

## INTRODUCTION

# Why Are You Going to College?

Not long ago I met a young man who was painting a friend's house. I guessed he was about thirty-seven years old. He was very pleased to tell me that he would be paying off his college loans in a few months, and then he and his fiancée were going to get married and buy a house. I learned that he had only attended college for two and a half years and didn't get a degree. He had spent all that time and money (in school and years more with monthly payments) and had only debt to show for it.

Before you head to college, you need a clear purpose. You should be able to state it. For example, "I'm uncertain about a major, but I am interested in film production or environmental science. I will go to community college for two years to take general requirements. Once I decide on a major, I will transfer to a four-year state school that offers a program that matches my interests." Or, "I would like to major in engineering. I don't know exactly which flavor yet, but I intend to explore the various options by taking courses in different branches of the field." Or, "I would like to become a high school biology teacher so I plan to major in biology and take the courses required for a teaching certificate." Or, "I plan to major in business. My life's dream is to open my own restaurant someday. I hope my courses and an internship in the business world will inform and support me in that plan." Or even, "I want a well-rounded liberal arts education. While I am taking college courses I will explore my options." You can always change your mind, and

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you probably will, but you should have a tentative plan. You also need a good attitude and determination to reach your goal.

**You must sincerely want to be successful in college, not just go because someone else expects you to.**

Unlike high school, college is not mandatory. If you don't have a purpose for going now, consider alternate plans. You might work, enlist in the military, or volunteer for a while.

Taking a “gap year” is increasingly popular. A major source of disappointment for professors is students who are not seriously committed to making the best of their time in school. The National Center for Education Statistics reports only 60 percent of full-time students who began college in 2010 with the intention of achieving a bachelor's degree graduated within six years of entering college. Spending all those years in college is a waste of time if you simply don't know what else to do.

College is also a big financial investment. You can spend \$20,000 or more on your first year of college, but if you don't know how to make the investment work for you, it is a waste of money. Would you spend \$20,000 on a new car and then drive over nails? Or leave it in the garage for a year? Your college dollars need to be invested wisely.

To make the most of your college experience, you should understand what to expect when you get there. This book is intended to help. It can boost your confidence if you know more about what is expected of you and how to navigate the system to your advantage. If you travel to a foreign country, it is prudent to read a guidebook about that country before you go. Think of college as foreign travel (it can feel rather foreign at first). It is better for you to be informed and forewarned before your college transcript records any stumbles and fumbles.



How about taking some notebooks and pens?

Oh, yeah. I guess I could do that.

