

1.2 Different Worlds of Different Students

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand how you may be similar to, and different from, other traditional students or returning students.
2. Describe the characteristics of successful students.

Not all college students are the same, and the world of college is therefore sometimes different for different students. Students will answer the following questions in a variety of different ways:

1. Are you attending college directly from high school or within a year of graduation?
2. Are you a full-time student?
3. Is English your first language?
4. Are you the first person in your family to attend college?
5. Have you spent most of your life in a country other than the United States?
6. Are you married or living with a partner? Do you have children?
7. Do you now or have you worked full time?

When thinking about different “types” of students, be careful to avoid stereotyping. While there are genuine differences among individual students, we must never assume an individual person has certain characteristics simply because he or she is a certain “type” of student. For example, if you answered yes to questions 1 through 3 and no to the other questions, you may be called a **“traditional” student**—young and attending college after high school. The word “traditional” is used simply because, in the past, this group of students formed the majority of college students—even though, at many colleges, these students are now the minority. On the other hand, if you are older and have worked for some years before returning to school, or if you are an international student or are working and attending classes part time, you might be considered a “nontraditional” student. Again, this term comes from past statistics, even though very many colleges have more “nontraditional” students than “traditional” students.

What does that mean to you? First, realize that not everything discussed in this book will apply to you. If you’re eighteen and living away from your family for the first time in a college dormitory, you will likely not face the same issues of finding time for studying as an older student working full time and having children at home. If you’re thirty and returning to school after years of successfully managing a job, you may have to reestablish your study skills but will not face the same issues as a younger student who may be tempted by the sudden freedom of college and have difficulty setting boundaries.

Every student brings certain advantages to college from their background experience. Every student may also face certain kinds of difficulties. Understanding how your own background may impact your own preparedness for college can help you make a good start in your college experience.

“Traditional” Students

We're putting the quotation marks around the word "traditional," again, because this group of college students is no longer the majority at many colleges, although the term is still sometimes used by educators. Coming directly or almost directly from high school, "traditional" students are used to attending classes, reading textbooks, and studying and thus may find the transition to college easier. Many are single and unattached and have fewer time commitments to others. Although a high percentage do work while in college, the work is typically part time or during the summer and does not have a severe time impact on their studies. As first-year students, usually living on campus at a four-year college or university, they do not lose time to commuting and typically their housing plan includes meals and otherwise simplifies their living arrangements. In all, many have few responsibilities other than their academic work.

On the other hand, "traditional" students living away from home for the first time may face more psychological and social issues than other student groups. One is away from family and old friends, perhaps forced to cope with an incompatible roommate or living arrangements, and facing all sorts of new temptations. Experiencing this sudden new freedom, many students experiment with or develop habits such as poor dietary and sleep habits, lack of exercise, and sometimes substance abuse or other behaviors that disrupt their academic routine and study habits. Many young students are forced to "grow up" quickly after arriving at college. Some students who do not adjust to the freedoms of college end up dropping out in their first year.

Returning Students

Students returning to their education are often older, may have worked for a number of years, and may be used to living on their own and being financially and psychologically independent. They are often more mature and have a stronger sense of what they want from college; they may be more goal driven. They may be paying their own way through college and want to get their money's worth. They may be full-time students but frequently are still working and can take only a part-time course load. They often live off campus and may own a home and have a mortgage. They may have children. Because they have made a very deliberate decision to go to college, **returning students** are often serious students and are motivated to do the work. Having spent time in the work world, they may also have developed good problem-solving and decision-making skills as a result of their "real-world" experience.

On the other hand, returning students may have less time for studying because of work and family commitments. They may feel more stress because of the time and financial requirements of college. Spending less time on campus may contribute to not feeling completely at home in the academic world. They may not have time for many **extracurricular** and campus activities. Although they may be dedicated and hardworking students, they may also be less patient learning "theory" in courses and want all their coursework to relate directly to the real world.

Other Student Groups

Beyond this difference of age, some other common differences also affect one's college experience. Students in the following groups may be either "traditional" students by age or returning students.

Commuter Students

Many returning students are commuter students, and it is increasingly common also for many young people after high school to continue to live at home or in their own apartment, coming to campus only for classes. Commuter students often face the same issues of limited time as returning students. They may find it difficult to find time to talk with an instructor outside of class.

First-Generation Students

The phrase “first-generation student” refers to students who are the first in their families to attend college. These students may be “traditional” students enrolled right after high school or may be returning students. Students whose parents did not attend college may be less familiar with some or all aspects of the college experience and thus may have to transition into their new life.

Recent Immigrant and International Students

Many colleges have a significant percentage of students who have recently immigrated to the United States or who are attending college here. What both groups may have in common is coming from a different culture and possibly speaking English as a second language. They may have to make cultural adjustments and accommodations. Language issues are often the most serious obstacle to overcome, especially since so much of college education is based on reading and writing in English.

