

Chapter 9

The Social World of College

Where Are You Now?

Assess your present knowledge and attitudes.

| | Yes | Unsure | No |
|---|-----|--------|----|
| 1. My interactions with students and others on campus will contribute to my academic success. | | | |
| 2. I feel I would like to make more or different friends in college. | | | |
| 3. I am sometimes shy about interacting with others in social settings or feel lonely when by myself. | | | |
| 4. I make an effort to communicate well in social interactions, especially to listen actively when others are speaking. | | | |
| 5. I use social networking Web sites to actively enhance social relationships. | | | |
| 6. When I get in an argument with someone, I work to calm the situation and try to reach a compromise solution we can both live with. | | | |
| 7. I am comfortable in situations interacting with people who are different from me in age, race, ethnicity, or cultural background. | | | |
| 8. I make an effort to meet and learn about others different from me and to accept and respect their differences. | | | |
| 9. When I see someone making a racist or sexist joke or comment, I speak out against prejudice. | | | |
| 11. I am participating in some clubs and activities on campus that interest me. | | | |

Where Do You Want to Go?

Think about how you answered the questions above. Be honest with yourself. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your college relationships and interactions with people from different backgrounds at this time?

| Not very healthy | | | | | Very strong | | | | |
|------------------|---|---|---|---|-------------|---|---|---|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

In the following list, circle the three most important areas of social interaction in which you think you can improve:

- Variety of friends and relationships
- Ability to interact comfortably with strangers
- Speaking skills
- Listening skills
- Assertive communication skills
- Online social networking use

- Conflict resolution
- Comfort level around people of different race or ethnicity
- Interacting with people of different cultural backgrounds
- Understanding of different cultural groups
- Ability to speak out against prejudice
- Knowledge of campus clubs and activities
- Participation in campus groups

Are there other areas in which you can improve your social relationships and interactions with others to improve your college experience? Write down other things you feel you need to work on.

How to Get There

Here's what we'll work on in this chapter:

- Understanding why social interaction is such an important part of the college experience
- Developing new friendships on campus
- Improving communication skills for social interactions at all levels
- Knowing why and how to use online social networking
- Balancing your schoolwork and social life
- Resolving conflicts that may occur in social interactions
- Knowing what to do if you experience harassment
- Understanding the many kinds of diversity found on college campuses
- Celebrating the benefits of diversity for all students
- Dealing with prejudice and discrimination
- Discovering the value of participating in organized campus groups and activities

Social Life, College Life

New college students may not immediately realize that they've entered a whole new world at college, including a world of other people possibly very different from those they have known before. This is a very important dimension of college—almost as important as the learning that goes on inside the classroom. How you deal with the social aspects and diversity of college world has a large impact on your academic success.

All the topics covered in this chapter relate to the social world of college. Here you will gain some insight into the value of making new friends and getting along with the wide variety of people you will encounter on campus. You will learn why and how a broad diversity of people enriches the college experience and better prepare you for the world after college.

Enter this new world with an open mind and you'll gain many benefits. Even if you are taking a course or two at night and do not spend much of your day on campus, try to make the most of this experience. You'll meet others who will challenge and stimulate you and broaden your thinking and emotional experiences.

9.1 Getting Along with Others

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explain the benefits of social interactions with a variety of people in the college environment.
2. List personal characteristics and skills that contribute to one's ability to get along well with others.
3. Improve your communication skills.
4. Use online social networking beneficially.
5. Balance your social life with your schoolwork.
6. Describe how to successfully resolve a conflict with another person.

Interdependence

Humans are social creatures—it's simply in our nature. We continually interact with other students and instructors, and we can learn a great deal from these interactions that heighten the learning process. This frequent interaction with others forms a state of interdependence. College students depend on their instructors, but just as importantly, they depend on other students in many ways.

