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# FOCUS

ON COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE SUCCESS

CONSTANCE STALEY

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# FOCUS

ON COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE SUCCESS

CONSTANCE STALEY  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO, COLORADO SPRINGS



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# FOCUS

## ON COMMUNITY COLLEGE SUCCESS

CONSTANCE STALEY  
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Above all, *FOCUS* has taught me truly to focus. Writing a book takes the same kind of endurance and determination that it takes to get a college degree. My empathy level for my students has, if anything, increased—and I am thankful for all I've learned while writing. It has been a cathartic experience to see what has filled each computer screen as I've tapped, tapped, tapped away. Ultimately, what I have chosen to put into each chapter has told me a great deal about who I am, what I know (and don't), and what I value. There's no doubt: I am a better teacher for having written this book. May all my readers grow through their *FOCUS* experience, too.



# MEET THE CAST

The *FOCUS* cast is based on real students who've taken a course very similar to the one that you're in right now. While we've used photos of different people, the information about the cast, what they've learned and advice they want to share is passed on directly from these students.



## CHAPTER 1 Carson Reed

---

**HOMETOWN:** Highlands Ranch, Colorado

**MAJOR:** Business

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Carson realized that he had to learn how to motivate himself, especially when it came to studying, because no one was telling him he had to do it. He also realized how important it is to get to know people in his classes. "This helps because if you can't show up to class . . . you can always get the notes from a friend, and you can gather your friends to make study groups to help ace those tests."

**TOUGHEST FIRST-YEAR CLASS:** World Politics. In every other class, Carson had some prior knowledge about the subject, but everything about World Politics was brand new. Carson says this made the class enjoyable!

**ADVICE TO NEW STUDENTS:** "Take good notes. Your test grade does in fact reflect your note-taking capability. If just taking bullet point notes isn't your style, try using different note-taking techniques."

**FREE TIME:** Play basketball, go to the gym, play video games, hang with friends

## CHAPTER 2 Sylvia Sanchez

---

**HOMETOWN:** I've lived all over Colorado. I consider the whole state to be my hometown!

**MAJOR:** Nursing with a minor in psychology

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Sylvia is still learning lessons about college. She keeps growing and discovering new things about herself and has made lifelong friends. She plans to remember college as the best years of her life!

**TOUGHEST FIRST-YEAR CLASS:** Anatomy . . . It was hard to study *all* the time.

**ADVICE TO NEW STUDENTS:** "Listen to your heart; it will lead you to the right place. Take every opportunity that comes to you because college is about finding out who you are and what you want from life."



## CHAPTER 3 Tammy Ko

---

**HOMETOWN:** Manitou Springs, Colorado

**MAJOR:** Marketing

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Juggling a part-time job while in school, Tammy loved meeting new people, but she regretted not talking to other students about which instructors and courses to take toward her marketing major. In order to succeed, she says, you’ve “gotta give it all you’ve got!”

**TOUGHEST FIRST-YEAR CLASS:** Microeconomics because it wasn’t like high school courses that just required memorizing a lot of facts.

**ADVICE TO NEW STUDENTS:** “Talk to other students to learn about the best instructors, and make sure you are studying something that you are interested in.”

## CHAPTER 4 Derek Johnson

---

**HOMETOWN:** Colorado Springs, Colorado

**MAJOR:** Communications/Recording Arts

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Even though he’s not married and has no children, Derek and his case study character have much in common—too much to do and too little time! Derek felt his biggest mistake in college was not asking enough questions in class. He knows now he should have asked for clarity on content or assignments he didn’t understand.

**TOUGHEST FIRST-YEAR CLASS:** English because he and his instructor had differing opinions, but he communicated through the tough spots and earned an “A.”

**ADVICE TO NEW STUDENTS:** “Surround yourself with positive people. As the saying goes, ‘You are the company you keep.’ I’ve seen many of my friends drop out because the people they called friends were holding them back from their full potential.”

**FREE TIME:** Composing music and producing films



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michaeljung/Shutterstock.com



lightwavemedia/Shutterstock.com

## CHAPTER 5 Desiree Moore

**HOMETOWN:** Colorado Springs, Colorado

**MAJOR:** MA Communication

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Organization, time management, study groups, and note cards

**TOUGHEST FIRST-YEAR COURSE:** Psychology because in this class I had to be very organized to keep my notes in order. There were only two exams in this class during the entire semester. I did not organize my notes or my time very well.

**ADVICE TO NEW STUDENTS:** “Get to know your professors, ask questions, and have a study buddy.”

**FREE TIME:** In my free time, I work out at the gym. I also spend quality time with my son.



Alexander Image/Shutterstock.com

## CHAPTER 6 Dario Jones

**HOMETOWN:** Fountain, Colorado

**MAJOR:** MA, Communication

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Start strong, work hard, and finish strong

**TOUGHEST FIRST-YEAR COURSE:** Math 099

**ADVICE TO NEW STUDENTS:** “Get to know your instructors and fellow classmates. Ask questions in class when you’re not sure about something.”

**FREE TIME:** What free time? To relax, I listen to jazz or classical music, or I’ll channel surf until I find something interesting to watch.



Maria Evseyeva/Shutterstock.com

## CHAPTER 7 Rachel White

**HOMETOWN:** Denver, Colorado

**MAJOR:** Philosophy

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Go to class!

**TOUGHEST FIRST-YEAR COURSE:** Intro to Geography (it might have been easier if I’d gone to class).

**ADVICE TO NEW STUDENTS:** “Balance fun and schoolwork, so you don’t get burned out on either one!”

**FREE TIME:** Acting and improv



## CHAPTER 8 Katie Alexander

**HOMETOWN:** Colorado Springs, Colorado. Because she went to college in her hometown, Katie really enjoyed the opportunity college provided to meet new people.

**MAJOR:** Nursing

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Spending her free time with her friends watching movies, going bowling or dancing, and just hanging out, Katie found that like her *FOCUS* Challenge Case character, she, too, would make up excuses to get out of studying and doing her homework. She quickly learned the importance of reading and taking notes. “As weird as it may sound, reading cuts your end study time by more than half. Reading the material ahead of time helps you understand everything so much better.”

**ADVICE TO NEW STUDENTS:** “Stay motivated. College is going to *fly* by! If you stay motivated and get good grades, it really will be over before you know it.”

## CHAPTER 9 Kevin Baxter

**HOMETOWN:** St. Paul, Minnesota

**BACKGROUND:** Portraying a student returning to school after fifteen-plus years in the working world, Kevin is currently a professor of chemistry at University of Colorado at Colorado Springs.

**COLLEGE MEMORIES:** Kevin remembers how much he liked the different social environment college provided after graduating from high school.

**TOUGHEST FIRST-YEAR COURSE:** English Composition, because writing wasn’t exactly his forte.

**ADVICE TO NEW STUDENTS:** “Study hard, and use your time wisely.”

**FREE TIME:** Woodworking, hiking, and climbing





Hugo Felix/Shutterstock.com

## CHAPTER 10 Serena Jackson

**HOMETOWN:** Denver, Colorado

**MAJOR:** Nursing

**TOUGHEST FIRST-YEAR COURSE:** Biology, because the way the class was taught in college (lecture-based) was very different than the way classes were taught in high school. She had to learn on her own what material was most important to study.

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Serena wishes she had gone to more study groups and devoted more of her time to subjects that she struggled with in order to be more successful. She also would have asked for help from professors since she now realizes they are fully ready to help a student become better in their class.

**ADVICE TO NEW STUDENTS:** “Make the most out of your college years. Make new friends because they could be great resources in the future. Also, if your professor tells you to read something, make sure you read the entire thing and you are able to teach it back to them because that will help your grade.”

**FREE TIME:** Hanging out with friends, participating in club events, and volunteering

**HELPFUL STUDY APPS:** Quizlet, Learnsmart, and Study Blue help Serena study for upcoming quizzes and exams.



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## CHAPTER 11 Ethan Cole

**HOMETOWN:** Fort Morgan, Colorado

**MAJOR:** Sociology

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Like his *FOCUS* Challenge Case character, Ethan noticed that he, too, didn't always push himself to reach his potential. But he learned through his first-year seminar course that he is responsible for himself and that instructors aren't like high school teachers. They will let you fail a class if you don't do what you need to. It's up to you.

**ADVICE TO NEW STUDENTS:** “Not only did getting involved on campus help me have more fun in school, but it has also helped me academically. It taught me how to manage my time and has made it so much easier for me to participate with confidence in class. Just make sure you get what you need to do done, and you will enjoy your college experience so much more.”

**FREE TIME:** “Free time? What's that?! I'm too busy to have free time!” (But he secretly admits he snowboards, plays guitar, draws, and spends time with friends.)

## CHAPTER 12 Anthony Lopez

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**HOMETOWN:** Aguascalientes, Mexico

**MAJOR:** Spanish with an emphasis on secondary education

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Anthony is extremely involved on campus and within his community—he is President of the Association of Future Teachers, sings with his church choir, plays intramural soccer, and works for the Air Force on weekends. Anthony thinks one mistake he made in his first term was that he procrastinated with homework because his new freedom let him think he could have fun first and study later, but he quickly learned he was wrong.

**ADVICE TO NEW STUDENTS:** “Be smart and be involved, but always do your homework first. If you are involved on campus, you will meet people that will help make your college experience easier and more fun.”



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# MEET THE AUTHOR



Larry Harwood Photography. Property of Cengage Learning

## Constance Staley

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**HOMETOWN:** Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Although she never actually lived there. Instead, she lived all over the world and went to ten schools in twelve years.)

