up to where it is sink or swim. Do the work or fail. High school teachers reminded us about the deadlines for projects every day and tried to help us if we were struggling.”

“The most important thing I’ve learned since I have been in college is that it’s time for me to step out of the purgatory between my teenage years and adulthood and to take some responsibility for my life.”

Students Are Treated More Like Adults Than Children.

In High School:

Teachers often contact parents if problems occur. Parents are expected to help

In College:

Students have much more freedom, and must take responsibility for their own actions. Parents may not be aware that a student is experiencing an academic crisis

students in times of crisis.

because the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protects their children's privacy.



“College teachers expect more from you. There are no late assignments or make-up tests. They do not hold your hand”

“The biggest difference between high school teachers and college professors is that you have to learn by yourself in college.”

Students Must Learn to Prioritize Their Activities and Manage Their Own Time.

In High School:

In College:

There are distractions from school work, but these are at least partially controlled by rules at school and home (e.g., curfews, dress codes, and enforced study hours).

Many distractions exist, but students are not protected from them by parental or school rules. Time management and the ability to prioritize become absolutely essential survival skills for college students.



“We don’t have as much time to do assignments as we did in high school because more material is covered in a shorter amount of time.”

“Even though you may not be in class as long as in high school, the amount of time you have to put in to complete the assigned work is doubled, even tripled.”

“The biggest difference between the two was that in high school, I could usually get an assignment done whenever I could and there wouldn’t be much of a consequence if it was late.”

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Drew Appleby, PhD

Dr. Appleby received his BA from Simpson College in 1969 and his PhD from Iowa State University in 1972. During his four-decade career, he chaired the Marian University Psychology Department, was the Director of Undergraduate Studies in the IUPUI Psychology Department, and served as the Associate Dean of the IUPUI Honors College. He used the results of his research on teaching, learning, advising, and mentoring to create strategies that enable college students to adapt to their educational environment, acquire academic competence, set realistic goals, and achieve their career aspirations. He published over 100 books and articles (including *The Savvy Psychology Major*); made over 600 conference and other professional presentations (including 20 invited keynote addresses); received 44 institutional,

regional, and national awards for teaching, advising, mentoring, and service; and was honored for his contributions to the science and profession of psychology by being named a Fellow of the American Psychological Association, the Midwestern Psychological Association, and as the 30th distinguished member of Psi Chi. Most importantly, during his 13 years at IUPUI, he was designated as a mentor by 777 graduating psychology majors, 222 of whom indicated he was their most influential mentor by selecting the following sentence to describe his impact: "This professor influenced the whole course of my life and his effect on me has been invaluable."

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Traci · a month ago

As a high school teacher, I completely agree with the points made in the article. I feel though, I must defend that we must teach (or have been forced to teach) in high school. Most of us would like to make our classes rigorous and encourage students to be more independent but because we have to answer to parents, admissions, and test scores, it is quite difficult to actually put that into practice. Parents are at times their child's own worst enemy and do not allow them to challenge themselves for fear of achieving a lower grade. Over the thirteen years I have been teaching the amount of hand holding with students has only increased. For every assignment I am expected to remind students in class of the assignment multiple times, write it on the board, have a twitter reminder, send out reminders to special education teachers and even notify some parents by email. If a student still fails to turn it in? Be sure that for the most part, it will still be blamed on us and the student will be provided extra time to complete the work. Unless a student takes an AP class, they are rarely exposed to the expectations that will prepare them for a college class. While the curriculum may be challenging in other ways, the amount of effort a teacher must make to get students to accomplish anything undermines their ability to become successfully independent in college.



Bjørn Z. Ekelund · a month ago

It was great reading this stuff. I am a consultant that works and supports universities and university colleges to create a learning culture among students. I do this in mostly in an European context, and want to learn more about learning practices in US. I see that this article stresses the relationship to the teacher/professor and individual differences in our approach, that might be culturally bound, we focus more upon learning processes, differences in learning and how these have implications for teamwork and learning opportunities among students. Maybe some flavour of self-managed teams with a learning oriented outcome. Then, working with norms of respect for learning processes, perspectives and competences - and how to fulfill goals with groups.

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Dr. Ronald G. Shapiro · a month ago

Excellent article!!!!

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

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gmw0583 — I'm very excited about research-based instructional strategies. This is a wonderful overview with enough references to get one ...

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rmcenta — Thanks Char. If you have any feedback sometime, I'd love to hear it! :)

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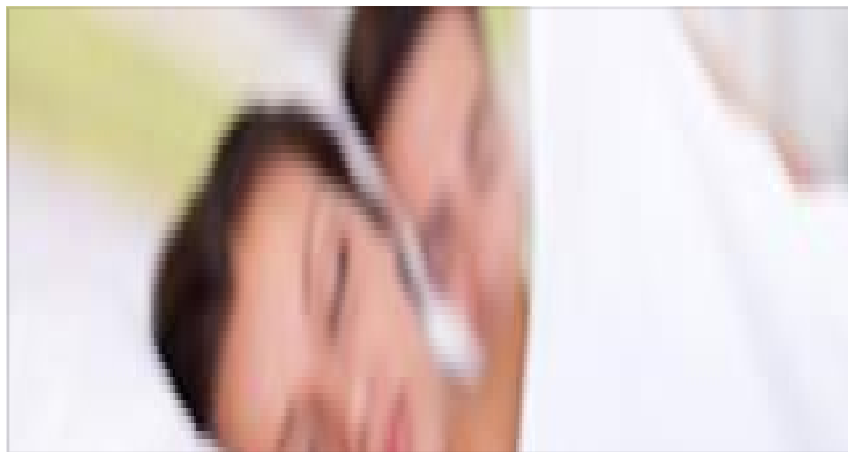
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