As important as our interactions with others are, we do not automatically possess the skills that help us form good relationships and make the most of our experiences. Consider how these two college students are different:

John often arrives just as class is beginning and leaves immediately afterward. He makes little effort to talk with other students in the classroom, and after class he goes off to study alone or to his part-time job, where he spends most of his time at a computer screen. He is diligent in his studies and generally does well. After two months, he has not gotten to know his roommate very well, and he generally eats alone with a book in hand. He stops by to see his instructors in their offices only if he missed a class due to illness, and on weekends and holidays he often hangs out at his parents' house or sees old friends.

Kim likes to get to class early and sits near others so they can talk about the reading for class or compare notes about assignments. She enjoys running into other students she knows from her classes and usually stops to chat. Although she is an older working student who lives alone off campus, she often dines in a campus café and asks students she meets in her classes to join her. After two months, with the approach of midterms, she formed a study group with a couple other students. If she feels she doesn't understand an important lecture topic very well, she gets to her instructor's office a few minutes ahead of office hours to avoid missing out by having to wait in line. A few weeks into the term, she spent a weekend with a student from another country and learned much about a culture about which she had previously known little.

These students are very different. Which do you think is more fully enjoying the college

experience? Which do you think is more likely to do well academically? Most of us fall somewhere between these two extremes, but we can learn to be more like Kim and more actively engage with others.

Recognize the Value of Social Interaction

Building good relationships is important for happiness and a successful college experience. College offers the opportunity to meet many people you would likely not meet otherwise in life. Make the most of this opportunity to gain a number of benefits:

- A growing understanding of diverse other people, how they think, and what they feel that will serve you well throughout your life and in your future career
- A heightened sense of your own identity, especially as you interact with others with different personalities and from different backgrounds
- Emotional comfort from friendship with someone who understands you and with whom you can talk about your problems, joys, hopes, and fears
- An opportunity to grow with wider intellectual and emotional horizons

College often offers an opportunity to be stimulated and excited by new relationships and interactions with people who will challenge your thinking and help you become your best. Still, it can be difficult to get started with new relationships in college.

Making New Friends

Some people just make friends naturally, but many first-year college students are more shy or quiet and may need to actively seek new friends. Here are some starting points:

1. **Keep all doors open for meeting new people.** If you live in a dorm, literally keep the door open. Try to sit with different people at meals so you can get to know them better. Study in a common area or lounge where you'll be among others.
2. **Be open in your interests.** Don't limit yourself to people who share only certain interests. Meeting people by studying together is an excellent way to get to know people with different interests.
3. **Don't try to get involved in everything going on around you.** Committing to too many activities or joining too many social groups will spread your time too thin, and you may not spend enough time with anyone to get to know them.
4. **Let others see who you really are.** Let people get to know the things you're interested in, your real passions. People who really know you are more likely to become good friends.
5. **Make an effort to get to know others, too.** Show some interest. Don't talk just about *your* interests—ask them about theirs. Show others that you're interested, that you think they're worth spending time with, and that you really do want to get to know them.
6. **Once a friendship has started, be a good friend.** Respect your friends for what they are and don't criticize them or talk about them behind their back. Give emotional support when your friends need it and accept their support as well when you need it.

Are You Shy?

If you're shy, try meeting and talking to people in situations where you can interact one-to-one, such as talking with another student after class. Start with what you have

in common—“How’d you do on the test?”—and let the conversation grow from there. Avoid the emotional trap of thinking everyone but you is making new friends and start some conversations with others who look interesting to you. You’ll soon find other “shy” or quiet people eager to interact with you as well and get to know you.

Shy people may be more likely to feel lonely at times, especially while still feeling new at college. Loneliness is usually a temporary emotional state, however. For tips for how to overcome feelings of loneliness, see the section on loneliness in [Chapter 10 "Taking Control of Your Health", Section 10.6 "Emotional Health and Happiness"](#).

Communication Skills

Communication is at the core of almost all social interactions, including those involved in friendships and relationships with your instructors. Communication with others has a huge effect on our lives, what we think and feel, and what and how we learn.