**BACKGROUND:** Connie has taught at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs for more than 40 years after getting a bachelor's degree in education, a master's degree in linguistics, and a Ph.D. in communication.

**COLLEGE MEMORIES:** Connie remembers loving her public speaking class as a first-year student and having tons of friends, but being extremely homesick for her family.

**ADVICE TO NEW STUDENTS:** "Earning a college degree is hard work, takes a long time, and requires a substantial investment of your time, energy, and resources. But it's the best investment you can make in your own future—one you'll never regret."

**FREE TIME:** Spending time with her husband, her two daughters, and her boy/girl grandtwins; relaxing at her cabin in the mountains; and traveling around the country to speak to other professors who also care about first-year students and their success.



# INTRODUCTION TO STUDENTS

Dear Reader,

This book is different. It won't coerce, coddle, caution, or coax you. Instead, it will give *you* the tools you need to coach yourself. Ultimately, this book is about you, your college career, and your career beyond college. It's about the future you will create for yourself.

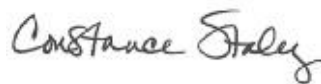
*FOCUS on Community College Success* stars a cast of twelve students, like a stage play. One student "actor" is featured in each chapter's opening case study. All twelve cast members reappear throughout the book, so that you'll get to know them as you read. I've been teaching for more than 40 years now and worked with thousands of students. Each case study is about a real student (with a fictitious name) that I've worked with or a mixture of several students. You may find you have some things in common with them. But whether you do or not, I hope they will make this book come to life for you.

I love what I do, and I care deeply about students. I hope that comes through to you as a reader. You'll see that I've inserted some of my personality, had a bit of fun at times, and tried to create a new kind of textbook for you. In my view, learning should be engaging, personal, memorable, challenging, and fun.

Most importantly, I know that these next few years hold the key to unlock much of what you want from your life. And from all my years of experience and research, I can tell you straightforwardly that what you read in this book works. It gets results. It can turn you into a better, faster learner. *Really?* you ask. Really! The only thing you have to do is put all the words in this book into action. That's where the challenge comes in.

Becoming an educated person takes time, energy, resources, and focus. At times, it may mean shutting down the six windows you have open on your computer, and directing all your attention to one thing in laser-like fashion. It may mean disciplining yourself to dig in and stick with something until you've nailed it. Can you do it? I'm betting you can, or I wouldn't have written this book. Invest yourself fully in what you read here, and then decide to incorporate it into your life. If there's one secret to college success, that's it.

So, you're off! You're about to begin one of the most fascinating, liberating, challenging, and adventure-filled times of your life. I may not be able to meet each one of you personally, but I *can* wish you well, wherever you are. I hope this book helps you on your journey.





# READINESS: FOCUS ENTRANCE INTERVIEW

Although you may not have experienced life as a new college student for long, we're interested in how you expect to spend your time, what challenges you think you'll face, what strengths you can build on, and your general views of what you think college will be like. Please answer thoughtfully.

## INFORMATION ABOUT YOU

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

STUDENT NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_ COURSE/SECTION \_\_\_\_\_

INSTRUCTOR \_\_\_\_\_

GENDER \_\_\_\_\_ AGE \_\_\_\_\_

## YOUR BACKGROUND

### 1. Ethnic Identification (check all that apply):

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native    ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander    ☐ Asian  
☐ Hispanic/Latino    ☐ Black or African American    ☐ White  
☐ Mixed Race (for example, one Caucasian parent and one Asian)    ☐ Prefer not to answer

### 2. Is English your first (native) language?

- ☐ yes    ☐ no

### 3. Did your parents graduate from college?

- ☐ yes, both    ☐ yes, father only    ☐ yes, mother only    ☐ neither    ☐ not sure

## YOUR HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

### 4. If you are entering college soon after completing high school, on average, how many total hours per week did you spend studying outside of class in high school?

- ☐ 0–5    ☐ 6–10    ☐ 11–15    ☐ 16–20    ☐ 21–25  
☐ 26–30    ☐ 31–35    ☐ 36–40    ☐ 40+    ☐ I am a  
returning student and  
attended high school  
some time ago.

### 5. What was your high school grade point average when you graduated?

- ☐ A+    ☐ A    ☐ A–    ☐ B+    ☐ B  
☐ B–    ☐ C+    ☐ C    ☐ C–    ☐ D or lower  
☐ I don't remember.    ☐ I earned a GED.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THIS SEMESTER/QUARTER

6. How many credit hours are you taking this term?

☐ 6 or fewer      ☐ 7–11      ☐ 12–14      ☐ 15–16      ☐ 17 or more

7. Where are you living this term?

☐ in campus housing      ☐ with my immediate family      ☐ with a relative other than my immediate family  
☐ on my own      ☐ other (please explain)

## WORKING WHILE IN COLLEGE

8. In addition to going to college, do you expect to work for pay at a job (or jobs) this term?

☐ yes      ☐ no

9. If so, how many hours per week do you expect to work?

☐ 1–10      ☐ 11–20      ☐ 21–30      ☐ 31–40      ☐ 40+

10. If you plan to work for pay, where will you work?

☐ on campus      ☐ off campus      ☐ at more than one job

## YOUR COLLEGE EXPECTATIONS

### YOUR REASONS AND PREDICTIONS

11. Why did you decide to go to college? (Check all that apply.)

<input type="checkbox"/> because I want to build a better life for myself.	<input type="checkbox"/> because I want to build a better life for my family.
<input type="checkbox"/> because I want to be well-off financially in the future.	<input type="checkbox"/> because I need a college education to achieve my dreams.
<input type="checkbox"/> because my friends were going to college.	<input type="checkbox"/> because my family encouraged me to go.
<input type="checkbox"/> because it was expected of me.	<input type="checkbox"/> because I want to prepare for a new career.
<input type="checkbox"/> because I want to continue learning.	<input type="checkbox"/> because the career I am pursuing requires a degree.
<input type="checkbox"/> because I was unsure of what I might do instead.	<input type="checkbox"/> other (please explain)

12. How do you expect to learn best in college? (Check all that apply.)

<input type="checkbox"/> by looking at charts, maps, graphs	<input type="checkbox"/> by writing papers
<input type="checkbox"/> by listening to instructors' lectures	<input type="checkbox"/> by engaging in activities
<input type="checkbox"/> by reading books	<input type="checkbox"/> by looking at symbols and graphics
<input type="checkbox"/> by going on field trips	<input type="checkbox"/> by talking about course content with friends or roommates
<input type="checkbox"/> by looking at color-coded information	<input type="checkbox"/> by taking notes
<input type="checkbox"/> by listening to other students during in-class discussions	<input type="checkbox"/> by actually doing things

- 13.** The following sets of opposite descriptive phrases are separated by five blank lines. Put an X on the line between the two that best represent your response, like this: For me, high school was easy \_\_\_\_: X \_\_\_\_: \_\_\_\_: \_\_\_\_: \_\_\_\_ hard
- I expect my first term of college to:
- |                                    |                              |                               |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| challenge me academically          | ____: ____: ____: ____: ____ | be easy                       |
| be very different from high school | ____: ____: ____: ____: ____ | be a lot like high school     |
| be exciting                        | ____: ____: ____: ____: ____ | be dull                       |
| be interesting                     | ____: ____: ____: ____: ____ | be uninteresting              |
| motivate me to continue            | ____: ____: ____: ____: ____ | discourage me                 |
| be fun                             | ____: ____: ____: ____: ____ | be boring                     |
| help me feel a part of this campus | ____: ____: ____: ____: ____ | make me feel like an outsider |

- 14.** How many total hours per week do you expect to study outside of class for your college courses?

____ 0–5	____ 6–10	____ 11–15	____ 16–20	____ 21–25
____ 26–30	____ 31–35	____ 36–40	____ 40+	

- 15.** What do you expect your grade point average to be at the end of your first term of college?

____ A+	____ A	____ A–	____ B+	____ B
____ B–	____ C+	____ C	____ C–	____ D or lower

## YOUR STRENGTHS, PERSONALITY, AND INTERESTS

- 16.** Please identify your *strengths*—personal characteristics that will contribute to your college success.

(Check all that apply.)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| ____ a. I am good at building relationships.             | ____ i. I am focused.   |
| ____ b. I can usually convince others to follow my plan. | ____ j. I can usually look at a problem and figure out a plan of action.      |
| ____ c. I like to win.                                   | ____ k. I work to keep everyone happy.  |
| ____ d. I work toward future goals.                      | ____ l. I'm a take-charge kind of person.                                     |
| ____ e. I like to be productive and get things done.     | ____ m. I help other people develop their talents and skills.                 |
| ____ f. I have a positive outlook on life.               | ____ n. I'm a very responsible person.  |
| ____ g. I'm usually the person who gets things going.    | ____ o. I can analyze a situation and see various ways things might work out. |
| ____ h. I enjoy the challenge of learning new things.    | ____ p. I usually give tasks my best effort.                                  |

- 17.** How confident are you in yourself in each of the following areas? (1 = very confident, 5 = not at all confident)

____ overall academic ability	____ technology skills
____ mathematical skills	____ physical well-being
____ leadership ability	____ writing skills
____ reading skills	____ social skills
____ public speaking skills	____ emotional well-being
____ study skills	____ teamwork skills

18. For each of the following pairs of descriptors, which set sounds most like you? (Choose between the two options on each line and place a check mark by your choice.)

