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## Being Successful

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I have tried to distinguish this book from other guides by not focusing on subjects like study skills and getting higher grades.<sup>1</sup> The idea has been to give you a professor's-eye view of a university. Yet, since professors are the ones giving out grades, I should probably say something about our perspective on the subject. It is about what you would expect if you put yourself in our shoes for a moment (something that few students do).

I would add that getting good grades is related but not equivalent to learning the material and getting the most out of college. Just about anyone willing to spend all their free hours studying can get straight As. But an A merely means that you have jumped over those hurdles a professor erects because she knows that students will slack off without them. Grades do not measure learning. They measure your ability to navigate a series of sometimes arbitrary exercises. While trying to get good grades may produce learning as a by-product, it is not the royal road to that end. Success in college is not measured in GPA but in what you become and what you can do. Nevertheless, here follows some advice on being successful in a more earthly way.

### TIP 45

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#### Manage Your Time

While hard work does not guarantee you success in college, it almost always prevents failure. The toughest thing about selective colleges is getting in.

1. For a more thorough view on getting good grades, see Lynn F. Jacobs and Jeremy S. Hyman, *Professors' Guide to Getting Good Grades in College* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006).

Once you get in, you need to make a determined effort to fail out. With a little bit of effort, it is not hard to get reasonable grades. Today's professors typically only give out failing grades or even Ds or low Cs to students who do not complete the required assignments or devote little attention to the class. Do your work and do it conscientiously and on time and most professors will reward you with a grade in the B range.

The real problems in selective schools show up only with students who do not learn to manage their time. They never devote large blocks of time to studying.<sup>2</sup> They try to sneak in five minutes of studying here and ten minutes there, always in between other activities. This is a recipe for poor performance.

The key to success is to set aside several hours each day that you devote fully to your classes. Find a quiet place where you are comfortable and won't be disturbed and work on your assignments. It may be a carrel in the library, your dorm room, or a quiet café. It is as simple as that. If you have trouble doing this, try keeping a time log of all your day's activities to find out where your lost time is going. If you learn how to manage your time and devote consistent effort to your classes, you will not necessarily get As, but you will avoid Ds and Fs.

#### TIP 46

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### Show Professors That You Are Working Hard

This tip is slightly different from the previous one. The point here is not just to work hard, but to give professors evidence of your hard work. Most professors want their students to do well. They are not against you. In fact, if you give them a reason to reward you, they probably will. So try to give them reasons to reward you. Besides doing good work, the obvious route is to show them that you care about the class and are working hard in it.

How do you do this? By attending class, by completing your assignments on time, by participating in class discussions, and by showing up at your professor's office hours. If a student is doing poorly and doesn't take any of these steps, I assume they are satisfied with their poor performance and

2. Richard J. Light, *Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 23–25, 91–93.

don't look into it any further. If they do take these steps, I am glad to help them out. I have been in many situations where a student's final grade rested on the borderline between an A and a B or a B and a C. The determining factor was often my perception of how much effort the student was putting into the class.

This is not to say that hard work entitles you to better grades as many students claim (what one professor calls the labor theory of grades); ultimately professors will judge you on the quality of your work.<sup>3</sup> The claim that "I worked as hard as I could" does not mean that you deserve an A. It is to say that it makes professors look on you more kindly.

#### TIP 47

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### Join a Small Study Group

In the past, professors prohibited students from working together on assignments. Collaboration was viewed as cheating. Today, professors encourage students to do so and with good cause. Students who cooperate with each other perform much better in class.<sup>4</sup> You are more likely to fail if you do all your studying by yourself. The best professors have come to realize this and encourage students to join together in studying and doing homework.

The key, however, is not to meet with others until you have looked at the material. First make a serious effort at doing the assignment by yourself and only then bring your unanswered questions to the group. This will prevent you from free-riding on the efforts of others and force you to do more thinking and learning yourself. Afterward, you will benefit both from discussing your difficulties with others and trying to help them with theirs.

3. See Max Roosevelt, "Student Expectations Seen as Causing Grade Disputes," *New York Times*, February 17, 2009.

4. Light, *Making the Most of College*, pp. 40, 53, 74–75.

#### WHAT GRADES MEAN

Many students focus their entire studies around grades and live or die by their latest grade report. Unfortunately, they cause themselves a lot of needless stress by imputing to grades meanings that they don't or

shouldn't have. It is thus worth thinking about what grades mean and how you can put them to work for you rather than having them work you over.\*

The standard view of grades is that they are a reward for talent or merit. To a considerable degree this is how professors assign grades. But it falls short in a number of respects. It doesn't distinguish between those who come into a class with God-given natural skills or ample prior experience and those who work hard and grow during the class. Since the latter is what students should be aiming for—little can be done about the former—grades are a somewhat unreliable signal.

A second view is that grades are a motivational tool. Though most professors are not enamored of grades (much less grading), they view them as a necessary evil to get students to work. They reason that if grades were eliminated, students would cease paying attention and turning in their assignments. Indeed, this is precisely the function grades serve for less ambitious students, but should be less important for readers of this book.

A third view sees grades as a message to your future employers. They are intended to inform them about your skills and work effort. But this information function is overrated. Employers pay relatively little attention to your transcript (and in any case cannot easily compare grades across classes and schools), and most professors do not grade as if this function mattered very much.

Grades can be most useful to you if you treat them in a fourth way: as a signal from your professor to you. You should use them to determine what you do well and what you need to improve. Low grades tell you either that you lack talent in a particular area or are not working very hard in it. High grades tell you the opposite. This signal is noisy because grading practices differ across professors and departments (see text box on “Grade Inflation”), but grades still carry some information. Better is to focus on the specific written or oral feedback you get on your work. Or ask your professor personally what one or two things you should work on in order to improve. And better still is to not take the whole practice of grading all that seriously.

\*This section draws on Harry Brighouse, “Grading Medical Students (and More on Grade Inflation),” [www.crookedtimber.org](http://www.crookedtimber.org).

**TIP 48****Ask for Help**

Every college has multiple options for getting free extra help with your work. As one graduating senior put it, “Unending help is available, but you have to ask for it.”<sup>5</sup> Professors and TAs are your first line of support. They are required to hold weekly office hours and make themselves available if you have another class during those hours. Go to their office hours when you have a problem and even before. Not only will you get help, but you will distinguish yourself as a student who cares about the class.

Most colleges also have tutoring programs that provide help both with specific subjects and more general study skills. Among the most valuable are the writing workshops that many schools sponsor. You can take an essay to these workshops and get trained students to read it and offer constructive advice. Professors themselves would welcome a service like this and have to pay graduate students to get it. In short, seek out any and all opportunities for extra help when you are falling behind.

**TIP 49****Don't Let Your Instructors Suspect That You Are Taking Advantage of Them**

One of the biggest worries of professors is that they are being taken advantage of by students. This is probably the main force keeping grades down. If we were sure that all students were trying their hardest in class, we would not be reluctant to give them all good grades. But we don't like the idea that students are playing us for a better grade than they deserve.

Evidence of this is not completing readings or assignments on time, showing up late for class, and requesting extensions, extra time on exams, or opportunities to do extra credit.<sup>6</sup> When you are in class make sure that your

5. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

6. The George Mason economist Alex Tabarrok, however, refers to the Law of the Below Averages: “I sometimes find evidence of cheating on exams but I rarely take action, I don't have to. Almost invariably the cheaters get abysmally low grades even without penalty. Some people I know get annoyed when students without evident handicap ask for and receive special treatment such as extra time on exams. I comply without rancor as the extra time never seems to help. Over the years I have had a number of students ask for incompletes.

cell phone is off—nothing singles you out as less than serious more than letting your phone ring or writing text messages. You would be wise to turn off your wifi connection as well; not only will it distract you from class, but it is usually clear to your professor when you are surfing the Web or writing e-mails because your eyes remain glued to the monitor. All of these actions are taken as indicators that you do not care about the class or wish to work hard. They will not endear you to most professors or TAs. If it is obvious to you that you are trying to get by with a minimum of effort, it is probably just as obvious to your professor and will often be reflected in your grade.

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None have ever become completes.” See Alex Tabarrok, “The Law of Below Averages,” [www.marginalrevolution.com](http://www.marginalrevolution.com).

#### GRADE INFLATION

There is a lot of evidence that grades have been rising over the past half century and that the increase has been largest at the most selective schools. Average grades were once in the C range; today they are closer to a B and at some places even an A. What are the implications of these changes for students?

Many critics have bemoaned the change as evidence of a decline in standards, which they term grade inflation. Supposedly professors today are relativists who no longer believe they can distinguish between right and wrong and so mark everything right. Others argue that the student protests of the sixties and seventies along with economic changes have led to a university that is afraid to criticize its students/customers. Even the rise of student evaluations is said to have contributed to the trend; professors may be wary of giving low grades for fear of getting low evaluations from students (see Tip 20).

