See this page in the course material.

Learning Objectives

- Develop a personal definition of success and explain how grades play a role in shaping success in college

A college education is aligned with greater success in many areas of life. While enrolled in college, most students are closely focused on making it through the next class or passing the next test. It can be easy to lose sight of the overall role that education plays in life. But sometimes it helps to recall what a truly great step forward you are taking!

It's also important to recognize, though, that some students do not succeed in college and drop out within the first year. Sometimes this is due to financial problems or a personal or family crisis. But most of the time students drop out because they're having trouble passing their courses.

In this section, we examine the elements of college success. Are there patterns of success you strive for but aren't yet reaching? Where might you shore up your support? What strategies can you use to achieve success in your college endeavors?

Defining Success in College

Read an Instructional Support presentation here from California Community Colleges. It includes an audio overview of success in college.
How do you define college success? The definition really depends on you. You might think that "success" is earning an associate's degree or attending classes in a four-year college. Maybe success is a bachelor's or master's degree or a PhD. Maybe success means receiving a certificate of completion or finishing skill-based training.

You might be thinking of other measures of college success, too—like grades. For instance, you might be unhappy with anything less than an A in a course, although maybe this depends on the difficulty of the subject. As long as you pass with a C, you might be perfectly content. But no matter how you define success personally, you probably wouldn't think it means earning a D or lower grade in a class.

So, if most students believe that passing a class is the minimum requirement for "success," and if most students want to be successful in their courses, why aren't more college students consistently successful in the classroom?

Perhaps some common misconceptions are at play. For example, we often hear students say, “I just can’t do it!” or “I’m not good at math,” or “I guess college isn’t for me . . . ,” or “I’m not smart enough.” But these explanations for success or failure aren’t necessarily accurate. Considerable research into college success reveals that having difficulty in or failing in college courses usually has nothing to do with intellect. More often success depends on how fully a student embraces and masters the following seven strategies:

1. Learn how to take effective notes in class.
2. Review the text and your reading notes prior to class.
3. Participate in class discussion and maybe even join a study group.
4. Go to office hours and ask your instructor questions.
5. Give yourself enough time to research, write, and edit your essays in manageable stages.
6. Take advantage of online or on-campus academic support resources.
7. Spend sufficient time studying.

So if you feel you are not smart enough for college, ask yourself if you can implement some of these skills. Can you make more time for learning? One approach is to create a regular study schedule and make sure you allot ample time. Most college success experts agree that students should study two hours outside of class for every hour in class. Only break away from your committed schedule if an extreme situation prevents you from sticking to it.

Another strategy to consider implementing is group study. For example, rather than relying just on your own knowledge, notes, and skills, try studying with other students in your difficult classes. Studying in a group gives every group member a chance to ask questions and talk about concepts.

You can also add a tutor to your study group. You will really be able to notice a positive difference. Tutoring is generally free in college, and the strategies and knowledge you gain will be invaluable. Usually tutors have taken the class you are currently enrolled in, and they are trained to get the best out of you.

Overall, students struggle in college not because of natural intellect or smarts, but because of time management, organization, and lack of quality study time. The good news is that there are ways to combat this, specifically by doing things like creating a regular study schedule, studying in groups, and taking advantage of your school’s academic resources, like a tutoring center, instructor office hours, and any available online help.

How Grades Play a Role in Shaping Success

In a recent online discussion at a student-support Web site, a college freshman posted the following concern about how serious he should be about getting good grades:

As a first semester freshman, I really have taken my education seriously. I've studied and done my homework nightly and have read all of the assignments. So far, I have all A's in my classes, including calculus and programming. Now, with a month left to go in the semester, I feel myself slipping a bit on my studies. I blow off readings and homework more to go out at night during the week and I've even skipped a few classes to attend major sporting events. I also travel most weekends with a sports team that I joined. Still, I've gotten A's on the exams even with these less extensive study habits, although not as high as before. So, my question really is this. Should I just be content with low A's and B's and enjoy myself during college, or should I strive to achieve all A's?

How would you answer this student's question, given what what you know and sense about college life? Grades do matter to your success, right? Or . . . do they? The answer depends on who you ask and what your college and career goals are.

