

Introduction



This book is for you, the community college student. We *want you* to succeed in order for you to realize your life's hopes and dreams. We *need you* to succeed in order for our country to realize our collective hopes and dreams in our common and interconnected future. The community college holds the great educational promise for each individual and for our entire nation.

Most students, like you, arrive at college not fully aware of just how different the college experience is. In some ways, it is like entering a foreign country with customs and rules that are not always obvious or written out. The intellectual and social expectations, as well as the rules and regulations, are different, and not just different from high school. Even students who have owned their own businesses, retired from military careers, recently immigrated to the United States, or enrolled in school for the first time later in life are often surprised that an important part of the challenge of college is just figuring out how to be successful in college.

While all college students must learn to negotiate the transition to college, there are unique challenges for those who enroll



in community colleges. Many community college students work, and many work full-time. Many also have family responsibilities—children, partners, and aging parents. A majority of community college students are the first in their family to enroll in college. For many students from abroad and from the United States, English is not their first language or the language they use at home, and many students at community colleges come to study from countries outside the United States. For all these individuals, there may not be any easy road map or “tour guide” in their own family to help figure out how it all works.

We hope, therefore, that this book will serve as your personal road map and guide for a successful community college experience and education. The suggestions we offer are directed specifically to the kinds of situations that are particular to you, the community college student, even as we recognize that you are all very different and have different goals and lifestyles. While we encourage you to read the book from beginning to end, our experience has been that the most useful guidebook is one that you can return to again and again, at the beginning, middle, or end, whenever you face new or unexpected challenges and opportunities.

As you read this book and the various tips in search of guidance, you will quickly learn that there is great diversity among the students who attend community colleges and also many differences that exist between one college and the next. Even if you are aware of this diversity, you may be surprised by just how diverse the stu-



dents in your classes are. This rich diversity in terms of age, social and educational background, national origin, first language, and life experience is one of the joys of the community college classroom, and you should take full advantage of it.

In any term, you are likely to find students who are still enrolled in high school, students who have graduated high school in the past year, and students who have been out of high school a decade or more. Some students are tentative about being in community college and are just testing the waters, while others have clearly defined and ambitious goals. Some are returning to college after being away from it for a few years, while some are trying community college after a few terms at a university. Others are choosing to go to a community college for two years to get the basic courses done before transferring to a university as a junior. Some community college students never received a high school degree, while others already have college degrees but need refresher classes before pursuing an advanced degree. Still others have recently immigrated to the United States and, as a result, need to establish credentials or develop skills for a career. Some attend because they have lost jobs and are re-tooling or are changing employment because of an injury, a shift in the economy, or a change in their personal lives.

We have attempted to address all of our tips and suggestions in this book to fit as many students attending community colleges as possible, but on occasion you may find that a specific sentence, example, paragraph, or tip may apply more to one population than



another. In those cases, we urge you to keep reading to learn more about what your classmates may be experiencing, and because, most likely, the next sentence or the example might pertain to your particular experience.

In terms of the demographics of your fellow classmates, you may be interested to learn just how diverse the students are who attend community colleges. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Pages/fastfacts.aspx) at the time of this writing:

- ✓ Nearly 12 million students attend one of the 1,173 community colleges, including 31 Tribal Colleges.
- ✓ 46% of students are age 21 or younger.
- ✓ Of the 54% percent of students over the age of 21, 16% are age 40 or older.
- ✓ Minority students represent 40% of the student body.
- ✓ 42% of community college students are the first generation in their family to attend college.
- ✓ 16% of students are single parents.
- ✓ Of the 40% of students who attend full-time, 21% are employed full-time and 59% part-time.
- ✓ Of the 60% enrolled part-time, 40% work full-time, and 47% work part-time.



Indeed, your community college classmates may include small business owners, military veterans, parents, homemakers, tribal elders, dual-enrolled high school students, as well as future leaders of industry and government. Students in community colleges have grown up speaking a great many different languages, have come to the United States from many different countries, and are from many racial and ethnic groups. They come from many different economic backgrounds, and they practice many different religions. They all have in common the desire to learn, grow, improve, and enrich their own lives and their communities.

