



The Right Start to College

by Don Fraser, Durham College

The basis for the motivation to persist comes from providing students with an educational and career vision, relationship building and success skills. It comes from creating a positive, professional program culture that mirrors the professionalism our students will be expected to display in their careers. It comes from making the connection between our students' academic subjects and their eventual career. It comes from showing them the importance of developing good work habits and success skills that will carry them through college and throughout their professional careers. It comes from connecting them with their faculty and classmates so they develop a support system that they can count on to help them through to graduation. It comes from helping them develop a strong motivational base that helps them decide that their program of studies is worth staying in school.

We can help students see the value of developing study skills by presenting these skills as high-performance workplace habits. College success and self-management skills are the foundation for workplace skills, so we're really preparing our students for a lifelong career journey when we help them develop these essential skills. Students often perceive that they do their schoolwork "for the college" and "to get

good grades", rather than for their own long-term benefit. Changing that perception helps students see the relevance of their studies and motivates them to be successful. There's a huge difference between doing schoolwork to meet college requirements and approaching college as professional development for career success and future employment.

To see what I mean, take a look at the chart at the bottom of the page.

Fundamental to student motivation and retention is creating a vision that students can believe in and own. When we provide them with information that shows them where their education is leading them, why their courses are relevant to their long-term career goal, and paint them a clear picture of career possibilities and opportunities, they will be ready to take their work habits to the next level to ensure they are successful in attaining their career vision. Students need to be able to answer, "Why am I doing this?" so that the curriculum and program have value at any given time. Giving students updates on the job market, competency profile, alumni success stories, and how the curriculum fits in will continue to solidify their confidence.

A career vs. a job—the difference

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To motivate students toward making the jump from their current work habits to high-performance work habits, we must help them create a clear vision of where their education is leading them and what they're working toward; in that context, we make a distinction between a career and a job. Generally, we define a career as a high-performance job that requires postsecondary schooling and has the potential for advancement and a good economic salary. The preparation for a career requires a long-term commitment and strategy; students can go out right now and get a job, but they need to understand that it takes a considerable investment to develop a career.

continued on page 13

Doing Work to Meet College Requirements

- Just another course
- The parts, the what
- Content driven
- Course outline
- Narrow focus
- Academic content
- 2.0
- Grades
- External motivation
- Workload
- Fear of failure

vs

Doing Work to Develop Career Skills and Success

- Professional in training
- The whole, the why
- Career vision driven
- Skill profile competency
- Big picture
- My future
- Pride, passion
- Me Inc.
- Internal motivation
- Commitment, professional
- Confidence

Once students can see the benefit of developing high-performance skills, they should go through a seven-step process:

Seven Step Process

1. Review past academic performance.
2. Explore limiting beliefs.
3. Identify positive and negative motivators.
4. Identify high-performance techniques and systems.
5. Create new patterns and habits.
6. Evaluate short-term results.
7. Adopt a lifelong approach to academic and career success.

Remind your students that success takes time—anywhere from 12 months to four years in an educational setting to develop entry level professional skills. Tell your students that it takes 2,000 hours of repetition/learning to reach a solid level of accomplishment in any given field. To illustrate this, the 2,000-hour figure is the equivalent of an intensive 12-month college program or a two-year associate degree or program, and is also the minimum number of hours of on-the-job work experience required to complete an apprenticeship program. At this point students are motivated to persist, and realize that while success won't happen overnight, in the long run, their efforts will be worth the investment. ●

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