To help you answer, take this quick self-assessment about your college goals and beyond. Put a checkmark in the Yes or No column next to items in the "I Want to Be Able to . . ." column.

I Want to Be Able to . . .	YES	NO
Change my major during my college years		
Have good relationships with my professors		
Be eligible for financial aid		
Be eligible for scholarships		
Get awards		
Be a resident assistant (RA) in my dorm		
Get reductions on my car insurance		
Prove to my employer that I can work hard		
Keep my parents happy		
Get a free master's degree		

You may be surprised to learn that each reason on this list directly relates to your grades—even changing your major. For example, colleges typically have a minimum GPA requirement to switch majors. Consider these additional factors:

- Undergraduate grades have been shown to have a positive impact on getting full-time employment in your career in a position appropriate to your degree.
- Grades also have been shown to have a positive net impact on your occupational status

and earnings.
- Getting good grades, particularly in the first year of college, is important to your academic success throughout your college years.
- Grades are probably the best predictors of your persistence, your ability to graduate, and your prospects for enrolling in graduate school.

You stand to gain immeasurably when you get good grades.

Your Grade-Point Average (GPA)

Grades may not be the be-all and end-all in college life. But to the degree that you believe they can help you achieve your greatest goals, you will pay close attention to them and to your GPA.

Your GPA is a calculated average of the letter grades you earn correlated on a 0 to 4.0 or 5.0 scale. Each semester you receive a GPA based on the grades you earned in all of your classes during that semester. You also maintain a cumulative GPA—an ongoing average of all your semester grades beginning with freshman year.

Many institutions provide students with an online GPA calculator. Use the calculator to keep track of where you stand. Your college may also publish data on the average GPA of your fellow students. Sometimes it's nice to know where you stand relative to your peers.

Words of Wisdom

It is important to know that college success is a responsibility shared with your institution. Above all, your college must provide you with stimulating classroom experiences that encourage you to devote more time and effort to your learning. Additional institutional factors in your success include the following:

- High standards and expectations for your performance
- Assessment and timely feedback
- Peer support
- Encouragement and support for you to explore human differences
- Emphasis on your first college year
- Respect for diverse ways of knowing
- Integrating prior learning and experience
- Academic support programs tailored to your needs
- Ongoing application of learned skills
- Active learning
- Out-of-class contact with faculty[1]

Ideally, you and your college collaborate to create success in every way possible. The

cooperative nature of college life is echoed in the following practical advice from a college graduate, recounted in Foundations of Academic Success: Words of Wisdom:

Professors do care about how you are doing in their class; they genuinely want you to succeed, but they will give you the grade you earn. There are people and resources on campus for you to utilize so you can earn the grade you want. Your professors are one of those resources, and are perhaps the most important. Go see them during office hours, ask them questions about the material and get extra help if you need it . . . Another resource to utilize can be found in the campus learning center . . . The first time I took a paper there, I recall standing outside the door for about ten minutes thinking of an excuse not to go in. Thankfully I saw a classmate walk in and I followed suit . . . Thanks to that first visit, I received an A- on the paper!

---

1. What Matters to Student Success: A Review of the Literature; National Postsecondary Education Cooperative ↵

Licenses and Attributions

CC licensed content, Original

- College Success. **Authored by**: Linda Bruce. **Provided by**: Lumen Learning. **License**: *CC BY: Attribution*

CC licensed content, Shared previously

- Choices and Personal Responsibilities for Success. **Authored by**: Ronda Dorsey Neugebauer and Zack Varpness. **Provided by**: Chadron State College. **Located at**: https://courses.candelalearning.com/collegesuccess2/chapter/introduction-to-choices-and-personal-responsibility-for-success/. **Project**: Kaleidoscope Open Course Initiative. **License**: *CC BY: Attribution*
- Foundations of College Success: Words of Wisdom. **Authored by**: Thomas C. Priester, editor. **Provided by**: Open SUNY Textbooks. **Located at**: http://textbooks.opensuny.org/foundations-of-academic-success/. **License**: *CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike*
- Instructional Support: Options and Resources. **Provided by**: California Community Colleges Online Education Initiative. **Located at**: https://apps.3cmediasolutions.org/oei/11-Instructional-Support/story.html. **License**: *CC BY: Attribution*

</div