<input type="checkbox"/> Extraverted and outgoing	or	<input type="checkbox"/> Introverted and quiet
<input type="checkbox"/> Detail-oriented and practical	or	<input type="checkbox"/> Big-picture and future-oriented
<input type="checkbox"/> Rational and truthful	or	<input type="checkbox"/> People-oriented and tactful
<input type="checkbox"/> Organized and self-disciplined	or	<input type="checkbox"/> Spontaneous and flexible

19. *FOCUS* is about twelve different aspects of college life. Which are you most interested in applying to yourself in your academic work? (Check all that apply.)

<input type="checkbox"/> Starting strong, building resilience	<input type="checkbox"/> Engaging, listening, and note-taking in class
<input type="checkbox"/> Becoming mindful, setting goals	<input type="checkbox"/> Reading, writing, and presenting
<input type="checkbox"/> Learning styles and studying	<input type="checkbox"/> Developing memory, taking tests
<input type="checkbox"/> Managing your time, energy, and money	<input type="checkbox"/> Communicating in groups, valuing diversity
<input type="checkbox"/> Thinking critically and creatively	<input type="checkbox"/> Choosing a college major and career
<input type="checkbox"/> Learning online	<input type="checkbox"/> Creating your future

## YOUR CHALLENGES

20. Of the twelve aspects of college life identified in the previous question, which do you expect to be most challenging to apply to yourself in your academic work? (Check all that apply.)

<input type="checkbox"/> Starting strong, building resilience	<input type="checkbox"/> Engaging, listening, and note-taking in class
<input type="checkbox"/> Becoming mindful, setting goals	<input type="checkbox"/> Reading, writing, and presenting
<input type="checkbox"/> Learning styles and studying	<input type="checkbox"/> Developing memory, taking tests
<input type="checkbox"/> Managing your time, energy, and money	<input type="checkbox"/> Communicating in groups, valuing diversity
<input type="checkbox"/> Thinking critically and creatively	<input type="checkbox"/> Choosing a college major and career
<input type="checkbox"/> Learning online	<input type="checkbox"/> Creating your future

21. Which one of your current classes do you expect to find most challenging this term and why?

Which class? (course title or department and course number) \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you expect to succeed in this course? ☐ yes ☐ no ☐ Perhaps (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

22. Please mark your *top three areas of concern* relating to your first term of college by placing 1, 2, and 3 next to the items you choose (with 1 representing your top concern).

<input type="checkbox"/> I might not fit in.	<input type="checkbox"/> I might have difficulty making friends.
<input type="checkbox"/> I might not be academically successful.	<input type="checkbox"/> My grades might disappoint my family.
<input type="checkbox"/> I'm not sure I can handle the stress.	<input type="checkbox"/> I may have financial problems.
<input type="checkbox"/> I might overextend myself and try to do too much.	<input type="checkbox"/> I might cut class frequently.
<input type="checkbox"/> I might not reach out for help when I need it.	<input type="checkbox"/> I might tend to procrastinate on assignments.

- \_\_\_ I might not put in enough time to be academically successful.
- \_\_\_ I might be tempted to drop out.
- \_\_\_ I might not be organized enough.
- \_\_\_ I may be distracted (for example spend too much time online).
- \_\_\_ Other (please explain). \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_ My professors might be hard to communicate with.
- \_\_\_ I might be homesick.
- \_\_\_ I might be bored in my classes.
- \_\_\_ My job(s) outside of school might interfere with my studies.

## YOUR FUTURE

**23.** How certain are you now of the following (1 = totally sure, 5 = totally unsure)?

- \_\_\_ Finishing your degree
- \_\_\_ Choosing your major
- \_\_\_ Deciding on a career
- \_\_\_ Completing your degree at this school
- \_\_\_ Transferring to a four-year school
- \_\_\_ Continuing on to work toward an advanced degree after college

**24.** What are you most looking forward to in college?

**25.** Describe the best outcomes you hope for at the end of this first semester/quarter. Do you expect to achieve them? Why or why not?

## UPDATED FOR THE FIFTH EDITION

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This edition has an increased emphasis on the topics of mindfulness, financial literacy, new presentation e-tools, and career planning.

**New research.** The research on today's students—their characteristics, learning styles, strengths, and challenges—is continually evolving. New studies appear in online and print journals daily. This edition of *FOCUS* contains updated research in every chapter to keep abreast of the prolific material available on the scholarship of teaching and learning and the practical world of careers—a primary reason why students come to college today. Specific areas of new research that are crucial to success include the specific effects of being distracted by technology interruptions, (like the time it takes to “reboot” after interrupting a task), the essential roles of mindfulness and grit on college success, and the role a college degree plays in living a better life.

This edition has **new content on mindfulness and grit, and increased content on financial literacy and career planning.** Managing money with rising tuition and tempting credit-card excesses is a challenge. *FOCUS* provides hands-on activities and real-world examples to drive these principles home. Additionally, many students believe they should have their futures defined as soon as they enter college. *FOCUS* includes the newest strategies to help students understand themselves and what they have to offer over a continually-evolving future career.

**New FOCUS Challenge Case design** allows students to immediately connect each student's story to their own needs and experiences.

**Up-to-date technology.** In a world in which new technologies are introduced every day, *FOCUS* is spot on. For example, *FOCUS* now contains **infographics** called “Quick Study” in each chapter to capture students' attention and aid comprehension. Staley's own engagement in the latest technologies comes through in her message to students.

**Life Hacks.** Life hacks are brief pointers, often technology-based, to save readers time and help them increase productivity. These short tips are placed in the margins for quick discovery. Without disrupting Staley's unique voice, this edition contains streamlined, yet robust, content for today's busy reader.

**WIIFM.** Every chapter contains a new feature called **WIIFM?**, or What's in It for Me? Launched with a pertinent quote from a famous community college attendee or graduate, WIIFM?s accentuate the relevance of the chapter topic and its importance to students in building connections between what they're learning and their lives, including academically, professionally, and personally.

**New overall contemporary design** streamlines content, yet retains the interactive tone, visual interest, and compelling features that students need in a first-year seminar textbook.

**New Readiness and Reality Check design and content** allows students to immediately connect the material in the chapter to their own lives.

**The updated quote and photo design** plugs into student engagement by offering photos of college students like readers themselves, stimulating students' interest and appealing to visual learners.

**Sharpen Your Focus** is now offered exclusively in MindTap for *FOCUS on Community College Success*.

**Numerous interactive, in-class activities** that you're familiar with from the fourth edition of *FOCUS on Community College Success* have been moved to an updated Instructor's Manual, available online.

Throughout the instructor edition, Application Idea, Activity Selection, and Teachable Moment annotations provide useful instructor ideas.

**xxxii** Updated for the Fifth Edition

# CHAPTER LEVEL REVISIONS

## CHAPTER 1: STARTING STRONG, BUILDING RESILIENCE

### Chapter Content

- **NEW QUICK STUDY:** “Why Our Brains Crave Infographics” illustrates reasons why information PLUS graphics are processed quickly and efficiently.

### Features

- **NEW WIIFM:** “What’s in It for Me?” (WIIFM?) is not just sassy, it’s smart, especially in today’s fast-paced, information-overloaded world. In short (reading time included) articles, each chapter of *FOCUS* will include reasons why the chapter content is worth reading—with both in college and on the job applications.
- **NEW** Exercise on resiliency—“How Resilient Are You?” has been replaced with “Grit Scale,” popularized in Angela Duckworth’s book, *Grit: The Power and Passion of Perseverance*, and originating from her published research on grit.

## CHAPTER 2: BECOMING MINDFUL, SETTING GOALS

### Chapter Content

- **NEW** Chapter 2 has a new focus on “The Three Ms of College Success”: mindfulness, mindset, and motivation. *FOCUS* makes a strong case for “psychological readiness,” “emotional intelligence,” or “soft skills” as the foundation for learning.
- **NEW QUICK STUDY:** “How to Focus When It’s Next to Impossible” paints an overview of how to zero in and study when tempting distractions bombard from both inside and outside.

### Features

- **NEW** Exercise 1.2 “Chocolate Mindfulness Meditation” illustrates the benefits of mindfulness, while teaching students to learn how to become more mindful in a simple and satisfying way.
- **NEW WIIFM:** Mindfulness is important for college students so that they can clear the deck for learning, but it’s also the key to productivity on the job. Many employers now provide mindfulness training, but why wait? Start learning about mindfulness now.
- **NEW** “Curiosity: Presence: Can Your Body Change Your Mind?” discusses the compelling story of Amy Cuddy, who overcame the odds and teaches students how to leverage the power they hold within themselves.

## CHAPTER 3: LEARNING STYLES AND STUDYING

- **NEW** Figure 3.2 “Learning Style Preferences: Would you rather...?” illustrates the differences between visual, auditory, read/write, and kinesthetic learning preferences.
- **NEW QUICK STUDY:** “How to Focus in College by Really Trying” depicts some key personal “to do’s” that can help ensure college success.

### Features

- Exercise 3.3 “Interpreting Your VARK Preferences” helps students understand their VARK assessment scores.
- **NEW WIIFM:** VARK provides insights into learning in college *and* building a productive superior-subordinate relationship on the job.

## CHAPTER 4: MANAGING YOUR TIME, ENERGY, AND MONEY

### Chapter Content

- **NEW QUICK STUDY:** “8 Secrets for Mastering Time Management” gives helpful ideas for saving and managing time.
- “How Time Flies” has been updated with recent research on how Americans spend their time.