The case for these claims remains unproven. They imply that professors today give higher grades for work that once received lower grades. But grade inflation could just as easily be caused not by looser standards, but by improved student performance. Students may be doing better work now than they used to and thus deserve higher grades. And there is in fact some evidence for this explanation. Consider that universities no longer practice massive affirmative action for men and legacies (improving the quality of admitted students), parents devote more attention to their children (increasing their talent levels and preparation), and the

teaching profession is much more competitive (leading to better teaching at universities).\*

No matter the case, there is a worry that grade inflation prevents professors from distinguishing the good from the bad. Because there is an upper bound on grades—an A or in some places an A+—professors now have fewer categories into which they can sort students. As Harvard’s Harvey Mansfield puts it, “Grade inflation compresses all grades at the top, making it difficult to discriminate the best from the very good, the very good from the good, the good from the mediocre.”†

It is unclear, however, whether professors can or need to sort students into thirteen categories (from A+ to F); in practice, five or six categories (say, A, A−, B+, B, B−) is probably enough. Is it really necessary to single out the top 5 percent over the top 10 percent? And as the mathematician Jordan Ellenberg points out, over the course of an entire college career, even a college with only two grades could do a fairly good job of discriminating among students if you just look at their final GPA.‡

More worrying is that grade inflation proceeds at different degrees across different departments. Some departments have increased their grades a lot and some less.§ This means that grades are less able to signal to students what their relative strengths are. You don’t know if you got a high grade because you are good at the subject or because the department gives out a lot of high grades. It should be easy to get this information; simply determine the average grade for each class and ask yourself where you are relative to the average. But only a few universities make this information available.

Besides lobbying your university to institute a practice like this or doing your own informal survey of classmates, the best you can do is focus on the professor’s individualized feedback. Have they singled you out as especially promising or personally encouraged you to continue in the subject? This means that this is where your talents lie. Have they

\* See Harry Brighthouse, “Grade Inflation and Grade Variance: What’s All the Fuss About?” in *Grade Inflation: Academic Standards in Higher Education*, ed. Lester Hunt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008).

† Harvey C. Mansfield, “Grade Inflation: It’s Time to Face the Facts,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 6, 2001.

‡ Jordan Ellenberg, “Don’t Worry about Grade Inflation: Why It Doesn’t Matter That Professors Give Out So Many A’s,” *Slate*, October 2, 2002.

§ See Richard Sabot and John Wakeman-Linn, “Grade Inflation and Course Choice,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 5, no. 1 (1989): 159–70.

simply given you an A— without saying anything else? This means that they are used to giving out lots of A minuses, and you shouldn't take that as a signal of your talents. Or simply ask the professor personally how good your work is relative to other students at a similar stage in their academic career. If you compare favorably, then this may be where your talents lie.

#### TIP 50

### Learn the Rules of Critical Thinking and Apply Them Constantly

Most every professor at your university wants to teach you how to think critically and analytically. They are often less explicit about what it means to do this, sometimes because they want you to discover how to do it for yourself. But there are in fact rules of critical and analytical thinking that can be taught. I won't presume to summarize all of them here—some are more attitudes than rules—but I will give you an idea of what your professors have in mind when they try to develop your analytical skills.

Most students show up at university with a view of thinking that could be termed “ignorant certainty.”<sup>7</sup> They believe that all questions have definite answers and that when asked a question they simply need to find an authoritative source to give them the answer. This is why so many high school students rely on the encyclopedia. The first step college students need to take is to realize that there are rarely absolutely right answers to important questions. Good professors will frequently confront you with questions that don't have clear answers and force you to struggle with them.

What they will encourage you to do is take a Cartesian approach—named for the philosopher René Descartes who was famous for his skepticism—to all arguments you meet. That is, you should be skeptical of any and all claims you meet in books and articles. The first thing that we try to teach undergraduates is this critical sense that Karl Marx once called “the ruthless criticism of everything existing.”

However many students stop at this stage, which is only halfway to the goal. They become “naïve relativists”: they believe that there is no truth

7. Derek Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges: A Candid Look at How Much Students Learn and Why They Should Be Learning More* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 103.

and all arguments are equal. But in fact, some arguments are better than others. (Argument here means a relation between cause and effect; it explains why something happens or is the way it is.) A better argument is one that is consistent with more facts about the world, explains more facets of a phenomenon, and does not introduce needless complexities. If an argument possesses these qualities, we call it a good or strong one (though even strong arguments are rarely the final word, they are just provisionally better than the alternatives). The skill of critical thinking is learning how to determine which arguments are better and worse.

Professors ultimately want you to create your own good arguments, but it is often easier to start with existing arguments and find out how they work or do not work. Most of your assignments in college do just this. Whenever you are asked to agree or disagree with an author's position or to compare and contrast the positions of two authors, you are taking apart an argument or multiple arguments.

The place to start in completing these exercises is to ask what exactly an author is asserting: what is causing what? Some arguments are simple. A classic in political science is "No bourgeoisie, no democracy"—that is, a country needs a large middle class to get democracy. Others can be enormously complex. I find it helpful to draw arrows between different variables or phenomena. For example, X and Y together lead to Z, which then produces A. Often authors will do this for you themselves. Your first task is usually to figure out what argument the author is making.

Having done this you can start thinking of where the argument goes wrong. I suggest asking a number of questions about every argument you encounter (including your own arguments). While these questions do not exhaust all of the ways an argument may be flawed and apply more to the social and physical sciences than the humanities whose standards of argument are somewhat different, they almost always give you food for thought.

1. *Ask whether there are other possible explanations of the phenomenon in question that the author has not considered.* If you encounter the simple argument that a large middle class causes democracy, ask yourself what else might cause democracy. Could it be a country's culture or religion? Or perhaps culture or religion are helping to create a middle class, which in turn promotes democracy. (See, for example, Max Weber's argument about the Protestant work ethic and the emergence of capitalism or current arguments about the relation between Asian values and prosperity.) Are the

author's arguments for dismissing these alternative explanations persuasive, or does he/she not even consider them at all? This is sometimes referred to as the omitted variable problem and is one of the best places to look for new insights.

2. *Ask whether things could actually be working in the opposite direction.* Is it possible that Y causes X rather than X causing Y? In technical terms this is called endogeneity, but it is also referred to as reverse causality. Returning to the middle class/democracy connection, you could ask whether democracy may be causing a middle class; perhaps democracies adopt economic policies that encourage private entrepreneurship, which in turn produces a large middle class. In this case, democracies do tend to have a large middle class, not because a middle class causes democracy, but rather the reverse.

3. *Consider how the author has chosen his or her evidence.* What sources has the author consulted? What cases does she look at? What data has she gathered? Has she considered all possible evidence or only carefully selected cases? If the latter, how did she choose to focus only on these cases? It is very easy to rig one's conclusions by looking only at certain evidence. And sometimes even all the evidence available is biased—after all, the winners get to write the history.

A quick example will show how things can go wrong. Let's say that you want to explain the causes of democracy, so you decide to look at a handful of democracies—the United States, the United Kingdom, and France—and see what they have in common. Well, they are all rich countries, so you conclude that wealth causes democracy. But this conclusion doesn't hold up because there are some rich countries—for example, Saudi Arabia—that are not democracies. If you want to determine what causes democracy, then you need to find some factor that differentiates the democratic from the undemocratic, not just a factor that unites the democracies. In other words, you should not just pick cases of success. You should look at failures as well as successes or how failures turned into successes.<sup>8</sup>

4. *Ask how the explanation works.* A good explanation should say not only that X causes Y but why and how. Make sure that any arguments you en-

8. This mistake is called selecting on the dependent variable and is very common. Consider all of the business advice guides that only look at successful businessmen and try to determine what they have in common. Let's say all of the successful businessmen they study are punctual. Does punctuality therefore cause success? No, because there are lots of unsuccessful businessmen who are punctual.

counter have a plausible mechanism showing how you get from X to Y. One good way to think about this is to ask what story you could tell about how X leads to Y. What are the intermediate steps? If the middle class causes democracy, how does it do so? By leading a revolution? By publishing newspapers that expose corruption? By refusing to invest in the economy without guarantees of accountability? Does the author provide evidence that this is what happens? If so, you can have more faith in the argument. If not, then ask whether evidence supporting this mechanism exists.

5. *Consider the assumptions.* You have probably heard this rule before, but students often have trouble identifying the assumptions of an argument unless an author is explicit about them. I would offer you one way of probing the assumptions of an argument, particularly in the social sciences and humanities. Ask yourself what model of human nature the argument presupposes. Does it assume that all people are greedy? Rational? Power hungry? Altruistic? Envious? Is this a reasonable assumption to make in this case? Are all individuals presumed to act this way all the time or only certain people at certain times? While the realism of the assumptions is not always a decisive point against an argument, it does help you to probe how the argument works and whether it makes sense.<sup>9</sup>

Following these rules should help you to expose some, but not all, of the flaws in arguments that you encounter.<sup>10</sup> Harder is to find ways of coming up with new and original arguments. There is no surefire way to do this, but I would offer two pieces of advice. First, students have a tendency to think that they must completely immerse themselves in the subject matter in order to hope to come up with an original argument. They read, read, and

9. The economist Milton Friedman has argued that whether assumptions are realistic is not an important point against an argument. He notes that it is helpful to assume that professional billiards players know the laws of physics if we want to explain their success, but few actually do know those laws. They simply act “as if” they knew them. See Milton Friedman, *Essays in Positive Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

10. There are of course many more considerations to keep in mind when critiquing and making arguments. Fortunately, there are a number of works that show the pitfalls you will encounter in trying to make true arguments. A short pocket guide like the one that I have outlined here can be found in Charles King’s “How to Think,” [www.georgetown.edu/faculty/kingch](http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/kingch). Another fascinating list of potential missteps and ways to avoid them is David Hackett Fisher’s *Historians’ Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1970). A more technical introduction to ways you might go wrong is William R. Shadish, Thomas D. Cook, and Donald Thomas Campbell’s ominously titled *Experiments and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Generalized Causal Inference* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

read some more. This is not a bad idea. There is little you can do without knowing the material at hand. But it can be overdone.

