

1. Mark your confusion by highlighting or underlining anything you don't understand.
2. Show evidence of a close reading (connections, predictions, questions, clarifying, summarizing, challenging, e t c.) *20 annotations minimum*
3. Type a 1 + page reflection

High School to College Transition, Part One: The Freshman Myth *Dr. Brian Harke*

The month of June is a time of celebration for high school seniors. As they cross the stage in cap and gown to receive their diploma, feelings of satisfaction, excitement and nostalgia are supplemented with the titillation of moving on to college life. As tassels are moved from one side of their mortarboard to the other, the ritual of the transition to college life begins.

Besides graduating, there is a very important commonality between many of these graduating high school seniors that affects their college future: they are overly optimistic and confident in their ability to manage the challenges they will encounter at college. This is referred to as the *freshman myth*. The freshman myth results in disenchantment when new college students' academic, social, and personal expectations are not met after arriving at college. As a result, many students will leave college or flunk out within the first year.

At this point, you may be thinking that this isn't me or this isn't my son/daughter, but I have seen it first hand. The freshman myth can be devastating to students if not addressed early on. According to the U.S. Census and American College Testing Program, an estimated 18 million students enrolled in college in 2008; nearly 34% dropped out in the first year because they were over confident, under-prepared and lacked realistic expectations about college. The majority of the students that leave the first years do so during the first six weeks of the fall term because they have not been able to make a successful transition. Like you, many of these students and their parents probably never thought this would happen to them. It can happen to anyone! Hopefully, the information contained in this series of articles will help you avoid the same fate.

Based on the statistics alone, common sense would indicate that if academic institutions are to challenge and support first-year college students in their academic success, they would focus on both the characteristics and expectations of their students prior to college. However, with the changing face of K-12 education, budget cuts are affecting the ability for many high schools to provide college-bound students the tools needed to successfully transition from high school to college.

Traditionally, high school counselors played a large role in preparing students for the transition to college. Faced with constant budget cuts and lack of support, many counselors are overwhelmed and cannot serve their student population as they once did. For example, in 2008 the California Department of Education reported a high school counselor-to-student ratio that exceeds 1:900. The ratio may be different in your high school, but the trend of cutting educational services is universal. As a result, most counselors are left with little time to help high school seniors prepare for the academic, social, and personal challenges associated with transitioning to college.

Many colleges are trying to fill the void by helping new college students set realistic expectations so a successful transition is possible. However, these programs usually take place once the new college students arrive on campus. By then, it can be too late. The students have already arrived with ideas and perceptions about college that are often more romanticized notions than accurate reflections of college life - ideas created by admissions brochures, a campus visit, stereotypes in the media and stories from family or friends. This leaves many new students struggling to adjust to their new environment.

Most new college students have not dug deep enough to understand the realities of college life and how they will react to their new environment before arriving on campus. I have observed that those students who did dig deeper and entered college with more realistic expectations, tended to adjust

better to the challenges of college life than did those students who began their college career with unrealistic expectations. There are many articles and studies support this observation.

I am a firm believer in growth through experience, but college is one of the biggest transitions a person will make. Therefore, it only makes sense to focus more attention on high school to college transition. I encourage parents and students to begin the process years before applying to college. But as a last ditch effort, I suggest using the senior year of high school and months after high school graduation to focus on the academic, personal and social expectations you or your son/daughter hold about college. That is what I recommend to you now. It is never too late!

To aid in the process, the remaining articles in this series will focus on some of the most common unrealistic academic, social, and personal expectations many college-bound seniors hold about college. My hope is that by providing you with this information you will begin to think about your own or your son/daughter's expectations to begin a dialogue on this topic. Through this dialogue and process, students could develop a greater sense of self-efficacy, coping skills, and new tools to help them succeed in the transition into college life and their academic endeavors. After all the work, sweat, tears, and financial resources it took to get into college, I would hate to see you or your student fail because you were under-prepared and fell prey to the freshman myth and unrealistic expectations. Don't let it happen to you!

If you want to begin the process and discussion before my next article, you can use the questions below as a starting point:

1. What are your short and long-term goals both academically and personally when you get to college (this means more than getting good grades)?
2. How do you think your relationships with your family will change when you go to college (because it definitely will)?
3. Do you expect your college grades to be similar to those you got in high school? If so, how will you feel if they are not? How will you deal with these feelings and improve?
4. Do you think you will need any outside help to do well in your courses? If not, why (most students do)? If yes, how will you find it?
5. Will it be difficult to discipline yourself to keep academic commitments, such as attending classes and being prepared for classes? If not, why do you think so (I've never seen a student who could do this effortlessly)? If so, what skills will you need to manage it?
6. Do you think you will feel stressed out at college? If so, list five ways to deal with it. If not, why not (because I'll guarantee you will feel stressed)?