### Features

- **NEW WIIFM:** Getting a handle on time management helps students get college assignments in by due dates. But time management on the job is a “job-saver,” so begin busting some common myths *now*.
- Box 4.2 “Top Ten Financial AID FAQs” has been updated with **NEW** questions.
- Exercise 4.9 “How Do You ‘Spend’ Your Time?” was moved from Chapter 2 to Chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 5: THINKING CRITICALLY AND CREATIVELY

### Chapter Content

- **NEW QUICK STUDY:** “How to Let Your Creative Juices Flow” illustrates eight ways to liberate natural creativity.

### Features

- **NEW WIIFM:** Critical thinking is what college is all about. But “critical thinking” references in job ads have doubled since 2009. Just how important is critical thinking on the job?

## CHAPTER 6: LEARNING ONLINE

### Chapter Content

- Chapter 6 includes updated references to current technology.
- Content on types of software, search engines, learning management systems, and other class-related possibilities from former Exercise 6.2 “How Tech-Savvy Are You?” is now part of the section “Use Technology to Your Academic Advantage.”
- **NEW QUICK STUDY:** “Do Paraphrase; Don’t Plagiarize” shows ways to “translate” so that intentional and unintentional plagiarism are avoided.

### Features

- **NEW WIIFM:** Technology skills aren’t just increasingly important in college. They help “future-proof” other job-related skills if they’re continually upgraded.
- Exercise 6.5 “Plagiarism or Not?” has a new example passage to review.

## CHAPTER 7: ENGAGING, LISTENING, AND NOTE-TAKING IN CLASS

### Chapter Content

- **NEW QUICK STUDY:** “The Ultimate Guide to Note-Taking in Class” illustrates what’s important in taking productive notes *before*, *during*, and *after* class.

## Features

- **NEW WIIFM:** Note-taking skills are important in college, naturally. But note-taking on the job is equally important—to carry through on an assignment and to help others who can benefit.

## CHAPTER 8: READING, WRITING, AND PRESENTING

### Chapter Content

- **NEW QUICK STUDY:** “9 Ways to Hack Your Speaking Anxiety” illustrates that anxiety is natural and suggests what to do about it.

## Features

- Former Exercise 8.8 “Paper Submission Checklist” is now Box 8.1 “Paper Submission Checklist” for students to go back to when writing papers throughout college.
- **NEW WIIFM:** Simply put: Those who know how to put words together in college and on the job come out ahead.

## CHAPTER 9: DEVELOPING MEMORY, TAKING TESTS

### Chapter Content

- “Twenty Ways to Master Your Memory” is now grouped into five categories and is renamed as “Five Major Ways to Master Your Memory.”
- **NEW QUICK STUDY:** “5 Major Ways to Master Your Memory”: Make It Stick, Make It Meaningful, Make It Mnemonic, Manipulate It, Make It Funny.

## Features

- **WIIFM:** Tests are a reality in college. But tests on the job—or tests in order to get a job—are real, too. Preparing now can help big-time.

## CHAPTER 10: COMMUNICATING IN GROUPS, VALUING DIVERSITY

### Chapter Content

- **NEW QUICK STUDY:** “The Top 10 Rules of Responsible Team Membership” portrays key areas of obligation to be a member of a productive team.

## Features

- **NEW WIIFM:** It’s obvious that knowing more about teamwork will help with group projects in class or online. But teamwork on the job is more prevalent now than ever before.

## CHAPTER 11: CHOOSING A COLLEGE MAJOR AND CAREER

### Chapter Content

- **QUICK STUDY:** “Designing Your Life” depicts the five steps involved in Design Thinking applied to designing your life: Be curious, try stuff, reframe problems, know it’s a process, and ask for help.

## Features

- **NEW** Exercise 11.1 “The Four P’s: Passion, Purpose, Practicality, and Promise” encourages students to explore their future through the lens of the four P’s.
- **NEW WIIFM:** Polls say that most Americans are not engaged in their work. Make the most of your major and career choices and maximize your happiness.

## CHAPTER 12: CREATING YOUR FUTURE

### Chapter Content

- “Write the Right Résumé” has been updated to “Write the Right Résumé and Cover Letter,” and now includes five suggestions for writing a strong cover letter.
- **NEW QUICK STUDY:** “Interviewing Etiquette” provides a valuable snapshot of what TO do and what NOT to do during interviews.

## Features

- Exercise 12.1 “What If . . . A Crystal Ball for Careers?” has been updated with the top-paying twenty-seven career fields that require a two-year degree or less.
- **NEW WIIFM:** Creating the future is a job that starts now. Devote present attention to future goals.



# STARTING STRONG, BUILDING RESILIENCE

# 1

## READINESS CHECK

### HOW THIS CHAPTER RELATES TO YOU

1. When it comes to starting strong and building resilience, what are you most unsure about, if anything? Put check marks by the phrases that apply to you or write in your answer.
  - ☐ Whether college is right for me
  - ☐ What academic professionalism means
  - ☐ What different instructors expect
  - ☐ What it takes to succeed in college
  - ☐ How to deal with hurdles along the way
  - ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is most likely to be your response? Put a check mark by it.
  - ☐ I'll check with my instructors.
  - ☐ I'll ask my classmates.
  - ☐ I'll see how things go and adjust.
  - ☐ I'll wait and eventually figure it out.
3. What would you have to do to increase your likelihood of success? Will you do it this quarter or semester?

### HOW YOU WILL RELATE TO THIS CHAPTER

1. What are you most interested in learning about? Put check marks by those topics.
  - ☐ Who goes to community college and why
  - ☐ How to display academic professionalism
  - ☐ How campus resources can support you
  - ☐ Why college success courses are important
  - ☐ What resilience is and why you need it

### YOUR READINESS FACTOR

1. How motivated are you to learn more about starting strong and building resilience in college? (5 = high, 1 = low)
2. How ready are you to read now? (If something is in your way, take care of it if you can. Zero in and focus.)
3. How long do you think it will take you to complete this chapter? If you start and stop, keep track of your overall time. \_\_\_\_ Hour(s) \_\_\_\_ Minute(s)

# FOCUS CHALLENGE CASE

Carson Reed



imagephotography/Shutterstock.com

***A week after his high school graduation, the nudges and nagging began.*** “Hey, you’d better get on it,” his Dad kept saying to him. His Mom warned, “Classes are filling up at the community college! I called to check.” But Carson wasn’t that sure about things. Was college really right for him? And was it right for him *now*? Why not wait a while? For now, he was doing just fine. He had a good-enough job, and he was constantly on the go. After a summer of tense discussions, it was decided; he’d start classes at the local community college in the fall and see how things went. Hopefully, he could get some financial aid.

Carson and his family were close. They texted back and forth all day, talked on the phone frequently, and posted on each other’s Facebook pages, even though they lived in the same house! Strangely enough, the family member he was closest to was Allie, his sister. Even though she was five years younger, they

were good buddies—hanging out together sometimes on weekends, watching movies, popping popcorn, or finishing off a tub of ice cream late at night. Allie was one of the reasons why he’d decided to stay at home and go to college right in his hometown. When he finally agreed to give college a try, his Mom and Dad were overjoyed. “Nobody gets anywhere without a college degree,” his Dad pronounced several times a week, as if he were some kind of expert.



Stockbyte/Getty Images

Although the decision about college was confusing, at least Carson was a confident, optimistic person. He was a bit of a rock star at home, and his parents liked to brag about him whenever they could. School had never been his strong suit particularly, but his bedroom was lined with wall-to-wall trophies for playing sports. He hadn’t actually won any awards, but he had earned trophies for taking part. In fact, in a lot of ways, Carson was just an average guy—except that he had more friends than most people. He always slept with his phone beside him and checked it literally 150 times a day. His parents were always on his case about spending so much time on his phone, but, honestly, they were just as bad.

Deep down, Carson figured college would just be “grade 13,” and he’d be able to get by. High school had been a breeze, and he never even cracked a book. His college classes got off to a decent start, especially his developmental English class, the one he didn’t think he needed but was the most worried about. The classes were easy, in fact, just reviews of what he had learned in high school.

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lanych/Shutterstock.com

He was meeting a few people, but for the most part, he just drove to campus for classes and then drove home. He worked as a server three days a week and every weekend at a local chain restaurant to help pay his bills, so finding study time was a challenge. But he was confident that everything would work out as it always had. Anyway, he figured that being able to say that he was in college probably sounded impressive.

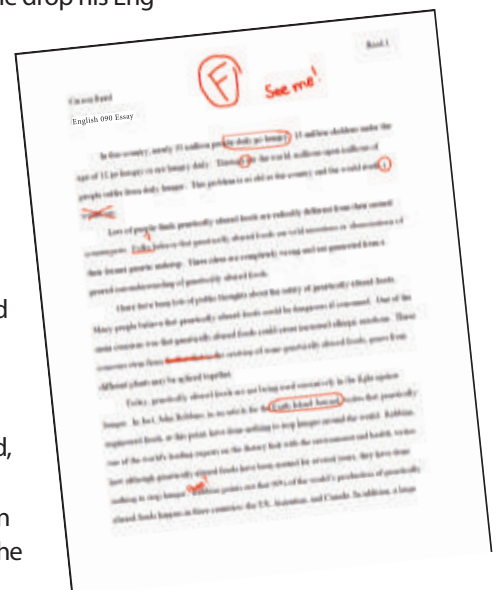
But as the weeks went by, Carson noticed that the pace was picking up quickly in his classes. Sooner or later, he'd have to buckle down and think about what kind of job he wanted after college, if he could even find a good job after he graduated. But overall, he even liked his instructors more than he expected to. "hey prof Allen how'd i do on my first essay in ur class" he fired off in an e-mail the second week. After he hit the send button, he wondered if that kind of informal writing would fly in college. Carson was used to texting; that's how he usually wrote.