Students with Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits colleges and universities from discriminating on the basis of disabilities and forces them to ensure that both classes and extracurricular activities are accessible to students with disabilities. Accessibility includes both physical accessibility to campus buildings and housing and accessibility to services and aids necessary for effective communication. Students with disabilities have the right to request any accommodations needed to allow them to succeed in college. For more information or to receive answers to any specific questions, contact the Association on Higher Education And Disability (AHEAD) at <http://www.ahead.org>.

Students Who Are Working

The key issue for working students often is time—how to find enough time for studying enough to do well in classes. Since it is very difficult to maintain two full-time schedules—work and school—one or the other may suffer. For those working long hours, Chapter 2 "Staying Motivated, Organized, and On Track" presents many tips for managing your time when you have less of it; Chapter 11 "Taking Control of Your Finances" also suggests ways to cut back on expenses while in college so that you don't have to work so many hours.

Students with a Family

Typically it is returning students who have families of their own, although younger students may also have families to care for. Having children of your own means you have different priorities from most some students, but a family shouldn't be viewed as an obstacle to college success. Time may be short, and you'll have to manage it carefully to avoid falling behind in your studies. Chapter 2 "Staying Motivated, Organized, and On Track" describes some creative ways students can involve their families in the experience to prevent normal student stresses from disrupting family happiness.

Profile of a Successful Student

While it's important to consider your strengths, it's also important to develop a plan for moving forward and ensuring you have the knowledge and skills needed to succeed. The following are some of the characteristics of the successful student you can be:

- Successful students have a good attitude and know how to stay motivated. You will learn about this in [Chapter 2 "Staying Motivated, Organized, and On Track"](#).
- Successful students have developed good time management strategies, such as scheduling study time and getting started early on assignments and projects. You will also learn about this in [Chapter 2 "Staying Motivated, Organized, and On Track"](#).
- Successful students have developed their critical thinking skills and apply them in their studies. [Chapter 3 "Thinking about Thought"](#) gets you started in this direction.
- Successful students have effective strategies for taking good notes in class and using them. [Chapter 4 "Listening, Taking Notes, and Remembering"](#) guides you through this learning process.
- Successful students have learned how to gain the most from their assigned readings for classes. [Chapter 5 "Reading to Learn"](#) presents guidelines for effective reading and taking notes to help you understand and retain information.
- Successful students know how to prepare for and take tests successfully. [Chapter 6 "Preparing for and Taking Tests"](#) tells you what you need to know and presents tips for effective test taking.
- Successful students interact well with their instructors and fellow students in and outside of class. [Chapter 7 "Interacting with Instructors and Classes"](#) helps you gain these skills.
- Successful students have learned to write well for their classes, an essential aspect of college education. [Chapter 8 "Writing for Classes"](#) introduces key principles of effective college writing to get you started.
- Successful students develop social relationships that contribute to, rather than detract from, their educational experiences. [Chapter 9 "The Social World of College"](#) will show you how to manage your social life.
- Successful students take control of their health with good habits that help them be better students and feel less stress. [Chapter 10 "Taking Control of Your Health"](#) can help you get started on good habits.
- Successful students have control over their finances. Because getting into debt is a very common reason that students have to drop out of college, it's important to control expenditures and manage your finances well, as we'll see in [Chapter 11 "Taking Control of Your Finances"](#).
- Successful students are able to transition well from the world of college into their future careers. You will learn these important principles in [Chapter 12 "Taking Control of Your Future"](#) to carry forward into your future.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- College students vary widely in terms of age, work experience before college, cultural background, family, and other factors that may affect how they learn.
- Traditional, young students just out of high school face a transition involving new freedoms and new situations they may need to master in order to succeed academically.
- Returning students who work and may also have family responsibilities often have time issues and may feel out of place in the college environment.
- Other student groups include commuters, first-generation students, immigrant

and international students, students with disabilities, and others, each of whom may need to face additional issues to be successful.

- Regardless of individual differences, all successful students share a number of traits, including a good attitude, effective time management strategies, good studying and test-taking skills, and more.

CHECKPOINT EXERCISES

1. Are you a “traditional” or “returning” student? List an important advantage you have as a result of being in this classification:

2. Check off which traits in this list are true of successful students:

<input type="checkbox"/>	They know how to stay motivated.
<input type="checkbox"/>	They don't need to schedule study periods because they study at every available moment every day.
<input type="checkbox"/>	They know better than to try to think on their own.
<input type="checkbox"/>	They know how to speed-read so they don't have to underline or highlight in their textbooks.
<input type="checkbox"/>	They avoid talking with their instructors, so they can remain anonymous.
<input type="checkbox"/>	They develop their writing skills.
<input type="checkbox"/>	They eat fast food so they have more time for studying.
<input type="checkbox"/>	They have few friends, because social relationships distract one from academics.
<input type="checkbox"/>	They use several credit cards so they don't have to worry about finances until after graduation.