It is easy to get lost in what other people have said and forget to listen to yourself. There are so many arguments out there that you may struggle to find the space to make your own. Some of my students, for example, search and search for an article or book asking the exact same question that they want to ask or making the same argument they want to make. I advise them to call off this search early. If you look hard enough, you will always find a work approximating your own. But if you start thinking for yourself, you will find that you can come up with a slightly different question or argument than the ones already out there. While this small difference may seem trivial to you, it is such small differences that constitute originality. At some point, students would do well to put their books and notes down and simply contemplate the subject matter. Sit alone for five or ten minutes and just think. Take out a sheet of paper and start jotting down ideas. Some will be dead ends, but some will pan out.

There is one other habit that may help. Always carry around a pen and small pad of paper. Ideas tend to come when you least expect them and disappear just as quickly. As soon as an idea pops into your head, you need to write it down whether you are at the gym, about to fall asleep, or at a party. All great writers practice some version of this rule, and it will help you as well. In making these notes you will find that you have many more original ideas than you had thought.

#### TIP 51

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### Professorial Shortcuts for Writing

One of the main differences between high school and college courses is the amount of writing. There are many books and guides about how to be a better writer, and it would not be to my advantage to try to better them here.<sup>11</sup> But since my career and those of my colleagues are made in academic writing, I thought that it would be helpful to share a few thoughts that have proved useful to me. So this tip is actually composed of several.

11. The classic is Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*, but it ignores some of the most important issues like structuring paragraphs and organizing essays and is misleading in other respects. Far better is Joseph Williams's *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

The first is one that is repeated everywhere, but is not often heeded: revise, revise, revise. If you haven't read through your essay draft three times, you should not hand it in. The ideal number of revisions is probably closer to ten, but three is a minimum. I am thinking here not just of a spelling and grammar check—this is too obvious to mention—but an ideas revision. Does your paper have a thesis or a point? Is it clear what you are arguing? Do the steps in the argument follow from one another? Does each paragraph make a single point? Have you included evidence for all of your assertions? Have you considered alternative explanations? Almost nobody, including 99 percent of professors, writes well enough to get this done in the first or even second draft. Professional writers know that writing is really revising.

My second tip will actually cause you to revise even more. When you start writing, concentrate mainly on getting your ideas down on paper. Don't worry about grammar and style. If you can't think of the right way to phrase something, just make a note of the point you want to make. The key thing is to get your ideas written down, which is also a way of generating more ideas. If you are thinking about style, about the way the paper sounds, you are thinking less about your arguments and writing at a much slower pace than you should. Because it is your first or second draft, your ideas probably aren't ready for prime time in any case and so all of your effort on style goes for naught. Rarely do good authors' phrasings survive in tact from the first draft to the last. So why spend effort getting your essay to sound right on these early drafts? More important is to get an argument on paper and see where your ideas lead. It remains only to add that this way of writing demands revisions. Ultimately you do want to fix the style and grammar. But even with these later revisions, you should save time because your first draft goes that much faster.

My third tip is to start writing early. Don't wait until you have all of your ideas set to begin. Essays are rarely preformed in your mind before you put them down on paper. At best you see the final essay through a glass darkly. New ideas will emerge as you write. The earlier you find those ideas, the better. You also alleviate time pressure on yourself. Almost all writing assignments can be broken into pieces. Some pieces can be written at the very beginning of the process—for example, background on the subject or a review of other people's arguments. Write them as soon as you feel ready even if the rest of the paper is still emerging.

Finally, a tip for emergencies. If you are pressed for time and have to hand in your paper as soon as you finish writing it—not recommended by any

means but occasionally necessary—take your final paragraph and make it your first paragraph. If you are doing one draft writing, then your argument will only emerge at the end of the essay. Take that argument and copy it to the beginning. That way the reader is at least a little prepared for the joy ride that your essay is and has some idea of where you are heading (which you did not when you started writing).

### TIP 52

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#### Professorial Shortcuts for Doing Research

As with writing, there are better guides to doing research than I can produce here.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, here are a couple of tips that help me to get started on a research project.

Students often don't know where to start looking for information about a research project. There are too many books in the library and they all have too many pages of text, so students begin by turning to the Internet. This is not a bad idea. Professors do it themselves. We have Wikipedia bookmarked in our browsers too. The difference between professors and students, however, is that we do not stop at Wikipedia. If all you are after is facts and the subject is not controversial, Wikipedia is usually trustworthy, but if you need more than a few facts, it is not very helpful.<sup>13</sup> Professors use it only to provide a quick and dirty overview of a subject or to guide them to other works that will be more helpful. I would note as well that while lots of information is available online, there is no substitute for visiting the library in person. Browsing the stacks is a great source of inspiration and will reveal many leads that you wouldn't find by sticking to electronic sources.

How do you begin orienting yourself in genuine sources? The key is to figure out which books and articles are worthwhile and which are not. There are a few shortcuts professors use to make this determination. One simple step is to find the most recent book or article published on a subject and read what is called the literature review section. Most scholarly works try to

12. See the recommended readings at the conclusion of the book.

13. Unless you want to intentionally annoy your professors, under no circumstances should you cite Wikipedia in a paper.

situate their arguments relative to arguments that have been made before. Typically, some place in the first chapter or two of a book or the first or second section of an article, the author summarizes these arguments and describes their contributions and deficiencies. These chapters and sections will tell what the major theories in the field are and thus help you orient yourself. Take particular note of the citations and bibliography as well—they will lead you to other useful sources.

A similar place to look for such information is in book reviews. Just about every academic book is reviewed in one journal or another. These reviews not only summarize the argument of the book but place it in the context of other works just as a literature review does. Even more helpful are so-called review essays where a scholar reviews several books at once and tries to lay out the terrain of a field. You can use a database of journal articles like JSTOR to look up these reviews. There is even a series of journals entitled *Annual Review* that specifically commissions essays that summarize the literature in a variety of fields. These essays can be enormously helpful for finding out what is known and not known about a subject.

Students also sometimes have trouble distinguishing a reputable source from a nonreputable one. Here again professors use a couple of shortcuts. In every field, there are A-list, B-list, and C-list publishers and journals.<sup>14</sup> The A-list publishers and journals generally put out the highest quality books and articles, while the C-list publishers and journals put out useful but not as well-regarded works (though there are plenty of exceptions on both ends). While it is often hard for a student to tell which publisher or journal belongs on which list, a good rule is that publishing houses associated with top-ranked universities (for example, Harvard University Press) are A-list, while small commercial presses are C-list. There are no hard and fast rules for journals, but you can find rankings of journals in most fields at the Institute for Scientific Information Web site ([scientific.thomson.com/mjl](http://scientific.thomson.com/mjl)). These rankings will tell you which journals are most prestigious in a given field. They are usually the most trustworthy.

Another tip is not to rely too much on secondary sources when you are writing a research paper.<sup>15</sup> Especially in the social sciences, enormous

14. A colleague of mine uses poker terminology and refers to blue, red, and white chip journals.

15. In the natural sciences, experiments always create new data, and so this rule is less relevant.

amounts of data are easily accessible at the touch of a button. Rather than searching for an article on health care in Nigeria, you can within seconds pull up data on infant mortality and life expectancy in Nigeria over the past fifty years and compare it with any other country or countries you wish. Or you can pore over the results of public opinion polls from just about every country in the world. Many students are reluctant to look up such data themselves and prefer to rely on authorities to give them the correct interpretation. This is a mistake. You will impress your professor and improve your thinking skills by plunging into primary sources directly.

Even better is to go out and collect your own data. You don't need to be a professional statistician or archivist to do this. Usually it is enough to go count something—the number of speeches a politician gave in a given year, the number and type of books in Jane Austen's library, or the number of references to quantum mechanics in the *New York Times*. In creating your own data, you almost assure yourself that your paper will have at least some whiff of originality and not bore your professor with ideas he has seen many times before.

Finally, I would be remiss not to alert you to the wonderful services of research librarians. They are experts in finding information about any research topic and navigating the enormous resources of not just your own university's library but all libraries the world over. You are making a large mistake if you do not consult with a librarian about every research project you are working on.

#### SELF-CARE

Success at college comes from more than being smart and working hard. It is also important to take care of yourself. While you can always find that one guy who parties seven days a week and still manages to ace his classes, for most everyone else the body and mind need a little more care. While this topic takes me somewhat far afield from the topic of the book and my own expertise, I would offer a few pieces of advice.