Communication is, many would say, what makes us human.

Oral communication involves not only speech and listening, of course, but also **nonverbal communication**: facial expressions, tone of voice, and many other **body language** signals that affect the messages sent and received. Many experts think that people pay more attention, often unconsciously, to *how* people say something than to *what* they are saying. When the nonverbal message is inconsistent with the verbal (spoken) message, just as when the verbal message itself is unclear because of poorly chosen words or vague explanations, then miscommunication may occur.

Miscommunication is at the root of many misunderstandings among people and makes it difficult to build relationships.

[Chapter 7 "Interacting with Instructors and Classes"](#) discusses oral communication skills in general and guidelines for communicating well with your instructors. The same communication skills are important for building and maintaining significant relationships.

Remember that communication is a two-way process. Listening skills are critical for most college students simply because many of us may not have learned how to really listen to another person. Here are some guidelines for how to listen effectively:

- **Talk less to listen more.** Most people naturally like to share their thoughts and feelings, and some people almost seem unable to stop talking long enough to ever listen to another person. Try this: next time you’re in a conversation with another student, deliberately try not to speak very much but give the other person a chance to speak fully. You may notice a big difference in how much you gain from the conversation.
- **Ask questions.** To keep the conversational ball rolling, show your interest in the other person by asking them about things they are saying. This helps the other person feel that you are interested in them and helps build the relationship.
- **Watch and respond to the other person’s body language.** You’ll learn much more about their feelings for what they’re saying than if you listen only to their words.
- **Show the other person that you’re really listening and that you care.** Make eye contact and respond appropriately with nods and brief comments like “That’s interesting!” or “I know what you mean” or “Really?” Be friendly, smile when appropriate, and encourage the person to keep speaking.

- **Give the other person feedback.** Show you understand by saying things like “So you’re saying that…” or asking a question that demonstrates you’ve been following what they’re saying and want to know more.

As you learn to improve your listening skills, think also about what you are saying yourself and how. Here are additional guidelines for effective speaking:

- **Be honest, but don’t be critical.** Strongly disagreeing may only put the other person on the defensive—an emotion sure to disrupt the hope for good communication. You can disagree, but be respectful to keep the conversation from becoming emotional. Say “I don’t know, I think that maybe it’s…” instead of “That’s crazy! What’s *really* going on is…”
- **Look for common ground.** Make sure that your side of a conversation relates to what the other person is saying and that it focuses on what you have in common. There’s almost no better way to stop a conversation dead in its tracks than to ignore everything the other person has just said and launch into an unrelated story or idea of your own.
- **Avoid sarcasm and irony unless you know the person well.** Sarcasm is easily misunderstood and may be interpreted as an attack on the other person’s ideas or statements.
- **Don’t try to talk like the other person,** especially if the person is from a different ethnic or cultural background or speaks with an accent or heavy slang. The other person will feel that you are imitating them and maybe even making fun of them. Be yourself and speak naturally.
- **While not imitating the other person, relate to his or her personality and style of thinking.** We do not speak to our parents or instructors the exact same way we speak to our closest friends, nor should we speak to someone we’ve just met the same way. Show your respect for the other person by keeping the conversation on an appropriate level.
- **Remember that assertive communication is better than passive or aggressive communication.** “Assertive” in this context means you are honest and direct in stating your ideas and thoughts; you are confident and clear and willing to discuss your ideas while still respecting the thoughts and ideas of others. A passive communicator is reluctant to speak up, seems to agree with everything others say, hesitates to say anything that others might disagree with, and therefore seldom communicates much at all. **Passive communication** simply is not a real exchange in communication. **Aggressive communication,** at the other extreme, is often highly critical of the thoughts and ideas of others. This communication style may be sarcastic, emotional, and even insulting. Real communication is not occurring because others are not prompted to respond honestly and openly.
- **Choose your conversations wisely.** Recognize that you don’t have to engage in all conversations. Make it your goal to form relationships and engage in interactions that help you learn and grow as a person. College life offers plenty of opportunities for making relationships and interacting with others if you keep open to them, so you needn’t try to participate in every social situation around you.