The weeks rolled by, but around the middle of the semester, Carson got a shocking reality check. It came in the form of an F on his third developmental English paper. He couldn't believe it. He'd gotten a B on the first one, a C+ on the second one, and now an F. An F! Some students hadn't even turned a paper in; at least he should get some credit for that. He would have in high school! Carson had never gotten an F in his life—on any assignment in any class—ever. The F on his English paper made him begin to wonder about his grades in all his classes. He was right: he got a D on his history midterm, and his algebra

professor had mentioned the words "early alert," which meant that he was turning in Carson's name to the Student Support Center because his grade was at risk. He had been trying to slide by like he had in high school, and now things were totally out of control. What was strange was how quickly it had happened! Major stress!

Carson was stunned. He'd never expected anything like this to happen. He had always thought of himself as a winner, but now he was beginning to feel like a loser, and he didn't like the feeling at all. He had to face the music, and more importantly, face his parents, who were helping him out financially as much as they could. He felt guilty and angry with himself for letting things go wrong. The questions began to mount: Did he belong in college? Was he smart enough? Should he drop his English class? And why

did he have to take classes like history and biology anyway? What would they possibly have to do with his future? Should he tell his parents he wanted to quit school? Or should he just wait and see and keep quiet for now? College was much more stressful than he expected, and he was tempted to give up. Right now, Carson wasn't sure it was worth the stress or the money.



## REACTION: WHAT DO *YOU* THINK?

1. Why aren't things going the way Carson expected in college? Identify three reasons and explain them.
2. What should Carson do to get his college career on track? If he were your friend, what advice would you give him?
3. In your view, will Carson be successful in college? Why or why not?
4. It seems that Carson doesn't know much about being a college student. What is he missing? Can you describe what it takes to be a "professional" college student?

## YOU'RE IN COLLEGE NOW

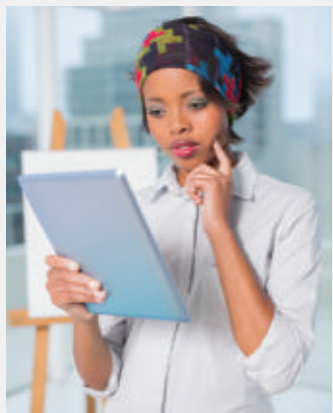
Congratulations! You're in college. You've just started a new chapter of your life! As the saying goes, "The first step toward getting somewhere is to decide that you are not going to stay where you are." In choosing to go to community college, that's what you've decided. You're *not* going to stay where you are. Your journey has begun.

As a new college student, you may be feeling competing emotions: excitement and anxiety, happiness and sadness, exhilaration and fear. That's natural; your life is about to change forever. But as motivational speaker Tony Robbins says, "Change is inevitable." But, he quickly adds, "Progress is optional." Progress, specifically progress toward the future you want for yourself, is your goal, and that's what *FOCUS* is about—helping you make actual, steady, undeniable progress. This chapter will launch you on your journey by discussing essential elements of college that make or break many students. You'll read about starting strong and keeping your focus, even when challenges present themselves. This text and this class can make all the difference, but only on one condition: *You* have to keep *your* part of the bargain.

If you're like most students, there will be times along the way when you're tempted to throw in the towel. Some students do. You may wonder if college was a good decision for you or if it's worth all the effort. Having those thoughts from time to time isn't unusual.

But you can't go wrong by investing in your own future. A college education has the power to create a better life for you, and in the opinion of many people who look back on theirs, it's possibly the best thing they've ever done. If you read this text carefully and follow its advice, you will become the best student you can possibly be. You will learn practical tools to help you manage your life, and the advice here will take you beyond college into your career. That is this text's challenge to you as you begin your college experience.

Why do people go to community college? Generally, people go to a community college to improve their skills or gain completely new ones. Many community college students differ from four-year college students in ways like these: they attend school part-time, support themselves, work full-time, are single parents, waited to go on to college, or got their high school degrees



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"First say to yourself  
what you would be;  
and then do what  
you have to do."

*Epictetus, Greek philosopher  
(55–135 A.D.)*

in nonstandard ways.<sup>1</sup> (In fact, if you don't yet have a high school diploma or **GED**, your community college may be able to help you with that.)

- **Reason 1: Transitioning from High School to College.** If you just finished high school, you may see college as the obvious next step. Like Carson, you'll find college to be a very different game. Think of it this way: Carson arrived at college, playing what he thought was a decent game of checkers. But he quickly discovered that his instructors expected him to play chess. He'd been successful in high school, and to the inexperienced eye, college looked like the same game board. After all, school is school, right? Wrong! Carson quickly discovered that college is a new game with different rules!

Other students you know may have gone off to college somewhere else. But you considered things like cost and convenience and chose a college in your own community. A community college is a *real* college—a **marketplace of ideas**, where you can try out all kinds of new things. According to one study, more community college students than students at four-year schools report opportunities to speak in class and get to know their instructors. A community college that focuses on teaching—and on you—can be a good place to be.<sup>2</sup>

A community college can also be a great place to test the waters. Before plunging into a university setting (often with higher tuition rates), you want to see if college is right for you. After you get into the rhythm of your classes, you may decide you've made a good decision. Or you may decide to wait until your life is less complicated or your head is in the right place.

Ultimately, the decision is up to you. But if you consider dropping out sometime during your first semester, do your homework first. Make the decision for the right reasons, not because you failed a test, dislike a class, or ran out of steam.

Think about it: A college education is one of the best investments you can make. Someone can steal your car or walk away with your cell phone, but once you've earned a college degree, no one can ever take it from you. Your choice to go to college will pay off in many ways.

- **Reason 2: Going Back to School after a Break.** Perhaps you've tried college before and quit. But now you've decided to get back on the road to success. Maybe you're absolutely committed to making it this time, so you're more motivated. Something may have changed in your life, or you worked to save up for college for a while, or you've been a stay-at-home parent, or you have an employer now who will help foot your tuition bill.

One of the most interesting things about community colleges is the amazing mix of students from all walks of life. You're just as likely to be sitting beside a grandmother who's decided it's her turn now, a soldier who's just come back from overseas, or an employee gaining credentials for a promotion. Adult community college students are practical, self-directed learners who want to build on their past experiences and apply what they learn to their everyday lives. Does that describe you?<sup>3</sup>

Or perhaps you're returning to school to gear up with a select course or two. For example, maybe you have a new job that requires giving presentations, and the thought of it terrifies you. So you take a course to help you overcome your fear of public speaking. You don't necessarily want

**GED** stands for **g**eneral **e**ducation **d**evelopment; passing these tests is an alternative to earning a traditional high school diploma

**marketplace of ideas** a place where many ideas are exchanged freely

Oscar Calero/Stock/Thinkstock



"Speed has never killed anyone, suddenly becoming stationary ... that's what gets you."

**Jeremy Clarkson**, British racing broadcaster and star of the television show *Top Gear*

a degree; you just want to take a course or two. There's probably no better place than a community college to meet those kinds of focused needs.

Who goes to community college? Take a look at these statistics:

- 45 percent of all college students nationwide attend community colleges.
- twenty-eight years old is the average age.
- 57 percent are female.
- 4 percent are veterans.
- 17 percent are single parents.
- 36 percent are the first in their families to go to college.
- 85 percent work full- or part-time.
- 46 percent are Hispanic, African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, or mixed race students, with the Latino population increasing most rapidly.<sup>4</sup>

## WIIFM?

🕒 2 MINUTE READ

WIIFM? It's not exactly a radio station, although everyone listens to it. Instead, it's that still, not-so-small, oh-so-practical voice in your head that whispers, "What's in It for Me?" It's so well known that it even has its own acronym (pronounced *whiff'em*). In fact, it comes up anytime anyone asks you to do anything. It's not just *sassy*; it's *smart*. We're all part of today's new "Attention Economy"; we have to make minute-by-minute choices about where to direct our attention. Information has never been more readily available, but we only have so much attention to go around, so it's natural to wonder, *WIIFM?* Why should I pay attention to this particular item when I'm literally drowning in a sea of possibilities?

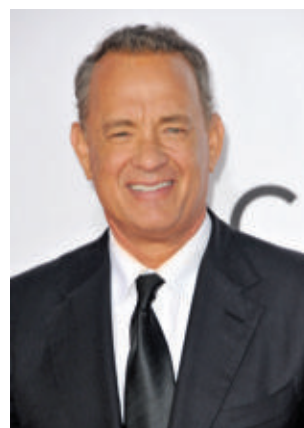
Here's a concrete example. "Exactly why should I buy this car?" you might ask on the showroom floor, with "WIIFM?" as your motivation. (*What's in it for me? Will this guy give me the deal of the century?*) Salespeople know about "WIIFM?" In order to sell, they're taught to turn a product's *features* into *benefits*. "This car goes from 0 to 60 mph in six seconds" is a feature. But "This car's pick-up will help you merge safely onto the crazy freeways around here" is a benefit.<sup>5</sup> See?

So that you know exactly why everything that's included in this text is worth doing, every chapter will have a "WIIFM?" feature. Eventually, as you read, you may come up with some "WIIFM?" ideas of your

own. But the point is: College success IS worth paying attention to. It has real, quantifiable benefits. And every chapter of *FOCUS*, based on its specific contents, will try to convince you why in just a couple of minutes. (Check how long it will take you to read each "WIIFM?" right up top.)