- Eat regularly and healthily. Too many college students find that their irregular schedules lead them to eat too much junk food and sometimes too much (or too little) food period. You might try to follow the advice of Michael Pollan who has three simple rules for eating right: Eat food (meaning not processed food; if the stuff you are putting in your mouth doesn't rot,

it's not food); not too much; mostly plants.\* One good way to do this is to cook more; consider getting a group of friends together and cooking for each other once or twice a week. To avoid the "freshman fifteen," don't take a tray in the cafeteria. A recent experiment found that students ate more when they had trays because they felt compelled to fill them up.†

- Get your sleep. The all-nighter is a college tradition that is probably as old as college itself, and I wouldn't want to deprive you of its joys. But lack of sleep will truly affect your performance. Consider that driving a car when you are sleep deprived is as dangerous as driving drunk.‡ Then consider what happens when you try far more complicated activities like writing an essay or studying for an exam in the same state. The solution is better time management so you don't get in situations where you have to work all night.
- Keep your drinking under control. A professor at Hobart and William Smith surveyed his students about their drinking habits and found that most students believed that they were below-average drinkers and needed to drink more to keep up with their peers.§ Of course, most students can't be below average. When the university then informed students about how much the typical student actually drank, students lightened up on their drinking. They were no longer trying to keep up. If you think you need to keep up, you really don't.
- Participate in extracurricular activities. College may be a full-time job, but it is not more than a full-time job. No matter how heavy your course load, you should have time for other activities like volunteer work, a student organization, a book club, or even a part-time job. Getting away from school work regularly will replenish your mental health and make you a happier person. You will remember that life is more than just grades. And according to one study, these activities won't even hurt your GPA.\*\*

\* Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008).

† They also created far more trash. See Elia Powers, "Eating Off the Table," *Inside Higher Ed*, January 30, 2008.

‡ A. M. Williamson and Anne-Marie Freyer, "Moderate Sleep Deprivation Produces Impairments in Cognitive and Motor Performance Equivalent to Legally Prescribed Levels of Intoxication," *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 57 (2000): 649–55.

§ H. Wesley Perkins, "Misperceiving the College Drinking Norm and Related Problems: A Nationwide Study of Exposure to Prevention Information, Perceived Norms, and Student Alcohol Misuse," *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 2005, 470–78.

\*\* Richard J. Light, *Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 27–29.

# 6

## Interacting with Professors

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My colleagues and I are continually surprised not only by how few students seek out personal contact with us, but by how poorly they behave when they do contact us. Even when they do show up at our office hours, students often show themselves to be rude, uncurious, and nakedly self-interested, the three biggest turnoffs for professors. You will get the best results from your professors by being courteous, curious, and not focusing on grades.

### TIP 53

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#### Be Respectful

It shocks me that I have to mention this, but showing common courtesy when interacting with professors is a basic floor you should not fall below. Most professors tend not to be impressed when students show up in their flip-flops and pajamas or worse. Or take cell phone calls in the middle of a conversation. Or want to discuss material that they have forgotten at home or haven't studied in the first place. Or fail to take notes on what they are being told. Or use vulgarities or informal forms of address. (Unless your professor specifies otherwise, referring to him or her as "professor" is most appropriate; never use a first name unless explicitly prompted to do so.) No, we are not shrinking violets, and you will not offend our delicate sensibilities by doing these things.

What you will do is single yourself out as a person who does not deserve serious attention. Our time is limited, and we have to decide who deserves more of it. Most student visits to us involve a request for some sort of help or advice. If you want our fullest attention, most sincere help, and best advice,

then make it clear that it is important to you. That means showing up in a reasonable degree of organization and focused on the discussion at hand. If you give the impression that you don't care, then we will assume that you don't and adjust our advice accordingly.

So besides being courteous, show up to a professor's office hours with your course material—notes, readings, etc. Have pointed questions ready that you would like to discuss. Focus your attention on the topic at hand. And make sure to have paper and pencil in order to write down the professor's responses. When students don't write down what I am telling them, they almost always forget it, and because I know they will forget it, I give less thorough advice.

#### TIP 54

#### Be Curious about the Subject

The fundamental thing to know about interacting with professors is that they genuinely care about their field. This is what they have devoted their lives to. Most of their nonteaching time is spent reading or writing about their field. They could literally talk for hours on end about their specialty without any notes. But aside from a handful of colleagues who work on the same topic, few people are interested in hearing their hard-earned opinions. Even their spouses have gotten sick and tired of their spouting off.

You should see this as an opportunity. Professors want to talk, and you want to learn. Make yourself their interlocutor. To do this, all you have to do is show genuine interest in their subject. Tell them how much you enjoy it and ask questions about it. It is easy to get professors chatting about their field of research because they know a lot that does not make it into their lectures.

Try to move beyond the course material in these discussions. Professors can go into a distracted, teaching mode when you ask specifically about their classes, which, truth be told, probably bore them a little. Ask them instead how the material sheds light on a current events issue or another book or article you have read recently. Or try to see the big picture or the meaning behind it all. Or ask about a subject not covered in class but related to it. Many professors will take this as an opportunity to be creative and witty, all to your benefit.

### INTERACTING WITH FEMALE PROFESSORS

Male and female professors have identical job responsibilities—to teach, do research, and advise students. A colleague of mine, the sociologist Eszter Hargittai, however, has noted that students tend to treat them in different ways that can be both demeaning to and demanding for female professors. I include her reflections so that students—who perhaps are not aware of this—act more responsibly in their dealings with female professors.\*

Anyone who thinks male and female professors are treated equally by students is clueless. Just recently I came across a couple of examples that are very illustrative of this point. A friend of mine told me that her undergraduate advisees gave her a photo of themselves in a picture frame that says: “I love my Mommy” . . .

I can see the comments already: “If female profs are more caring then what’s wrong with students expressing their appreciation for that?”

First of all, students demand much more emotional work from female professors than they do of male profs. If the women don’t provide it, they are often viewed as cold bitchy profs that don’t care about students. Although I don’t know of any systematic studies of what types of topics students bring up during interactions with professors by gender, I have heard plenty of anecdotal evidence suggesting that female profs get approached much more by students wanting to talk about life issues than male profs.

Second, there are plenty of ways to express appreciation that don’t involve putting the female prof in a mothering role, a role that certainly isn’t emphasizing her academic strengths and credentials. As my friend noted, a gift of this sort makes her feel as though her only contribution to the students’ success was in shepherding them through their projects and not in providing intellectual stimulation, helping them professionally, or contributing to the creation of new well-trained researchers. Maybe, just maybe, she’d like to be recognized for her intellectual contributions and the part of mentoring that involves the research aspects of her job. And while it would be neat if mothering was equated with all of those things, don’t kid yourself. Of course there is nothing wrong with being compassionate and caring, but it’s not what tends to be rewarded professionally in academia.

\* See Eszter Hargittai, “Herr Professor Daddy? I didn’t think so,” [www.crookedtimber.org](http://www.crookedtimber.org).

## TIP 55

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**Visit All Your Professors during Office Hours at Least Once**

Every university requires professors to hold office hours at least once a week, usually for two or three hours.<sup>1</sup> While you might think that we would have long lines outside of our offices during these hours, there is usually only a trickle of students (except the week before an exam). I still haven't figured out why this is. The economist Brad DeLong found that even putting out cookies didn't help.

This is an incredible opportunity for you. You can go and chat with one of the most knowledgeable people in the world on the subject that they know best. You can ask them not only about issues you are having trouble with in class, but also about potential research ideas, your academic career, interesting things to read, or other classes that are worth taking. While you shouldn't view office hours simply as an opportunity to chew the fat—unless the professor leads you in that direction—you do have a good bit of freedom in the kind of issues you can discuss. I would recommend going in with an agenda—a set of questions that you wish to ask about the class or the field—and then see where things lead.

You should do this at least once in every class you take. While not all of your encounters will be great successes, some will be, and all of them will mark you as a serious student to your professor. This leads to the next tip.

1. Consistently not showing up for office hours is one of the few infractions for which professors will be reprimanded. Few professors will go to the lengths of the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek. As a profile of him explains, “Žižek says that he deals with student inquiries in a similar spirit. ‘I understand I have to take questions during my lectures, since this is America and everybody is allowed to talk about everything. But when it comes to office hours, I have perfected a whole set of strategies for how to block this,’ he says with a smirk. ‘The real trick, however, is to minimize their access to me and simultaneously appear to be even more democratic!’ Initially, Žižek scheduled office hours immediately before class so that students could not run on indefinitely. Then he came up with the idea of requiring them to submit a written question in advance, on the assumption that most would be too lazy to do it (they were). Žižek reserves what he calls ‘the nasty strategy’ for large lecture classes in which the students often don't know one another. ‘I divide the time into six twenty-minute periods and then fill in the slots with invented names. That way the students think that all the hours are full and I can disappear,’ he explains.” See Robert T. Boynton, “Enjoy Your Žižek,” *Lingua Franca*, October 1998.

## TIP 56

## Get to Know at Least One Professor Well

I hope that you leave university having made at least one personal bond with a professor. Even if teaching undergraduates is not always at the center of our mental worlds, we are people too and like to have as acquaintances smart and ambitious young people. What professors would be turned off by eager students who want to learn what they have to teach? Students also provide us with a connection to the real world that is often lacking in our lives, and we are genuinely curious to see how our students' lives turn out.