While there is great diversity in the overall student population attending community colleges, the demographics of the student body at your college may be quite different from the national averages. Please note: The figures on pages 5–7 represent the most recent data posted on college websites at the time that this book went to press. For instance, of the approximately 17,000 students at LaGuardia Community College in New York City in 2010—just to pick one community college—46 percent came from the United States and 54 percent were born in another country (from more than 160 countries). Fifty-nine percent are female, and 41 percent are male. Of those students identifying their race and ethnicity, 36 percent are Hispanic, 18 percent Asian, 15 percent African American, 11 percent white, and 1 percent Native American. Also, 54 percent of LaGuardia’s students are between the ages of 17 and 22, while 14 percent are 30 years or older (www.lagcc.cuny.edu).



Similarly, at Kingsborough College, also in New York City, 42 percent of the students attend part-time, 40 percent have an annual income of less than \$20,000, and 48 percent are from the United States. In 2008–2009, more than 70 different languages were spoken by students at Kingsborough (www.kbcc.cuny.edu/). In contrast to these two colleges, of the 12,000 students at Delta College in Michigan, nearly 81 percent are white and less than 1 percent are international. Among these students in 2010, 62 percent are 24 years old or younger, and 57 percent attend part-time (www.delta.edu/aboutdelta).

To continue to show the range of diversity at U.S. community colleges: at Cerritos College in California in 2010, 54 percent of the students are Hispanic, 13 percent are Asian, and 13 percent are white (<http://cms.cerritos.edu>). At Miami Dade College in Florida in 2010, 78 percent of the students are Hispanic, 61 percent attend part-time, 58 percent are female, and the average age is 26 (www.mdc.edu). Collin College in Texas has a similar percentage of part-time students—62 percent; however, of the 51,000 students enrolled at the college, 61 percent are white, 11 percent are Hispanic, and 11 percent are African American. Among these students in 2010, 9 percent are between the ages of 13 and 17, 48 percent are between the ages of 18 and 22, and 16 percent are 36 years or older (www.collin.edu).

In addition to the diversity of students, community colleges—and even individual campuses of any one college—vary consid-



erably. At Maricopa Community College in Arizona, more than 260,000 students are enrolled at ten different colleges around Phoenix, several of which have more than one campus (www.maricopa.edu). At Tampa, Florida's Hillsborough Community College, which enrolls 48,000 students, campus sizes ranged in 2009–2010 from less than 5,000 at the South Shore campus to more than 22,000 at the Dale Mabry campus (www.hccfl.edu/).

Overall, of the 73,000 students at the six campuses of Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA), 41 percent are 25 years or older, 62 percent attend part-time, and 12 percent are international students. However, at the different campuses, the percentage of male students ranged in 2009–2010 from 22 to 51 percent, the percent of white students ranges from 37 to 58 percent, and the percent of African-American students ranges from 10 to 27 percent (www.nvcc.edu).

Obviously, then, you can see that because community colleges differ in their student populations, they will also differ in their organization and structure. For example, community colleges have both full-time instructors and part-time, adjunct instructors. At some colleges, instructors generally hold office hours, while on other campuses some instructors may even though others do not. Some colleges have orientation while others do not; some have advising offices and/or online advisors; many assign students to developmental courses while others do not; some have health and counseling centers; and some offer community service and study abroad opportunities yet others do not.



We have tried to provide here some evidence of just a few of the ways that community colleges differ, school to school. In this book we have tried to address the specific features, structures, and nomenclature of the community college, generally speaking, but on occasion you may find that a specific example or tip may name a program or regulation differently than what it is called at your college or may discuss a program, requirement, or opportunity in a way that differs from how it is managed on your campus. Again, we suggest you use those occasions to broaden your awareness of community college practice across the country.

Our greatest hope is that the tips in this book help you learn, succeed, graduate, and have a rewarding and fulfilling experience at your community college.