Some students may have difficulty in the opposite direction: their social lives may become so rich or so time consuming that they have problems balancing their social lives with their schoolwork. Online social media, for example, may eat up a lot of time.

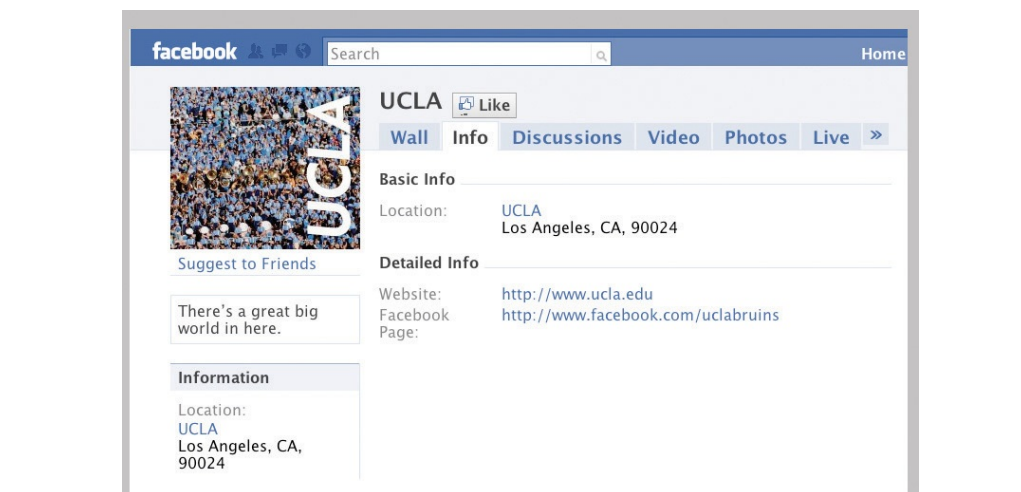
Online Social Networking

Most college students know all about Facebook, Twitter, blogging, chat rooms, and other **social networking** sites. Current studies reveal that over 90 percent of all college students use Facebook or MySpace regularly, although older students use these sites less commonly. The media have often emphasized negative stories involving safety concerns, obsessive behavior, a perceived superficiality of social interaction online, and so on. But more recently, online social networking has been found to have several benefits. Many of those who once criticized Facebook and MySpace are now regularly networking among themselves via LinkedIn, Plaxo, and other “professional” networking sites.

Following are some of the benefits of Facebook—some clear to those using it, others revealed only recently by research in the social sciences:

- Facebook and other forms of online networking makes it easy to stay in touch with friends and family at a geographical distance. College students who have moved away from former friends seem to make the transition more easily when they stay in touch. Maintaining past relationships does not prevent most people from making new friends at college.
- Facebook provides users with increased “social capital,” which is a sum of resources gained through one’s relationships with people. Facebook users gain information, opportunities for participation in activities and groups, greater knowledge about others, some interaction skills, and so forth. Social capital is also associated with self-esteem, success in some endeavors, and general happiness.
- Facebook makes it easier for people who are shy or otherwise slow to initiate or respond to interactions with others to participate socially in a group. Online network sites also offer an outlet for self-expression and sharing.
- For many college students, interactions on Facebook strengthen personal relationships rather than detracting from them.
- Acknowledging that online social networking is a reality for most college students, many college administrators and instructors also use it to stay in better touch with students, to provide information and encouragement, and to help students experience the full richness of the college experience. Your college may have a Facebook page where you can learn much about things happening around campus, and you may even receive tweets about important announcements.