Such connections can be meaningful to you as well. Not only because you have made a new friend, but because I think we have something to offer. Perhaps it is as simple as advice on courses or careers. Maybe it is help in learning who you are and what you believe. Besides their families, young people have few non-self-interested adults in their lives who they can turn to with their dilemmas. While we are not equipped to deal with intimate or psychological problems—we are advised by our universities to refer you to counseling centers at the university—we can often give you some perspective on moral dilemmas or worries about your future. More practically, getting to know at least a couple of professors well is essential for obtaining good letters of recommendation (see Tip 61).

Some hard evidence backs me up in this advice. A recent survey showed that students who reported that a professor took a special interest in their work ended up being more satisfied with their university experience.<sup>2</sup> Another study noted that “frequent interaction with faculty is more strongly related to satisfaction with a college . . . than any other type of involvement.”<sup>3</sup> In a series of interviews with recent graduates, Richard Light found that students named close relations with a particular professor as among their most significant experiences in college.<sup>4</sup>

2. Charles T. Clotfelter, “Alumni Giving to Elite Private Colleges and Universities,” *Economics of Education Review* 22, no. 2 (April 2003): 109–20.

3. Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education, *Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education* (Washington, DC: National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education, 1984), p. 18.

4. Richard J. Light, *Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 81–87.

How do you get to know a professor well? Mostly by doing the things I have recommended in other rules: visiting office hours, taking small seminars and upper-division classes, writing a senior thesis, and becoming an RA. Most professors are glad to get to know students who are clever, ambitious, and curious. Show us that you possess these abilities and we will generally meet you halfway.

I would add in passing a neat trick to get to know professors better and find out the inside dope on a department and its classes. Get a job as a work-study in the department you are interested in. Departments often hire students to do simple secretarial jobs like answering the phone or photocopying course packets. While the work itself is not inspiring—though it may be intermittent enough to let you study while you work—it does plant you in the department for long stretches of time. You will thus get to know many of the professors—they will ask you to do jobs for them or will simply know your face—and you will hear scuttlebutt that will help you to become a more discerning student.

#### TIP 57

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### Find Out What Your Professors Research

Few students realize that the intellectual center of their professors' lives is research. This ignorance may be natural. Students have few direct or indirect encounters with this side of the university. But since this is the focus of our mental lives, we are quite flattered when students bring it up. Your best ticket to impressing a professor is to mention his or her research.

You can find at least some basic information about what your professors are working on by looking at their departmental Web site or their personal homepage where they typically post a short biography and a list of recently published works. Many professors contribute to blogs or have Facebook sites where you can learn more about them. If you want to be the one in a thousand case, actually check one of their books out of the library or download one of their articles. Mention how much you enjoyed it and ask questions about it: how difficult was it to write, where did they get the idea, and what extensions would they like to see? Few students ask these questions, and professors are generally eager to answer them. In short, we are much easier to flatter than you might expect.

### “TENURED RADICALS”

Despite occasional denials, it is true that university professors tend to be more liberal than the public at large.\* They are considerably more likely to vote Democratic than Republican and to hold political beliefs that are on to the left side of the political spectrum. The question is what this means for your education.

In the first place, I'd note that lots of groups in American society differ from the “average” American. Businessmen, for example, are more conservative than the rest of society. And there is no conspiracy to keep universities on the left. The hiring process focuses almost entirely on a professor's research rather than his or her political beliefs. Even if universities wished to institute an affirmative action program for right-wing professors, they would have a hard time filling the positions. Conservatives seem to prefer other professions, and liberals seem to be attracted to universities.†

While many commentators have made hay out of this disparity, arguing that these “tenured radicals” are indoctrinating future generations, I am skeptical about whether this is true.‡ Though there are certainly cases of professors turning the classroom into a political forum, there is a strong ethic among most of us not to bring our own politics into our teaching. Most of the time it just isn't relevant—a discussion of *Jane Eyre* is not the time or place to talk about George Bush—and the rest of the time we see our function as challenging whatever preconceptions students have rather than inculcating our own. I view my own role as being a devil's advocate for unpopular ideas rather than pushing a particular political line.

Insofar as our politics does come out, I don't think the influence is as pernicious as most would have it and may even be beneficial. In the first place, even if some professors are advocates for their own views, I think it unlikely that students will take their word for it. Most professors only wish they had as much influence as critics attribute to them. Students

\* See Scott Jaschik, “The Liberal (and Moderating) Professoriate,” *Inside Higher Ed*, October 8, 2007.

† Matthew Woessner and April Kelly-Woessner, “Left Pipeline: Why Conservatives Don't Get Doctorates,” American Enterprise Institute, 2007.

‡ Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990).

usually don't learn the subject matter and forget it even faster; why should the professor's political opinions exert a greater hold over their minds? Second, I think there is arguably a conservative bias in society at large, a bias toward the tried and true, the status quo, the traditional. Given that, it may be a useful thing for there to be a place where this bias is challenged constantly and in depth. What other organization pays people to think subversive thoughts? Most of these ideas won't pan out, but some will and become the conventional wisdom for future generations.

Finally, for the true conservative students out there, I believe that you will get a better education than your liberal counterparts. As I've mentioned several times, one of the most important parts of your education is challenging your established beliefs. What better way to do this than sit through classes that do nothing but. For the conservatively inclined, university is the perfect place to sharpen your debating skills and hone your ideas. It would probably be better if universities were more diverse politically, if there were more true conservatives and even reactionaries in the professoriate. § Then students could test their ideas against a wider range of foils. But in the current environment at least conservative students get this benefit.

§ If you are curious, the humanities and social sciences are the most liberal fields, business and the health sciences the most conservative, while computer science and engineering contain the highest proportion of moderates. Interestingly, younger professors are more moderate and less liberal than their elders. See Neil Gross and Solon Simmons, "The Social and Political Views of American Professors," Working Paper, September 2007.

## TIP 58

### Send E-mails Judiciously, Answer E-mails Promptly

It used to be that to contact professors, you had to catch them in their offices or risk disturbing them by telephone. With the advent of e-mail, this is no longer the case. Sending an e-mail is a simple and seemingly unobtrusive way of communicating with a professor. After all, professors are free to answer at their leisure; you're not interrupting their work or their dinner.

Nevertheless, I would urge you to treat e-mail with caution (see text box "Writing an Effective E-mail"). You should not e-mail professors to ask for information that has already been distributed: the due date of an assignment

or the required reading. Consider your professor a last resort for obtaining information that has been made publicly available. Turn first to a fellow student or TA. For serious matters, by contrast, e-mail is usually not enough. If you want an extension on a paper or have a complaint about a grade, you will be better off visiting in person. Our suspicion meter rises when someone doesn't look us in the eye.

On the other hand, if you receive an e-mail from a professor, it is best to answer immediately. Not only might you forget about it as it drops down your e-mail queue, but you are potentially annoying a professor who has taken the time to think of you personally. Often students put off answering because they wish to change the state of affairs that has prompted the e-mail. If the professor is asking about a late assignment, students think that if they delay answering until they have finished, then they can honestly answer that it is done. This tactic fools no one. Better to come clean right away and say that you will hand in the assignment tomorrow or the next day.

#### WRITING AN EFFECTIVE E-MAIL

Many of your professors won't tolerate the casual e-mail conventions that you may be used to with your friends or family—the informality, the ubiquitous abbreviations, the grammatical looseness. Writing an e-mail with these characteristics will at best mildly annoy them and at worst threaten your standing in their eyes. Unless you are explicitly advised otherwise, you should write e-mails that resemble formal letters. This means they should include:

- An informative subject line like “Question about the final exam”
- A respectful salutation: best is “Dear Professor”; even if a professor signs his/her e-mails with a first name, this is not an invitation to respond in kind unless the professor explicitly says, “Call me Andrew.”
- A clear, concise explanation of your problem or request written in grammatical English without abbreviations. If you are following up on a previous discussion, it is good to reference that discussion, for example, “As we talked about after class on Thursday . . .” If you wish to meet with a professor, specify exact times when you can come (and then be on time); their posted office hours are your best bet.
- A definite closing: appropriate ones are “Best,” “Best regards,” and “Thanks.”

Here is an example:

Dear Professor Roberts,  
 I wanted to follow up on the discussion we had during your office hours last week. You mentioned that for my final paper on Clinton's healthcare plan, I should submit a revised bibliography. I have attached it to this email. I look forward to your comments.  
 Thanks for your help,  
 Lisa

### TIP 59

#### Avoid Complaints about Grades

There is nothing that professors dislike more than complaints about grades. It is probably even worse than grading itself, which is one of our least favorite things. Most professors put rules in place to prevent such complaints—they might require you to bring them up first with TAs or to submit complaints in writing. Nevertheless, complaints get to us no matter what we do, and it seems like with increasing frequency.

The main problem with complaints about grades is that they immediately signal to us that you are less interested in the subject of the course than in your grade. You show that you are person who is not interested in genuine learning but in credentials and symbols. You mark yourself as a grade grubber—yes, we use this term too—rather than a scholar.

A second annoyance is that most complaints are baseless. Professors produce their grades with the experience of hundreds or thousands of different exams and essays that they have graded in this course or others. If they think your exam was not up to snuff, it is because it did not measure up to all of these others that you naturally have not seen. This is not to say that grading is a science—far from it—only that it usually takes into account most of a student's objections.