Take getting an associate's degree in the first place, for example. Why not get a four-year bachelor's degree? That's a good question, and you may, in fact, want to transfer to a university and pursue a four-year degree. But let's face it: Getting an associate's degree is downright smart—less time and resources are required to get a return on your investment. You can launch a very good career in less time for less money. Did you know that many careers require an associate's degree (rather than a four-year bachelor's degree), and that their starting salaries are impressive? Air traffic controllers are among the highest paying careers that don't require a bachelor's degree. The average air traffic controller earns \$122,950 per year, and there are expected to be 7,500 openings through 2024. Dental hygienists earn \$72,330 on average, and 70,300 positions will be filled by 2024. Web developers make an average of \$64,970, and you may be one of the 58,600 hired.<sup>6</sup>

Carson Reed wondered about whether college was worth it, and eventually he



"I went to college because I didn't have anywhere else to go and it was a fabulous hang. And while I was there I was exposed to this world that I didn't know was possible."

**Tom Hanks, actor, attended Chabot College, Hayward, California, and transferred to California State University, Sacramento**

worked his way through his challenges by making use of campus resources that were created with students like him in mind. So, when it comes to finishing what you've started in college, what's in it for you? Potentially, everything—especially, preparing yourself for a successful career and opening up real possibilities for a better life.

## EXERCISE 1.1 WE'D LIKE TO GET TO KNOW YOU ...

Take a few minutes to finish the following statements. Think about what each sentence says about you. Use your responses to introduce yourself to the class, or form pairs, talk over your responses together, and use your partner's answers to introduce him or her to the class.

1. I'm happiest when \_\_\_\_\_.
2. If I had an extra \$100, I'd \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The thing I'm most proud of is \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Once people get to know me, they're probably surprised to find I'm \_\_\_\_\_.
5. I've been known to consume large quantities of \_\_\_\_\_.
6. I'd rather be \_\_\_\_\_ than \_\_\_\_\_.
7. My best quality is \_\_\_\_\_.
8. My worst quality is \_\_\_\_\_.
9. The academic skill I'd most like to develop is \_\_\_\_\_.
10. One thing I'd like to figure out about myself is \_\_\_\_\_.

People go to a community college like yours at a particular point in their lives for a variety of reasons. As you discuss this exercise in class, explore these additional questions: What is your background and why are you here?

## EARNING A TWO-YEAR DEGREE

If you're in college to earn a degree, an associate's degree will prepare you to go one of two ways in a relatively short amount of time: (1) into a career or (2) on to further education. If you want a career-oriented associate's degree, in two years you can train for one of the fastest-growing jobs in the economy by taking approximately twenty classes. The five best jobs for the future requiring a two-year degree include becoming an air traffic controller, nuclear medicine technician, dental hygienist, funeral service director, and diagnostic medical sonographer.<sup>6</sup> If you prefer hands-on coursework and a career like one of these is your goal, a community college is exactly the right place for you. (It's also quite possible that you couldn't prepare for some of these specific degrees at a four-year institution.)

Instead of a career-oriented associate's degree, you may want to earn a fairly general two-year degree to apply toward a bachelor's degree at a university. Part of the coursework you'll complete to get an associate's degree will consist of core requirements or general education courses, like writing and speaking, that apply to any career field. If those are your plans, you'll leave your community college with transferable courses when the time comes.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps instead of a two-year associate's degree, you want to specialize even further and finish your coursework sooner, so instead you opt for a certificate.

Certificates generally require fifteen to as many as fifty credits, and you'll most likely only take courses that apply specifically to the career field you're preparing for. You set your sights on a target and finish your certificate program in as little as one year, sometimes less.<sup>8</sup>

One of the biggest differences between an associate's degree and a certificate is that the courses you take for an associate's degree usually transfer to a four-year school and include core requirements, general courses like speaking, writing, and math.<sup>9</sup> That may not be true of certificate programs. So if you think you may want to earn a bachelor's degree at some point, choose an associate's degree. It's up to you. How soon do you need a job? What interests you? How hands-on do you want your course of study to be?<sup>10</sup> Whatever degree you choose, getting off to a strong start will be key to your success.

## ACADEMIC PROFESSIONALISM: WHAT INSTRUCTORS WILL EXPECT FROM YOU

The way to start strong in college can be summed up in these two words: Academic Professionalism. Here's what the term means, and using a comparison may help explain it. Imagine this: You've just landed a new job, and it's one you really wanted. How do you know what to do and how to act? What will your boss expect from you? Should you just show up whenever it's convenient, take on this job on top of others you already have, and start firing off casual e-mails and texts about business? ("what up with the johnson report i thought max was gonna write that") Probably not—at least not if you want to be successful. You'll want to display workplace professionalism by noting how professionalism is defined in your new organization, and then start doing those things right away. The same thing is true in college: If you want to be successful, you must display academic professionalism. It's a set of behaviors you start now and carry with you into your career.

Hiring experts in the workplace identify three areas in which they believe college graduates are not as well prepared as they should be. They expect college graduates to have **oral and written communication skills**, a **positive attitude and strong work ethic**, and the **ability to work in groups and teams**.<sup>11</sup> You'll see that these three things, among others, are emphasized throughout *FOCUS*. You may be thinking, "*But wait a minute...I just started college!*" True, but considering how competitive the job market is these days, why not start preparing for it *now*? You'll gain a major advantage over other applicants—college graduates, or not. The academic professionalism you learn early in your college career can translate into career professionalism later. Or if you decide to continue for a bachelor's degree, all the academic strengths you begin building from your first year on will serve you well when further schooling requires even more of you.

So how is academic professionalism defined, specifically, and what's required? If you asked college instructors across the country, they'd give you advice like this:

1. **Don't just pile on.** Ever see the winning team "pile on" after a big football game? When one too many players jumps on top of the one unfortunate person at the bottom, the whole pile collapses. Some students hope they'll

"Let us not look back in anger, nor forward in fear, but around in awareness."

James Thurber, *American author* (1894–1961)

be able to just add college to an already-long list of obligations. But when they add one more thing, the entire stack crumbles. College isn't just "one more thing" to fit into the daily agenda of your life. Like many students, you may have to work to afford tuition, or you may want to keep up the demanding social life you had before college. But being successful in college may mean that you must give something up (like the temptation to OD on Netflix or Facebook) to give school the attention it needs. Something in your life will need adjusting to make room for college classes. You may have to cut back on your hours at work once you get a sense of your academic workload, or tell your sister who has to miss class because she has the flu that you can't stay and keep her company because you have class, too. Put college at the top of your list of obligations.

2. **Choose to go to class.** Let's face it: life is complicated. It involves overlapping demands and minute-by-minute decisions. Your boss wants a piece of you, your friends want your attention while you try to study, your romantic partner wants to go to the movies the night before your midterm exam, the bills keep mounting—and on and on. Some students choose to miss class to pick up a relative at the airport or shop with a friend who's in town, for example. Sometimes true emergencies in your personal life will interfere with your academic life. If you're ill, for example, call or e-mail your instructor beforehand, if for no other reason than to be courteous. But your instructors will expect you to plan nonemergencies around your already scheduled (and paid-for!) classes. Many things in your life are important—it's true—but while you're in school, going to class and doing your coursework should be at the top of your to-do list.
3. **Don't be an ostrich!** Some students develop "the Ostrich Syndrome." If reading or homework assignments seem too hard or feel like busywork, they just don't do them. Instead, they bury their heads in the sand and pretend like nothing's at stake. Somehow they may even think that they can't get a bad grade if they don't turn in an assignment for the instructor to grade. It goes without saying (but here it is, anyway) that "ostriching" is the opposite of academic professionalism, and your instructors will *not* be impressed. Always do your best work and submit it on time. If the assignment is due on October 1, it's due on October 1. Familiarize yourself with each syllabus since it will outline what's due and when for every one of your classes. Honest-to-goodness realism and continuous upkeep in your courses work wonders in college, just as they do in the workplace.
4. **Show respect.** One thing instructors dislike is getting a sense from students that school isn't a top priority. Dress like you're a serious student who's there to learn. Leave the muscle tanks and halter tops for truly informal occasions. You're not in college to score fashion points, draw attention to your tattoos, or define your personality with your baseball cap. That doesn't mean you can't be yourself, but it does mean that you should use good judgment. And when you breeze in late or sneak out early, you're communicating that you don't value school, your instructor, and your classmates, whether you realize it or not. If you criticize a classmate or your instructor in public—even if you think it's constructive—that's disrespectful, too. And when you whip out your cell phone to see how many

JuniorsBildarchiv/AGE Fotostock



"An ostrich with its head in the sand is just as blind to opportunity as to disaster."

*Anonymous*

“likes” you have in response to your latest Facebook post, or text your boyfriend about where to go for dinner, everyone knows where your head is. When you’re in class, be in class.

