



Is Your Teen Ready for College?

FEWER HOURS SPENT STUDYING IN HIGH SCHOOL MAY LEAD TO ILL-PREPARED HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

By JOANN PETASCHNICK

Encouraged by parents, teachers, lawmakers and the promise of a brighter future, a greater number of high school students than ever are seeking a higher education. In fact, more than 14 million students are enrolled in our nation's colleges and universities. That's great news, right?

That all depends, says Dr. Robert R. Neuman, retired Marquette University associate dean of academic advising for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. "It depends on how well prepared students are. Unfortunately, far too many college students enroll as freshmen believing they are academically ready when they are not," he says.

"Over 25 years on the job, it seemed to me that students were less and less prepared for college. Toward the end of my career, I started doing some research on the subject and I was blown away by what I found. Nationally, only one in three students graduates from college in four years," Neuman says.

Furthermore, a USA Today article published in 2009 reported an American Enterprise Institute study found that four-year colleges graduated an average of just 53 percent of entering students within six years. "When you think about what that delay means in terms of financing a college education, it is extraordinary," Neuman says.

His research also revealed that, in recent years, students in high school are studying fewer and fewer hours per week. "The most recent survey suggested that these days, students in high school are studying not much more than they studied in middle school — less than 10 hours per week," he says. This does not bode well for them in terms of study demands when they reach college. "My advice is to be prepared to study two to three hours per week for each credit earned. That is 30 to 40 hours, a far cry from what they are used to," he says.

Based on his own experience and these findings, Neuman has written "Are You Really Ready for College?" a guidebook for students as well as parents, counselors, teachers, advisers and others in education. The book includes 12 "secrets for success," including "how to use your head,"

"finding a study place," and "knowing how to talk to teachers and guidance counselors." "The book shows you how to control your courses, have fun and get the most out of college," he says.

Like Neuman, Jan Ford, executive director of the Department of Recruitment and Outreach for UW-Milwaukee has seen how often students experience a rude awakening when they begin their freshman year. "They really should start to prepare as far back as their sophomore year of high school. That includes not only selecting a school, but also asking some basic questions about the kind of environment they want to be in, like the size and location of the campus, distance from home, academic programs and co-curricular activities," she says.

Ford also believes many students need help with academic preparedness. "In high school, they should not be taking just the courses they need to be accepted, but courses that will make them successful in college. They need to establish good thinking and reasoning skills and sound judgment, as well as courses that fit into their area of interest," she says.

In "Are You Really Ready for College?" Neuman lays out certain aspects of good learning that students can develop long before they graduate high school. "These are the foundation for learning; for example, how to take tests," Neuman says. Cramming for tests is a gigantic no-no in his view.

"Cramming is not learning. It produces short-term knowledge, like remembering what to pick up at the grocery store. In the same way, students remember a chunk of knowledge long enough to get through a test, then they forget the knowledge as the course

moves on to the next chapter," Neuman says. "Learning is understanding and retaining specific knowledge that can be recalled later. This learned information will be combined with already learned information and later on, with information learned in the future. This is how learning should work," he says.

Unfortunately, college students may drop out of school when the going gets rough. After their first year of college, 25 percent of students in a freshman class drop out altogether or change schools to find an "easier" program, according to the Education Trust, a national organization that promotes high academic achievement for students at all from pre-kindergarten through college.

"College can be a frightening experience for students who are away from home for the first time or who are simply unprepared," Ford says. Common reasons why students drop out include low grades due to excessive partying and lack of studying; feelings of homesickness; lack of advising; or being overwhelmed due to the stressful circumstances.

When students have second thoughts about college and are considering dropping out, they should seek out someone to talk with, Ford says. "Always remember there is help available. You can visit the student counseling center, talk to a friend or even your parents. There are alternatives to dropping out," she says.

Non-Traditional Students are a G

Not all students enroll in college right after high school graduation. There are many non-traditional students now attending colleges and universities. While there is no official definition of what a non-traditional student is, but generally t

- **Over the age of 25.**
- **Students who have previously attended college and are returning after a break.**
- **Students who went right into the work force after school and are attending college for the first time.**

Non-traditional students are the fastest growing segment of college campuses are extremely interested in serving these students. Dr. Robert R. Neuman, retired director of the Department of Recruitment and Outreach for many colleges, says that many colleges have guidance and services for these students who are non-traditional and family, including child care."

Despite their differences, non-traditional students have many similarities with their younger counterparts, says Dr. Robert R. Neuman, retired Marquette University dean. "They may be out of the academic environment for a while, but they are reminded of things like study habits and time management. This is true for all students," he says. In fact, organization can be even more important for non-traditional students. "They may have to wait until their children are asleep before they can study," he says.

Starting or resuming a college education is a big undertaking. It should be done thoughtfully, Neuman says. "People might want to ask themselves if they can go to school without putting their family or their health at risk. They should learn as well as finances to investigate all of the issues before making the investment," he says. **M**