The substance of most complaints moreover ends up being things that professors warn you about repeatedly before exams like remembering to read the entire question and producing a clear and well-organized answer. Many students bring in their exams to show us how much they wrote for a specific question or that bits and pieces of the answer are scattered around their essay. This is not a convincing complaint. A good answer to an essay or exam question is not a hidden code that needs to be deciphered; it is a

clear and organized answer to the question. If you have not produced that, you should not be complaining. And this is not to mention the weakest claim of them all: the plea that your grade is especially important because you are applying to law school or medical school or because it is your major. This one carries zero (and perhaps negative) weight.

I would finally point out that even if your complaint is successful, it will have almost zero influence on your collegiate grade point average. Consider the standard request for an A– instead of a B+. The difference between these two grades is .33 grade points (3.67 versus 3.33). During your undergraduate career, you receive maybe thirty-two grades. The increase in your GPA as a result of a successful complaint is  $.33/32$  or .01 grade points, which is not very different from zero.

Given all of this, what are your odds of getting the professor to change your grade? Will you be able to roll him or her? I don't know of any research on this, but my experience is that your chances are slim. You may have success with TAs—who lack the will to stand up to pesky students—but they usually have to intervene with the professor who is likely to reject your claim.

And what do you lose in exchange for the possible .01 increase in your GPA? If you view your relation with a professor as a one-shot encounter—meaning that you will never see him or her again—maybe nothing. But if you see any possibility of further encounters, whether classes, research assistantships, or letters of recommendation, you would be best advised to skip your complaint because the main impression you have left in the professor's head is of a student who cares more about grades than learning. And remember that professors talk with each other every day and enjoy stories about annoying or outrageous behavior by students. Your reputation will quickly spread around the department.

I don't want to overemphasize this advice (and there is a certain amount of self-interest in my perspective). There may be situations where professors or TAs have made a careless mistake, and it will not be held against you to alert them to it.<sup>5</sup> On matters of interpretation, you are on thinner

5. I read about the following incident in my college's alumni review. A former student recalled how an elderly professor had throughout the semester confused him with another student and in the end given him the C that the other student deserved rather than the A that he had earned. When he asked another professor what he should do, the professor advised him to let it be because it would become a great cocktail party story for him in later years. Although the student in question heeded the professor's advice, you do not have to go that far.

ice. I suggest that if you really feel aggrieved you approach professors in the following manner. Tell them that you would like to do better in the class because you enjoy it a lot, but that you were discouraged by your performance on the exam or paper. Then show them the exam and ask how they think you could improve. This way, you get them to take a second look at the exam and mark yourself not as a complainer but as a student who cares about the subject and wishes to do better.

### TIP 60

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#### Become a Research Assistant

I noted earlier that research is the most intense and probably the most natural type of learning that there is (see Tip 43). Besides writing a senior thesis, one of the best ways to get involved in research is to work for a professor as a research assistant (or RA). Particularly at larger universities, many professors have received large grants that they can use to hire students to assist with their research. RA work is an excellent way not just to earn money, but to learn more about a particular subject and to form a more personal bond with one of your professors.

What do RAs do? Their tasks vary widely by discipline and professor. In virtually all fields, there is a certain amount of secretarial work—tracking down articles, photocopying, and data entry. This is the least rewarding part of RA work. But doing it well will encourage a professor to trust you with more interesting tasks. Most professors are initially suspicious of undergraduates' abilities to do good and conscientious work, a suspicion born of past disappointments. If you do the simple tasks well, you will dispel some of this suspicion. Even in these simple tasks, however, you get a glimpse into how your professor conducts research—what sort of questions they ask, how they look for answers, and how they organize their work—all things that will help you in your own research.<sup>6</sup>

The interesting tasks are more diverse. In the sciences or psychology you may be asked to help conduct experiments—whether setting up the materials, administering tests or surveys, or even combining chemicals in beakers and flasks. In any field you may be asked to produce a literature review—

6. For a fascinating account of how one professor goes about doing research, see Paul Krugman, "How I Work," [www.princeton.edu/~pkrugman/howiwork](http://www.princeton.edu/~pkrugman/howiwork).

that is, tracking down the latest articles or books in a given field and writing a summary of the major findings. Depending on your skills you might be asked to run statistical analyses or translate foreign texts. The more fortunate may be sent on trips to archives or to conduct interviews. The only limits to the kind of tasks you are assigned are your own abilities.

Indeed, talented undergraduates sometimes even end up as coauthors on their professor's published work, a nice notch to add to your résumé. RA work is also an excellent springboard to a senior thesis (see Tip 43). You will discover spin-off questions that your professor doesn't have time for answering. You will also develop the skills to answer these questions more effectively.

How do you find RA work? Some professors advertise for RAs whether on their office door or in the school newspaper. Some departments and institutes hire RAs to serve a group of professors. You may also write to specific professors or departments offering your services. Don't be shy about asking professors you know well if they are looking for an RA. The more practical skills you have, the better your chances of getting hired. Those with skills in statistics, computer programming, and foreign languages tend to be in high demand.<sup>7</sup> Being conscientious and hardworking top most skills.

#### TIP 61

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### Ask for Recommendation Letters from Professors Who Know You Well

Most professors are happy to write recommendations for students they know and like. They view this as part of their job and typically do it conscientiously. For this reason, be solicitous in your requests from them. In the first place, you need to come to their office hours with a set of future plans and materials about yourself. You might write to the professors in advance,

7. Note, however, the political scientist Jacob Levy's advice on putting together a résumé: "Under no circumstances is 'Microsoft Word' a skill worth listing on your [résumé]. Neither is Power Point or Excel. Unless you're a certified [system administrator], under no circumstances is any version of Windows or a Mac operating system a skill worth listing on your [résumé]; it means 'I know how to turn my computer on.' And—really, truly—under no circumstances is your ability to e-mail or to operate a web browser a skill worth listing on your [résumé]. These things aren't just weighted at zero. They make you look ridiculous." See Jacob Levy, "The Unlicensed CV Doctor," [jacoblevy.blogspot.com](http://jacoblevy.blogspot.com).

so that they know to expect you and tell you what materials they would like to see. A list of programs you are applying to (with addresses and dates when the recommendation is due) along with a résumé and your application essay is a minimum.

Remember that you want a professor to write a recommendation that is both positive and detailed. For the positive part, you need to find a professor for whom you performed well and who enjoyed your company. But readers of recommendations will discount a positive recommendation if it is not backed up by detailed knowledge of your work. For the detailed part, you want to choose a professor who knows something about you. If you were one of a hundred students in a lecture class, don't expect much. If a professor never addressed you by name or wrote detailed comments on your papers, then they probably can't say much about you. In short, put yourself in your professors' shoes and think about what they could possibly say about you. We don't have a magical formula for turning chance encounters into effective recommendations.

The best recommendations are thus from professors who taught you in multiple classes, particularly in small, upper-division seminars where they could observe you up close engaging in challenging tasks. Better still would be a professor who advised you on a senior thesis or independent study and thus had sustained personal interactions with you.

Even when you have this sort of relationship, you still need to meet the professor halfway. We teach several hundred students a year and cannot remember very much (if anything) about all of them. You thus need to supply some of the details of your academic career. You may recall that you wrote a paper arguing X or Y, that you focused on this particular subject, or that you had certain extracurricular experiences. If you can come up with a list of bullet points about why you want the position and why you are qualified, this would be helpful. The more details you can fill in, the better the recommendation a professor can write.

Ideally you would take these steps somewhat but not too far in advance of the due date for the recommendation. While writing a recommendation probably only takes an hour or so of a professor's time, they may be particularly busy at certain times whether due to grading or research commitments. Two months in advance is a reasonable amount of time and less than two weeks is pushing things. Once you've done this, it is not considered offensive to check up with the professor to see whether they have actually sent off the recommendation. We do deserve our reputation for absent-mindedness,

and recommendations are the sort of random tasks that may slip out of our schedule. A thank you note a week or two before the recommendation is due may be one unobtrusive way of sending a reminder.

One final note: you should consider it worrisome if the professor asks you to draft the recommendation letter yourself. Not only is it ethically dubious, but as the economist Tyler Cowen points out,

Most people, especially undergraduates, do not know how to write a very good recommendation letter. They fail to realize that such letters, to be effective, should offer very specific and pointed comparisons. Those few students who understand this fact are probably too shy to call themselves “comparable to [the famous economist] Greg Mankiw as an undergraduate.” . . . So if a professor asks the student to write the letter, the professor does not care about the letter or student very much. The resulting letter is likely to be very generic and thus not very effective. In addition, the professor probably has a hard time saying much about the student. This again suggests the letter will be less than overwhelming, no matter who writes it.<sup>8</sup>

I would add that much of the advice in this book is intended to forestall such situations. As you get to know more professors personally, you will have more possible recommenders who can describe your qualities in depth.

8. See Tyler Cowen, “Letters of Recommendation,” [www.marginalrevolution.com](http://www.marginalrevolution.com).

# 7

## Learning Outside the Classroom

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Though this book has mainly tried to improve your experience inside the classroom, in fact many of your seminal learning experiences will occur outside of it. The advice in this chapter is intended to give you a leg up on this sort of learning. Unfortunately, there is less research on this subject, and as a professor I am less informed about what students do when they leave my classes (I'm not sure I want to know). Nevertheless, my hope is that some of this advice will be helpful in making college a more complete learning experience for you.