5. **Know the rules.** Your college and your professors have policies you need to know about up front. What constitutes cheating? How can you avoid plagiarism? Who should you talk to if you have a concern about your grade? Do instructors accept texts and calls on their cell phones? What kind of writing will they expect in e-mails? Even when it comes to everyday things—like weather cancellations—your college and instructors have policies and procedures to guide you. Don’t leave yourself in the dark when it comes to important rules that affect you.
6. **Take charge.** When it comes right down to it, who is responsible for your success? None other than you! Even though you may be afraid to speak up or not want to admit that you’re fuzzy about something, your instructors will rely on you to let them know that. They aren’t mind readers. Do what you need to do: get help, take advantage of instructors’ office hours, or hire a tutor. Don’t sit idly by while success drifts away.
7. **Invest enough time.** In high school you may have done well without trying very hard. A teacher may have forgiven a late assignment, provided opportunities for extra credit, or graded on a curve so that everyone passed. But college is different. In college, it’s important to get ready for class beforehand by reading and doing assignments, and then jump in once you’re there. Bring your books, notebook, and pen, and sit up straight, too, just like mom always used to say. College isn’t a place to just slide by or wing it. It’s a place to put your best foot forward. That may mean rewriting a paper three times or rereading a textbook chapter more than once. Academic professionalism requires you to invest as much time as it takes.
8. **Learn to work in groups.** Your instructors know the value of teamwork later in your career, so they’ll expect you to work with your classmates in class, outside of class, or online. They may even think it’s important enough to assign points for group projects in the course syllabus. Even though you may prefer to work alone, teamwork skills are highly valued in today’s workplace, and you’ll learn things from other students that you might not learn from your instructor.
9. **Check your e-mail regularly.** Sure, you can talk to an instructor in person or on the phone, or text a classmate with a question about an assignment. But the primary means of communication in college is e-mail. Most colleges will send all “official correspondence” (like bills) this way, and many professors will use campus e-mail to communicate with you. If you never check your school e-mail account, but instead only use your personal account, you’ll miss important information. (“What? The instructor’s sick today? I broke my neck to get here!”) Your campus IT department or an online helpsheet can tell you how to forward one e-mail account to the other so that you’re always up to speed. Believe it or not, this one simple thing trips up more students than you would ever imagine!

## life hack #1

To maximize your productivity, get chummy with Siri. Use more voice commands for school reminders via your cell phone: “Siri, remind me to start my algebra homework at 7 P.M.” She’ll do it. Or you can use Google Now with Android.



Hiroaki Ito/Hulton Archive/Getty Images

“No one can whistle a symphony. It takes a whole orchestra to play it.”

*H. E. Luccock, professor, Yale Divinity School (1885–1961)*

- 10. Engage!** Students who soak up all they can enjoy college most. When they're in class, they're tuned in. Sure, Professor Whoever may not be quite as funny as your favorite late-night TV comedian, and going to class isn't like going to see the latest box office smash hit. But college is about becoming an *educated* person, not an *entertained* one.

If you follow all the advice offered in these ten recommendations, you'll display academic professionalism and reach your goal—to start strong.

## ACADEMIC PROFESSIONALISM: HOW TO HELP YOURSELF SUCCEED

Any time you start something new, there's a **learning curve** involved. The best thing to do is to admit it, decide what to do, and start climbing! Beyond conducting yourself as a professional student, what other things will help you succeed? Here are some additional responsibilities.

### DEVELOP A DEGREE PLAN AND PLAN YOUR COURSEWORK

In some ways, college is like a journey with parts of the itinerary planned for you. You can't just hitchhike wherever you like. It's more like a guided tour planned by experts in the areas you'd like to explore. You can choose to go left or right at particular moments, but much of the trip is planned in advance.<sup>12</sup> If you'd like to become a nurse, for example, your coursework will be prescribed for you. However, everyone appreciates the focused knowledge of nurses when they need one!

Some courses will count toward your major or area of **concentration**, and some will satisfy **core** requirements. Core requirements often make students wonder: "I'm never going to be another Stephen King. Why do I have to suffer through writing courses I'll never use?" The key words in that last sentence are *never use*. You'll speak and write and think and solve problems in any career. And even though you're in college to prepare for a career, becoming a more knowledgeable person in general should be a big part of your mission.

Most community colleges will ask you to fill out an academic or degree plan up front. You'll plan your coursework for each semester or quarter from now until you've finished. Not only do you end up taking the right courses, but you can watch your progress as you go.

If you decide to transfer to a four-year institution later to get a bachelor's degree, it's likely you can bring many of your associate's degree credits (up to 60 credit hours or half the credits you'll need for a four-year degree) from your community college courses with you. That wouldn't be true unless community colleges were considered to be **real** colleges and coursework was seen as equivalent. However, it is your responsibility to know what courses will transfer to the particular transfer institution you may have in mind. Do some digging on your own by calling an advisor at that school for information that will help you with your planning now. Find out **exactly** which courses will transfer into the major you're considering. And remember that there's a difference between whether a course will **transfer** (for general credit) or **count** (toward a specific degree).

**learning curve** a measure of how long it takes you to learn something and how hard it is



"If you don't know where you are going, you might wind up someplace else."

**Yogi Berra, major league baseball player and manager (1925–2015)**

**concentration** focused effort; specialization

**core** basic

## BOX 1.1 SAMPLE DEGREE PLAN

Here is a road map, or a sample degree plan, for Carson, assuming he decides to get a general Associate of Arts Degree at his community college. (The requirements at your community college will be different from this example.)

### GREAT BLUFFS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

#### DEGREE TRACKING WORKSHEET

NAME Carson Reed EMAIL ADDRESS creed5@gbcc.edu  
STUDENT NUMBER 123-45-6789 PHONE 555-9876

#### GENERAL STUDIES

#### Associate of Arts Degree

Many community colleges, yours included, use a worksheet or degree plan, like this one of Carson's to help you stay on course and track your progress as you earn your degree. Check with an advisor to see what aids like this your campus provides.

Program Course #	Course Title	Term (to be) Taken	Term Hours	Grade A = 4 B = 3 C = 2 D = 1 F = 0	Notes
ENGL 090	English Composition I	Fall 2018	3	?	
HIST 103	United States History I	Fall 2018	3		
	Foreign Language		3		
GBCC 100	College Success		3		
SPE 115	Public Speaking	Fall 2018	3	?	
ENGL 102	English Composition II		3		
HIST 104	United States History II		3		
	Foreign Language (must be the same language)		5		
	Humanities		3		
PSC 205	United States Government		3		
	Literature		3		
	Visual and Performing Arts		3		
SOC 103	Introduction to Sociology		3		
	Mathematics		3		
	Humanities		3		
PSC 206	State and Local Government		3		
BIO 100	Natural Science I	Fall 2018	3-4		
	Natural Science II		3-4		
	Unrestricted Elective		3		
	Unrestricted Elective		3		

In the "Notes" column, Carson can keep track of his thoughts about each course and things to keep in mind when registering for the next term.

The courses with department abbreviations and numbers listed are required for Carson's degree plan. The open categories are places where he can choose from a list of possible courses. His advisor will help him know his options.

Source: Adapted from Austin Community College website. Available at <https://www6.austincc.edu/cms/site/www/awardplans/awardplan.php?year=2017&type=CC&group=@0004&apid=3855>

## BE ADVISED! ADVISING MISTAKES STUDENTS MAKE

One of the most important relationships you'll have as a community college student is the one you build with your academic advisor. On your campus, this person may be an advisor, a counselor, or a faculty member who can steer you toward courses you can handle and instructors you can learn best from. An advisor can keep you from taking classes that bog you down academically or unnecessary ones that take you extra time to earn your degree. Here's a list of advising mistakes students make, from real advisors who work with college students every day.

- 1. Not using the campus advising office or your faculty advisor.** If you don't get regular advice from an advisor, counselor, or a designated faculty member who's serving as your advisor, your degree may take longer and cost more money. It's that simple. It's your college career, after all, and it's important that you and your advisor work as partners.
- 2. Not planning ahead.** Some students walk into the advising office or e-mail an advisor and expect help right away, and sometimes that works. However, planning ahead is a better option. Planning ahead includes making an appointment, looking through the course offerings, making a list of questions to ask, and thinking in advance about which days you can attend classes based on your work schedule, how many classes you can take, and on which days of the week. And, if you're leaving your advisor a voice mail, remember to include all of this important information. What's wrong with this message? "Hi, this is Tony. I have a question about my schedule. Please call me back, OK?" Tony who? And what's his phone number? Or how about an e-mail like this from hotchick13@email.com? "Do I need to take English 090? Please let me know." Exactly who is "hotchick13"?
- 3. Procrastinating.** It's important not to put off advising appointments. To drop a class, you may need to meet a deadline. Or you may need help from an advisor to solve a problem with a faculty member, but by the time you get around to it, the instructor has already left campus for the summer. If you deal with problems right away, while they're small, they may be reversible. (And it's always a good idea to discuss dropping a class with the instructor first.)
- 4. Skipping prerequisites.** Some students want to skip the required prerequisites. They think they can handle the work. They think prereqs are a waste of time and money when, actually, they're in place because hundreds of students before you have shown that these classes help you succeed. And in some cases, students who haven't taken a prereq are actually disenrolled from the course that requires it.
- 5. Choosing the wrong major.** Sometimes students lock on to a major because someone else thinks it's a good idea or because a particular career field pays well, not because they enjoy the subject and are suited for it. Staying motivated is hard when you're not interested in something. Advisors can help you figure out which major is right for you.
- 6. Taking too many credits or too few.** Some students are overly optimistic and think they can handle a heavier course load than the other factors in their lives will permit. Other students may underestimate the number of

### life hack #2

On average, cell phone users check their phones 150 times a day. Why? What are they looking for? Beware: Technology can become an unproductive procrastination habit!

**prerequisites** courses that you need to take before advancing on to other ones

courses they should take, which increases the time it takes them to finish school. An advisor can help you stay on target.