Figure 9.3



Still, online social networking is not 100 percent beneficial for all college students. Someone who becomes obsessed with constantly updating their profile or attracting a huge number of friends can spend so much time at their computer that they miss out on

other important aspects of college life. Hopefully by now everyone knows why you should never post compromising or inappropriate photos or information about yourself anywhere online, even as a joke: many employers, college admissions offices, and others may find this compromising material in the future and deny you the job, internship, graduate program, or other position that you want. It's important also to protect your identity and privacy on online sites.

Overall, online networking in moderation can help enrich one's life. When used to build relationships, gain information, and stay in touch with a larger community, it can contribute to success in college. Most college students use Facebook ten to thirty minutes a day. If you're spending more than that, you might ask yourself if you're missing out on something else.

Balancing Schoolwork and Social Life

If there's one thing true of virtually all college students, it's that you don't have enough time to do everything you want. Once you've developed friendships within the college community and have an active social life, you may feel you don't have enough time for your studies and other activities such as work. For many students, the numerous social opportunities of college become a distraction, and with less attention to one's studies, academic performance can drop. Here are some tips for balancing your social life with your studies:

- **Keep working on your time management skills**, as you learned in [Chapter 2 "Staying Motivated, Organized, and On Track"](#). You can't just "go with the flow" and hope that, after spending time with friends, you have enough time (and energy) left over for studying. Make a study schedule that provides enough time for what you need to do. Study first; socialize after.
- **Keep working on your study skills**, as you learned in [Chapter 4 "Listening, Taking Notes, and Remembering"](#), [Chapter 5 "Reading to Learn"](#), and [Chapter 6 "Preparing for and Taking Tests"](#). When you have only a limited amount of time for studying, be sure you're using that time as effectively as possible as you read assignments and prepare for class, organize your notes after class, and prepare for tests.
- **If you can't resist temptations, reduce them.** If you are easily distracted by the opportunity to talk with your roommate, spouse, or family members because you study where you live, then go to the library to study.
- **Make studying a social experience.** If your studying keeps you so busy that you feel like you don't have much of a social life, form a study group. You will learn more than you would alone by gaining from the thoughts of others, and you can enjoy interacting with others without falling behind.
- **Keep your social life from affecting your studying.** Simply scheduling study time doesn't mean you'll use it well. If you stayed up late the night before, you may not today be able to concentrate well as you study for that big test. This is another reason for good time management and scheduling your time well, looking ahead.
- **Get help if you need it.** If you're still having difficulty balancing your study time with other activities, talk with your academic advisor or a counselor. Maybe something else is keeping you from doing your best. Maybe you need some additional study skills or you need to get some extra help from a tutor or campus study center. Remember, your college wants you to succeed and will try to help those who seek help.

A Note on Greek Life

Fraternalities and sororities appeal to many students on many campuses. You meet a lot of people quickly and have a social life provided for you almost automatically, with many events and parties as well as usually an active house life. Many people have formed lasting, even lifelong relationships with their fraternity and sorority friends. On the other hand, this living and social experience may limit the kinds of people you meet and present fewer opportunities to interact with others outside the Greek system. If there are frequent activities, it may be important to learn to say no at time when studying becomes a priority. If you are interested in but not yet committed to this life, it's worthwhile to find out what the houses at your school are really like, consider what your life would likely be like in a fraternity or sorority, and think about how it may impact your college goals.

Overcoming Difficulties and Resolving Conflicts

Conflicts among people who are interacting are natural. People have many differences in opinions, ideas, emotions, and behaviors, and these differences sometimes cause conflicts. Here are just a few examples of conflicts that may occur among college students:

- Your roommate is playing loud music in your room, and you need some quiet to study for a test.
- You want to have a nice dinner out, but your spouse wants to save the money to buy new furniture.
- Your instructor gave you a C on a paper because it lacks some of the required elements, but you feel it deserves a better grade because you think it accomplished more important goals.
- Others at your Greek house want to invite only members of other fraternities and sororities to an upcoming party, but you want the party to be more inclusive and to invite more diverse students.
- Your partner wants to have sex with you, but you want to wait until you get protection.