### TIP 62

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#### Get Involved in Extracurricular Activities

This first tip is the simplest one. When asked to name a critical moment at university that changed them profoundly, 80 percent of students in a recent survey named an event that occurred outside of the classroom.<sup>1</sup> Some of them were dorm room bull sessions, but most often they were organized extracurricular activities. These activities combined learning with personal connections and genuine accomplishment. The types of activities were diverse; the most common were in the arts, but they also included community service, student government, school newspaper, debate, religious activities, athletics, and even paying jobs.

Students were particularly satisfied when they discovered connections between their classroom learning and activities outside of class. A political

1. Richard J. Light, *Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 8, 14, 23–34.

science major might join the Model UN; community service could complement majors in sociology, psychology, or African American studies; you could combine journalism with just about any field.

Most colleges have a myriad of extracurricular activities to choose from. Typically, they host an extracurricular fair early in the school year so that you can check out the variety on offer. If an activity you would like to pursue is missing, it is usually not hard to found your own organization with seed money from the college. Not only will your participation lead to more satisfaction, but it will not cost you in grades. Students involved in extracurriculars (including paid work) do not appear to get lower grades than others, so don't worry that you will be sacrificing your education.<sup>2</sup> (The exception to this rule is intercollegiate athletics, but athletes are among the happiest people on campus.)

### TIP 63

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#### Subscribe to an Intellectual Magazine

Students are often encouraged to read a newspaper to keep up with world events. This is a good start to learning outside of the classroom, but smart students usually go even further. There are certain conventions of news reporting that make the news harder rather than easier to understand—the “he said, she said” standard, the unwillingness to call a lie a lie, etc.<sup>3</sup> While newspapers may give you the facts, smart students want more. They want something analytical and synthetic, that separates the wheat from the chaff, that is based on careful study of a particular issue, that puts current facts in context, and that makes a coherent argument.

While academic work is hopefully one place where you may get such analysis, it typically comes long after the fact and in a too dry a form. A better option where you can find more palatable versions of academic arguments with current relevance is in a number of magazines where academics write for a lay audience. This includes journals like the *New York Review of Books* (not so much the *New York Times Book Review*), the *Times Literary Supplement* (this is the *Times* of London), the *London Review of Books*,

2. Ibid., pp. 27–29.

3. Some parody the former convention with the imagined headline, “Opinions on Shape of Earth Differ.”

*Foreign Affairs*, *Current History*, and a good number of popular science periodicals.<sup>4</sup>

These magazines often use the pretext of a book review to give scholars the opportunity to write wide-ranging surveys of particular fields, usually in an engaging literary style. It is worthwhile to subscribe to one of these magazines or at least pick up copies in the periodicals room of the library. You will soon find yourself a budding expert with strong opinions on everything from the recent Russian elections to Thomas Pynchon's latest novel to the ethics of cloning.

#### TIP 64

#### Read Academic Blogs

One of the joys of university life is getting to hear very smart people (your professors) pontificate on whatever issue happens to be in the news that day. Who wouldn't want to know what their political science professor thinks of the current election or their English professor about Oprah's book club or their biology professor on teaching creationism. Yet, professors are often reluctant to tell you what they really think. Most believe that their personal opinions should not enter into lectures or discussions, and in any case they are concerned with "covering" whatever material is the subject of their class rather than engaging in free-form digressions on the issues of the day.

Fortunately, today you can get access to these opinions on a daily and even hourly basis in more abundance than you can imagine. I am not suggesting that you should go read your professors' research. Journals and books are not the place to find their unvarnished opinions on current events. Their published works are highly detailed, heavily qualified, and filled with jargon. (We joke among ourselves that perhaps a dozen people will read our journal articles and rightly so.)

What you should read is their blogs. In the last several years there has been an explosion of blogs written by academics where they bring their knowledge to bear on the latest news and controversies. You might associate blogs with your aunt who posts updates about the latest antics of her cat.

4. Unfortunately these magazines are skewed to the left side of the political spectrum. The problem is that there are too few conservatives in academics to support equivalent journals. See the text box "Tenured Radicals."

That is one side of the so-called blogosphere. But there is actually a booming and bustling academic blogosphere where many of your professors go to bring their expertise to bear on current issues.

The Berkeley economist Brad DeLong has been the most eloquent advocate of this academic blogosphere. He calls it an “invisible college”:

But I am greedy. I want more. I would like a larger college, an invisible college, of more people to talk to, pointing me to more interesting things. People whose views and opinions I can react to, and who will react to my reasoned and well-thought-out opinions, and to my unreasoned and off-the-cuff ones as well. It would be really nice to have Paul Krugman three doors down, so I could bump into him occasionally and ask, “Hey, Paul, what do you think of . . .” Aggressive younger people interested in public policy and public finance would be excellent. Berkeley is deficient in not having enough right-wingers; a healthy college has a well-diversified intellectual portfolio. The political scientists are too far away to run into by accident. . . . Over the past three years, with the arrival of Web logging, I have been able to add such people to those I bump into—in a virtual sense—every week. My invisible college is paradise squared, for an academic at least.<sup>5</sup>

While Professor DeLong is talking about the benefits of blogs for academics themselves, the benefits apply in spades for students. Through blogs you can listen in on the hallway chatter among your professors, their arguments with each other. Not the anodyne consensus they present in lectures, but the live controversies and bitter disputes about current problems. And because blogs consist mainly of short one or two paragraph posts, they are easy to pick up and put down, so to speak. Moreover, because of linking and comment threads you can watch scholars responding to each other’s arguments and sometimes even reaching agreement.

And besides this academic learning, you may form a more personal connection to professors through their blogs. Besides commenting on the latest research in their field, professors are also likely to talk about their personal lives and political views. You will get a view of who they are as people, not just as scholars and teachers.

To help get you started I have listed a number of academic blogs that have impressed me in the accompanying text box. Get started with these, but then go and explore. And as you do so try to keep an open mind. Don’t

5. J. Bradford DeLong, “The Invisible College,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 28, 2006.

get in the trap of reading just one side of an issue. If you read about public affairs, for example, make sure to look at both liberal and conservative blogs. If you care about literature, consider blogs by both traditionalists and postmodernists.

#### ACADEMIC BLOGS

Tip 64 mentioned reading academic blogs as one way to continue your education outside of the classroom. Below I list a few academic blogs that you might enjoy. Since bloggers link to each other's work, it is easy to start with one or two blogs and make your way to others that interest you more. For a more complete list, see this wiki page of academic blogs: [www.academicblogs.org](http://www.academicblogs.org).

##### *Social Sciences*

Brad DeLong ([delong.typepad.com](http://delong.typepad.com)). A left-of-center economic historian from Berkeley presents his take on current events as well as history and the media.

Crooked Timber ([www.crookedtimber.org](http://www.crookedtimber.org)). A group of sociologists, political scientists, philosophers, and economists comment on happenings in all of their fields.

Marginal Revolution ([www.marginalrevolution.com](http://www.marginalrevolution.com)). Two economists from George Mason with diverse interests discuss not only economic theory, but also culture and everyday life from an economic and libertarian perspective.

The Monkey Cage ([www.themonkeycage.org](http://www.themonkeycage.org)). A group of political scientists tries to bring research results to bear on current events.

##### *Humanities*

Dial "M" for Musicology ([musicology.typepad.com/dialm/](http://musicology.typepad.com/dialm/)). A compellingly readable blog about "music, musicology, and related matters."

Language Log ([itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/languagelog](http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/languagelog)). A group of linguists takes on popular conceptions and misconceptions about language.

The Leiter Report ([leiterreports.typepad.com](http://leiterreports.typepad.com)). A University of Chicago

philosopher comments on the latest controversies in his field and ranks American philosophy departments.

The Valve: A Literary Organ ([www.thevalve.org](http://www.thevalve.org)). A group blog that wishes to “to foster debate and circulation of ideas in literary studies and contiguous academic areas.”

#### *Natural Sciences*

British Psychological Society Research Digest Blog ([bps-research-digest.blogspot.com](http://bps-research-digest.blogspot.com)). A fascinating digest of the best psychological research that has been recently presented or published.

Pharyngula ([scienceblogs.com/pharyngula](http://scienceblogs.com/pharyngula)). Often provocative commentary on current issues in biology (particularly creationism and intelligent design) by PZ Myers.

Statistical Modeling, Causal Inference, and Social Science ([www.stat.columbia.edu/~gelman/blog](http://www.stat.columbia.edu/~gelman/blog)). Statisticians from Columbia comment on recent research, describe pitfalls in using statistics, and even answer statistical queries from readers.

#### *Other*

Two other sites worth mentioning are not blogs, but what might be called aggregators. They try to pull together links to the most interesting intellectual articles on the Web. Both of them repay repeated visits.

Arts and Letters Daily ([www.aldaily.com](http://www.aldaily.com))

Bookforum ([www.bookforum.com](http://www.bookforum.com))

### TIP 65

#### **Attend a Public Lecture Every Week**

Most universities hold multiple lecture series either in conjunction with particular academic departments or simply for the community at large (see Tip 41). Add to this a large number of outside speakers invited by different student groups and talks by professors auditioning for jobs and you have what is virtually a whole other university ripe for the picking. Instead of being limited to the professors on your campus, you can listen to academics and public figures from all over the country.