- 7. Ignoring problems.** If you run into difficulty and end up on academic probation, for example, an advisor or college official will work with you to get you back on track. But you must agree to that bargain and accept the help, possibly by signing a contract of steps you must take to reverse the situation.
- 8. Being afraid to drop a course.** Sometimes, when you've tried everything (for example, tutoring, extra help sessions, and the campus learning center), but you're still not succeeding in a class, the best thing to do may be to drop the course by filling out a drop form (online or on paper) and submitting it. Then retake the class later. That option is better than just not going to class and assuming that by not coming, you've dropped the course. Colleges require deliberate action from you. It's always best to know your school's rules and talk with your instructor first. *And beware that dropping a course may affect your financial aid.*<sup>13</sup>

**GPA** an average of all your grades for a single semester or a running average across all your coursework

## MAKE THE GRADE: COMPUTING YOUR GPA

One of the most important things to learn as a new college student—and fast—is what grade point averages (**GPA**s) are and how they work. Your GPA is an indication of how well you're doing, and you keep track of it over time, term by term. Your academic record will follow you for the rest of your life! Some students don't realize how grade points add up. They end up on academic probation, even if they only have one failing grade. Let's say you're taking four courses this term, and you earn the following grades:

COURSE	CREDITS	FINAL GRADE	GRADE POINT VALUE
English Composition	3 credits	C (2 points)	6
College Algebra	3 credits	F (0 points)	0
College Success	3 credits	B (3 points)	9
Public Speaking	3 credits	D (1 point)	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12 credits</b>		<b>18 grade points</b>

You may look at this record and think, *Not bad. I passed three of my four courses.* But divide that Grade Point Value column total (18) by the total number of credits (12), and you get 1.5.

$$\text{GPA} = \text{Grade Point Value} \div \text{Total Number of Credits}$$

At most schools, a 1.5 GPA puts you on academic probation, and eventually, you may be facing suspension. That can be a discouraging way to start, and digging yourself out of a GPA hole once you're there takes a very long time, like paying off credit card debt.

Not only is it important to keep track of your grades over the whole term, but it's also important to keep track of your grade in each course. If you stop going to your math class because it's too hard or because you don't like the teacher, your grade will suffer. If an assignment is worth 25 percent of your

grade, and you don't turn it in, the highest grade you can possibly earn, even if you do everything else perfectly, is a 75 percent or "C." You may think, *but it's only one assignment*. It is only one assignment, but it counts as one-quarter of your grade. In college, everything counts. The typical grading scale in college is:

A = 90–100%   B = 80–89%   C = 70–79%  
D = 60–69%   F = 59% and below

## REALIZE THE VALUE OF DEVELOPMENTAL COURSES

As a rule, community colleges have what's called an open-door admissions policy. That means that anyone who wants to get an education is invited in. You don't have to get a certain score on the SAT or ACT standardized national tests, and you don't have to have a particular GPA in high school to be admitted. That's a good thing. As a nation, we are opening the doors of education to everyone, and our society as a whole benefits in many ways. Education improves the quality of life.<sup>14</sup>

But when restrictions are removed, more variety is a natural result, right? Think of it this way: If every student at your community college had to be over six feet tall to be admitted, then you and all your classmates would tower over the general public. But if anyone of any height could attend, you'd see a range from very short to very tall. Some people would need steps to reach high places, and others would have to duck under low ceilings. But variety presents challenges. Community colleges are characterized by variety, and they've devised ways to make it work. Here's how.

New community college students bring standardized test scores or take placement tests that help schools know where to *place* them. If you're "short" on some necessary skills for success, like reading, writing, or math, they'll place you in a **developmental** (sometimes called *remedial*) class to help you catch up fast. Some students see these courses negatively, thinking they're a waste of time or money. At your particular college, you may be allowed to opt out of developmental classes or take them online at your own pace, but generally speaking, they're insurance that you will grow into the skills you'll need.

If you're enrolled in a developmental class, you're in good company. In one study of 35 community colleges that were all part of a proposal to increase student success, 37 percent of incoming students required one remedial course, 26 percent required two courses, and 22 percent required three courses—for a total of 85 percent. And note this piece of good news: In a related study, students who earned a C or better in a developmental course during their first semester were, from that point forward, more likely to stay in school and succeed than students who weren't required to take a developmental course in the first place!<sup>15</sup> In another study, students who took a developmental writing course earned higher English grades in later courses and higher GPAs overall than students who did not.<sup>16</sup> If you're enrolled in a developmental class, perhaps you're beginning to see its value *now*. If you don't see the value yet, chances are you'll greatly appreciate what it did for you *later*.

## MASTER THE SYLLABUS

You'll get a syllabus (or course schedule) for most of the college classes you'll take. If the syllabi (plural of syllabus) for your courses are available online,



"Problems are only opportunities in work clothes."

Henry J. Kaiser, American industrialist (1882–1967)

**developmental** designed to develop or improve a skill



"Your current safe boundaries were once unknown frontiers."

Anonymous

## BOX 1.2 ANALYZING A SYLLABUS

Take a look at this example of a syllabus to see what you think. What is this professor like? Do you get a sense of her standards and values from her syllabus? Will this be a challenging course? Take a close look at

a syllabus from one of your current classes. Analyze it, just as this one has been analyzed, and make a list of things you learn about specific aspects of the syllabus that can help you be successful.

Some community colleges have a syllabus template or standard format so that your syllabus for each class will look basically the same and contain similar kinds of information.

Pay attention to the course description. It's a summary of what you can expect.

You can buy the textbook from your college bookstore or order it online. But often textbooks are "customized" with portions inserted from different books or material that pertains to your own campus. You must buy those books from your campus bookstore. You can also rent textbooks or you can buy or rent an e-version of the text. Even though textbooks cost money, they are a critical investment. Trying to get by without one puts you at a disadvantage right from the start.

The instructor has devoted a substantial portion of the syllabus to this topic, and she has spelled out her expectations in detail. Professional conduct must be important to her.

This syllabus actually continues on for several more pages and includes three other things: (1) a campus statement about academic honesty and plagiarism, (2) due dates for each assignment, and (3) specific information on how speeches will be graded.

### GREAT BLUFFS COMMUNITY COLLEGE COURSE SYLLABUS

Course ID: SPE 115  
Term: Fall 2018  
Instructor: Regina Lewis  
Office: Vail Hall 501  
Office Hours: MW 10:00–11:00 A.M., TR 2:00–3:00 P.M., by appointment only

It's appropriate to ask the instructor what she prefers to be called: Regina, Ms. Lewis, Professor Lewis, and so on.

Course Title: Public Speaking  
Credit Hours: 3  
E-mail Address: regina.lewis@gbcc.edu  
Office Phone: 555-1234

Send the instructor an e-mail the first week of class, introducing yourself and discussing your thoughts about how this class will help you. Remember, however, that in college, you must use good grammar and correct spelling in ALL your writing, including e-mails.

**Course Description:** This course combines the theory of speech communication with oral performance skills. Emphasis is on researching, organizing, and preparing speeches and analyzing the needs and interests of your particular audience. Although this is primarily a performance class, you will also build your writing and researching skills.

**Prerequisites/Corequisites:** ENG 090, REA 090

**Course Text:** *Public Speaking: Concepts and Skills for a Diverse Society*, 2016. Cengage Learning.

**Professional Conduct in Class:** Students are responsible for knowing and abiding by the "Standards of Conduct" listed in the 2018–2019 GBCC Catalog (beginning on page 10). Your cell phone should be turned off, set to vibrate only, or left at home. Eating, sleeping, social discussions, or doing reading or homework for other classes are distracting behaviors and communicate indifference and disrespect for this learning environment and subject matter. Children should not be brought to class. Getting up and coming in and out during class (unless you are sick, of course) is distracting to your classmates. These activities are unacceptable in academic environments and qualify as examples of inappropriate conduct in class, which may result in your academic withdrawal from the class.

**Online Learning Management System (LMS):** e-CC (pronounced EASY). All students have access to the materials posted on the LMS website through the internet from a campus computer lab or from home.

**Attendance:** If you must miss a class for an emergency, you must still submit assigned work by the due date. Please provide documentation to indicate that the absence was due to a situation beyond your control. There are no excused absences without documentation. In order to receive credit for attendance, you must attend the ENTIRE class period. IF YOU MISS A CLASS, IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO CONTACT A CLASSMATE FOR NOTES AND ASSIGNMENTS. NO MAKEUP WORK IS ALLOWED.

**Grading:** Assignments must be turned in on time and speeches must be presented on schedule. Grades for makeup speeches are automatically reduced by 20 percent. Only one makeup day will be scheduled for speeches missed due to emergencies! THERE ARE NO MAKEUP EXAMS OR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS.

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):** Any student eligible for academic accommodations because of a learning or physical disability should speak with the instructor during the first week of class and contact the Office of Support Services.

**Speeches:** You will be required to give a minimum of five speeches.

- SP 1: Informative 5 mins. (+ or –1 min.) (1 visual aid) Prep and speaking outline required.
- SP 2: Career (Impromptu) Speaking on the spot!
- SP 3: Ceremonial 3 mins. (+ or –1 min.) (1 quote) Prep and speaking outline required.
- SP 4: Persuasive 7 mins. (+ or –1 min.) (2 visual aids and 2 sources) Prep and speaking outline required. You must have a partner for the opposition.
- SP 5: Public Speaking Outside the Box 10 mins. (+ or –2 mins.) (Poster, flyer, 2 visual aids) Presented in TV studio.

Source: Regina Lewis, Pikes Peak Community College. Used by permission.