

## **What I wish I knew before College**

No one tells you what is most important in preparing for college. Maybe they don't know and sheer dumb luck kept it from affecting their future, or perhaps they just withhold what they had to figure out on their own. Don't pass up your chance to do college the right way.

You've taken the SAT or the ACT, possibly several times. You were finally accepted to the college of your choice, or at least a college. You are so glad to be done with high school that the last thing on your mind is what you will be doing after college. But this is exactly what you should be thinking about.

Before you ease into those general education courses buying yourself time to consider what you will be when you grow up. Determine now what you will do with your education. You are spending valuable money toward knowledge, shouldn't you be sure your time is best spent with applicable knowledge.

Sure, I was told all along that I needed to decide on a major. It seems like common sense to know what you are studying so once you finish you will get hired in your chosen career. The career centers at college will even speak with you, give you mounds of materials to study, and maybe even an interest test to help you figure out what kinds of things you like and could do. These are wonderful resources that should be utilized, but there is more. What no one tells you is how to make sure what you do with your classes will apply to the position you want to fill upon graduation.

Here is the secret: do an extensive job search. But you are not looking for a job, you say. Oh yeah? Before you have to decide what program you are applying to in college know specifically the job requirements for the position(s) you would want after college. Now make a checklist of all the skills you want to be able to have, upon leaving college, in order to be able to do those things going into the job market. As unfair as it is, the conundrum after college when searching for a job is that too many of those jobs are looking for someone with experience, while you will rightly wonder how they can expect you to have working experience at entry level. How can they expect you to get experience if no one is willing to give you that first job of experience? Fair enough, but at least do what you can and try to bridge the gap by building applicable experiences while gaining the knowledge to be employed in your field. Take classes where you can make the experiences to be able to fill the need that employers are looking for. The quicker you do this, the less time and money you will waste. Keep abreast of the job market and tailor your classes toward learning what you need to gain from each subject, specifically toward your desired career position(s). It will be important to accomplish well what your teachers require of you, but you will be a step ahead if you make sure that meeting their requirements still meets your requirements for competency in your desired field.

Also keep in mind a few fallible notions that threaten your success, under the guise of scholarly achievement: don't ever assume your guidance counselor, your classes, your professor, or your scholarly environment; 1) will grant you access to the best resources to

direct your education, 2) is set up to provide you with the best knowledge you will need for your specific future, and 3) wants you to get good grades. Especially as an undergraduate, it is you who has to take full responsibility for what you take from this education and how much value you receive in return for all that you are paying into it. The University sees its responsibility as teaching and testing you to new scholarly heights, but not necessarily in training you on how to succeed in translating knowledge into applications of your field outside of the scholarly world.

You may wonder why this is. The fact is that most scholarly types aren't trying to leave your education void of application. Most just don't have the advantage of application themselves—outside of a scholarly environment. Counselors assigned to students are often just teachers. While they may be able to guide you, their study has been based in teaching not in mentoring. Teachers are often focused on grades and authoring scholarly publications, because at the college level this is how they keep their jobs, by showing competency in testing their teaching and writing their understanding for other professors to gawk at, rather than demonstrating their competency in the field their students will directly be finding work in. The bottom line is that anyone working for the University is devoting their career to building the greatest resource a University has: knowledge. Sorry, students, you come second. Can you blame them? They are fulfilling their careers and expect their students to do the same by taking responsibility for their own careers.

Just realize that to meet your agenda you may have to work through the University and its teachers' agenda. They have more students than just you to teach anyway, so you solely will have to make the most of the college resources available to you, fitting them according to your needs, or all that you could achieve just won't happen. You won't maximize this pivotal opportunity unless you have a checklist of things you want to learn, to know, and to be able to apply after college. That's how you get the most out of the college experience!