While some of these lectures are full of jargon, a good number of them address general issues and do so in an accessible way. If a lecture is well

advertised and has a comprehensible title, it is a good bet that it is worth seeing. Getting into the habit of attending these lectures will not only broaden your horizons and teach you something new, it will put you in closer touch with your professors who are among the main attendees. As you become more experienced, you can also consider organizing your own lectures; most colleges put aside funds so that student groups can invite outside speakers.

### TIP 66

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#### Spend Your Free Time in Coffeehouses

For at least the past two hundred years intellectual life has been inextricably linked with coffee and coffeehouses. If politicians prefer smoke-filled rooms and celebrities seek out red carpet, then intellectuals pine for a table in a coffeehouse. The tradition reached its pinnacle in fin de siècle Vienna where all the major artistic, literary, and scientific worthies found a place at one or another of Vienna's hundreds of cafés. One even listed his address on a business card as Café Central, Wien 1.<sup>6</sup> Just as famous is the culture of the Parisian cafés of the postwar era, and the United States is enjoying a similar coffeehouse Renaissance today.

What is it about coffeehouses that encourages intellectual life? The coffee itself may help. It seems to rev the mind as much as the body, which is why members of the thinking professions seem to run on it. There is something democratic about coffeehouses as well. They are open to everyone. Who cannot afford a cup of joe? They are thus ideal places to run into different types of people and hear different opinions.

The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas views them in fact as the site where modern democratic life emerged; they were the first place that the English middle class could meet each other as equal and autonomous human beings and engage in rational argument, an essential precondition for democratic life.<sup>7</sup> His analysis is just as relevant today. As people spend

6. See the entry on Egon Friedell in Clive James, *Cultural Amnesia: Necessary Memories from History and the Arts* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007). The book has many fascinating portraits of the leading lights of the Viennese café scene.

7. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989). The sociologist Lewis Coser remarks that the English coffeehouse allowed for "daily intercourse across the cleav-

more and more time in cars and in front of TV sets, coffeehouses constitute one of our last public fora. As the Swedish thinker Jakob Norberg puts it, “the conversation that accompanies coffee consumption can range from the banal to the serious, but it never takes place among irreconcilable enemies and tends to present itself as an opportunity to neutralize noxious conflicts; it is pleasant to have coffee with others.”<sup>8</sup>

Coffeehouses are also an affront to the fast food world of American culture. You can, as I am wont to do, stretch a \$1.50 espresso out over two or three hours. The waitstaff usually won’t bother you or ask you to leave. It is this leisurely pace that is conducive to true intellectual conversation. Even if interesting conversational partners are absent, it is no problem to lay out your school work across a table or even read a novel.

#### TIP 67

### Make Friends with People Who Have Different Beliefs and Experiences

While it might not be apparent on the surface, people choose their acquaintances very carefully. They typically associate with those who have the same background, beliefs, and values. From the point of view of feeling comfortable this is all for the best. We hang out with these people because we enjoy their company. From the point of view of learning and getting an education it is for the worse.

Much of the learning you do at university comes from encounters with other students outside of the classroom. For these encounters to be effective learning experiences, you need to interact with people who have different opinions and experiences.<sup>9</sup> When you get together with people who share your opinions, it tends not only to confirm your existing prejudices (called groupthink) but also to make them more extreme (called group

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ages of birth and rank and station” and thus “helped to replace a solidarity based on common styles of life or common descent by one based on like opinion.” Lewis Coser, *Men of Ideas: A Sociologist’s View* (New York: Free Press, 1965), pp. 20–21. See also Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).

8. Jakob Norberg, “No Coffee,” *Eurozine*, August 8, 2007.

9. See Scott E. Page, *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

polarization).<sup>10</sup> To avoid these traps you need to constantly expose yourself to alternative views.

American society does not give you many opportunities to do this. Our society (and even media) is remarkably segregated along racial, class, and increasingly political and religious lines. Look, for example, at a list of the most popular television programs broken down by race. One scholar has tracked the sort of books on politics that Amazon customers buy; he found that liberals buy one set and conservatives another with little overlap between them.<sup>11</sup> Most encounters we have are with people who share our values and experiences.<sup>12</sup>

Universities have consciously tried to buck this trend (though only recently—in the past they encouraged it<sup>13</sup>). Most universities have made a commitment to a diverse student body, and so you are hopefully surrounded by people from diverse walks of life and with diverse opinions. There are of course limits—just about everyone is between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one and most schools draw predominantly from the upper-middle class—but even so a fair diversity of views and experiences is represented. It is important for your education to seek out fellow students with different beliefs, to engage them, and to learn what they have to teach.

10. For a fascinating discussion of this topic, see Cass Sunstein, *Why Societies Need Dissent* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). Sunstein argues that there are three reasons why opinions become more extreme: group members are exposed to fewer counter-arguments, corroboration leads to more confidence, and people want to be well thought of by others around them. One of his interesting examples concerns the deaf. As he puts it, “Studies of disability movements in the U.S. show that the most mobilized, effective and separatist of the many disability movements, is the hearing-impaired. They are the ones who have the strongest sense of a shared identity, who have the most political clout. The author’s speculation is that deaf people have geographical unity, they have spaces of their own, they often go to school together, so they interact. Like-minded people interact, they polarize, they end up being a unified force, which doesn’t happen for the visually-impaired or depressed people or those in wheelchairs, at least not nearly as much.” See Cass Sunstein, “Why Societies Need Dissent,” presentation at the Carnegie Council, September 11, 2003.

11. See Valdis Krebs, “New Political Patterns,” [www.orgnet.com/divided.html](http://www.orgnet.com/divided.html).

12. In fact, it is hard to get a good cross-sectional picture of American society. The comedian Jerry Seinfeld suggests the Department of Motor Vehicles as a place where virtually everybody has to go—everyone drives—and thus presents a true cross-section of America. He is not impressed by what he sees there, at least in terms of physical beauty.

13. See Jerome Karabel, *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2005).

Doing so is not too difficult. After an intense class discussion, why not continue it over coffee with your main antagonist. Some students have asked universities to hold more classes between 4 and 6 p.m. so that they can adjourn to the dining hall where debate continues.<sup>14</sup> View the randomness of dorm room assignments in freshman year as an opportunity rather than a threat. Attend talks sponsored by organizations that you would not necessarily join yourself—the campus Republicans or the Gay and Lesbian Union.

Above all, do not get in the common undergraduate habit of viewing certain ideas as beyond the pale, as not worthy of discussion or acknowledgment. You will not encounter ideas on campus that are truly evil and violent—eliminationist anti-Semitism or Ku Klux Klan–style racism. While you may view certain ideas that are expressed as racist, fascist, immoral, or dangerous, you still owe them a civilized response, not a thumb of the nose or worse. Don't respond by trying to prohibit certain speakers or speech. The best remedy for offensive speech is, as Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis put it, “more speech.”

In fact, it is a good thing that you will be exposed to such views. A real education will at times offend you. You will be exposed to views with which you disagree, and you will have to determine why you disagree with them and effectively communicate your reasons for disagreeing. It is not the job of the university to protect you from offensive views, but to expose you to them. As the University of Chicago's Kalven Report puts it, “the ideas of different members of the University community will frequently conflict and we do not attempt to shield people from ideas that they may find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even offensive.”

#### TIP 68

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### Get to Know Foreign Students

American universities are the envy of the world. They are better funded and staffed than universities anywhere else. Of the twenty universities considered the best in the world in one prominent ranking, seventeen are in America.<sup>15</sup> For this reason they tend to attract many foreign students. You should view these students as a resource to rival your professors. Excepting

14. Light, *Making the Most of College*, pp. 206–9.

15. See the Shanghai Jiao Tong University rankings at [www.arwu.org](http://www.arwu.org).

study abroad, they are your best path to learning about the rest of the world and even about the United States.

I spent my first years after college teaching English as a second language in the Czech Republic. During my classes I would constantly interrogate my students about their lives—what music did they listen to, what were their favorite books, what were their schools like, how did their parents raise them, in short everything under the sun. In doing this I learned an enormous amount about Czech culture including lots of things that are almost never written down in books. I ended up writing a dictionary of Czech popular culture where I tried to show foreigners all of the things that natives take for granted.<sup>16</sup> You can get the same sort of knowledge by befriending foreign students. And you will discover just as much from their invariably fascinating impressions of American culture and our peculiar habits.

There are other rewards as well. Most foreign students are alone in America and grateful for any sort of guidance. Take the opportunity to do a good deed and help them out. The final bonus of befriending foreign students may be the sweetest. Whether your new friend is from Russia, China, Argentina, or Nigeria, you now have a place to visit. It is a lucky person who has a bed to sleep in in a foreign land and a friendly tour guide willing to show them around. All the money you make as an investment banker can't buy the sort of entrée to a foreign culture that simply having a native friend can.

16. Andrew Roberts, *From Good King Wenceslas to the Good Soldier Svejk: A Dictionary of Czech Popular Culture* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005).