So how can such conflicts be resolved? Two things are necessary for conflict resolution that does not leave one or more of the people involved feeling negative about the outcome: attitude and communication.

A conflict cannot be resolved satisfactorily unless all people involved have the right attitude:

- **Respect the options and behaviors of others.** Accept that people are not all alike and learn to celebrate your differences. Most situations do not involve a single right or wrong answer.
- **Be open minded.** Just because at first you are sure that that you are right, do not close the door to other possibilities. Look at the other's point of view. Be open to change—even when that means accepting constructive criticism.
- **Calm down.** You can't work together to resolve a conflict while you're still feeling strong emotions. Agree with the other to wait until you're both able to discuss it without strong emotions.
- **Recognize the value of compromise.** Even if you disagree after calmly talking over an issue, accept that as a human reality and understand that a compromise may be necessary in order to get along with others.

With the right attitude, you can then work together to resolve the issue. This process

depends on good communication:

- **Listen.** Don't simply argue for your position, but listen carefully to what the other says. Pay attention to their body language as you try to understand their point of view and ask questions to ensure that you do. Paraphrase what you think you hear to give the other a chance to correct any misunderstanding.
- **Use "I statements" rather than "you statements."** Explain your point of view about the situation in a way that does not put the other person on the defensive and evoke emotions that make resolution more difficult. Don't say, "You're always playing loud music when I'm trying to study." Instead, say, "I have difficulty studying when you play loud music, and that makes me frustrated and irritable." Don't blame the other for the problem—that would just get emotions flowing again.
- **Brainstorm together to find a solution that satisfies both of you.** Some compromise is usually needed, but that is usually not difficult to reach when you're calm and have the right attitude about working together on a solution. In some cases, you may simply have to accept a result that you still do not agree with, simply in order to move on.

The process of conflict resolution is discussed more fully in [Chapter 10 "Taking Control of Your Health"](#). In most cases, when the people involved have a good attitude and are open to compromise, conflicts can be resolved successfully.

Yet sometimes there seems to be no resolution. Sometimes the other person may simply be difficult and refuse to even try to work out a solution. Regrettably, not everyone on or off campus is mature enough to be open to other perspectives. With some interpersonal conflicts, you may simply have to decide not to see that person anymore or find other ways to avoid the conflict in the future. But remember, most conflicts can be solved among adults, and it's seldom a good solution to run away from a problem that will continue to surface and keep you from being happy with your life.

Roommate Issues

At many colleges students just out of high school must live in a campus residence hall. Other students may live in a shared apartment with new roommates. This is the first time many students have had to share a room, suite, or apartment with others who were not family members, and this situation may lead to conflicts and strong feelings that can even affect your academic success.

As in other interactions, the keys to forming a good relationship with a roommate are communication and attitude. From the beginning, you should talk about everyone's expectations of the other(s) and what matters most to you about where you live. Don't wait until problems happen before talking. It's often good to begin with the key practical issues: agreeing on quiet hours for study (limiting not only loud music but also visits from others), time for lights out, neatness and cleaning up, things shared and private things not to touch.

Show respect for the other's ideas and possessions, respect their privacy, and try to listen more than you talk. Even if your roommate does not become a close friend, you can have a harmonious, successful relationship that makes your residence a good home for both of you. Millions of college students before you have learned to work this out, and if both (or all) of you respect each other and keep communication open and nonconfrontational, you will easily get through the small bumps in the road ahead, too. Follow these guidelines to

help ensure you get along well:

- **Anticipate problems before they happen.** Think about things that you consider essential in your living environment and talk with a new roommate about these essentials now.
- **Deal with any problem promptly.** Don't wait until a behavior is well established before speaking up, as if the other person will somehow catch on that it aggravates you. It may be as simple as a roommate using your coffee cup or borrowing your toothpaste without asking, but if you say nothing, trying to be polite, the habit may expand to other things.
- **Be patient, flexible, and willing to compromise.** It may take a while for each of you to get used to each other and to establish a communication pattern of openness so that you can be honest with each other about what really matters.
- **Be warm, use humor, and be sensitive.** Telling someone that they're doing something bothersome can be very difficult for many people. Think before speaking, looking for the best way to communicate what you feel. Remember, you'll be spending a lot of time around this person, so do you really want them to think of you as bossy or obsessive-compulsive?
- **Get out more.** Sometimes it helps to spend more time elsewhere on campus, studying in the library or another quiet place. You just might need a certain amount of time a day alone. That's fine, but don't expect your roommate to have to leave just to give you that time alone!

But What If You *Really* Have a Roommate Problem?

In some situations and with some people who will not compromise and do not respect you and your needs, a roommate can be a serious problem. In some circumstances, you may be able to move to a different room. Room changes usually are not granted simply because you "don't get along," but certain circumstances may justify a change. The following are some examples:

- Your roommate smokes in the room.
- Your roommate uses illegal drugs, drinks alcohol underage, or conducts other illegal activities in the room.
- Your roommate repeatedly refuses to limit activities at any hour to allow you to sleep.
- Your roommate does anything that threatens your physical well-being or safety.
- Your roommate denies you your rights to practice your religion or other basic rights.

If you have a problem like this, first talk with your resident advisor (RA) or other residence hall authority. They will explain the process for a room change, if warranted, or other ways for managing the problem,

Dealing with Harassment

Although college campuses are for the most part safe, secure, and friendly places where social and intellectual interaction is generally mature and responsible, harassment can occur in any setting. **Harassment** is a general term referring to behavior that is intended to disturb or threaten another person in some way, often psychologically. Typically the person or people doing the harassment target their victim because of a difference in race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, sex, age, sexual orientation, or disability.

Acts of harassment may be verbal, physical, psychological, or any other behavior intended to disturb another person. Bullying behavior, name-calling, belittling, gesturing obscenely, stalking, mobbing—any action intended to torment or deliberately make another person uncomfortable or feel humiliated is harassment. Harassment may also be intended to manipulate a targeted person to act in some specific way.

Sexual harassment is a special term referring to persistent, unwanted sexual behaviors or advances. Sexual harassment may begin with words but progress to unwanted touching and potentially even rape. Sexual harassment is discussed in more detail in [Chapter 10 "Taking Control of Your Health"](#).

Many types of harassment are illegal. In the workplace, a supervisor who tells off-color sexual jokes around an employee of the opposite gender may be guilty of sexual harassment. Students who deliberately malign members of another race may be guilty of committing a hate crime. Physically tormenting another student in a hazing may be judged assault and battery. Any discrimination in the workplace based on race, religion, age, sex, and so on is illegal. On a college campus, any harassment of a student by a faculty member or college employee is expressly forbidden, unethical, and also possibly illegal.

Harassment of any type, at any time, of any person, is wrong and unacceptable. You will know it if you are harassed, and you should know also that it is your basic right to be free of harassment and that your college has strict policies against all forms of harassment. Here's what you should do if you are being harassed:

1. Tell the person to stop the behavior—or if you feel at any risk of harm, get out of the situation immediately.
2. Document the incident, particularly with ongoing harassment. Keep notes of the details. Tell someone you trust about the situation.
3. Report the harassment to the appropriate college authority. If you are unsure which to go to, go to the dean of students first.

Changing Family Relationships

The college years are a time of many changes, including one's relationships with parents, siblings, and one's own children and partners. Any time there is change, issues may arise.

As in other relationships, try to understand the other's perspective. Honesty is particularly important—but with tact and understanding. Here are some tips for getting along:

- Understand that your parents may not change their attitudes toward you as quickly as you yourself may be changing. They may still think of you as a younger person in need of their continued guidance. They will worry about you and fear that you might fall in with the wrong crowd or engage in risky behavior. Be patient. Take the time to communicate, and don't close yourself off. Let them gradually accept you as a more mature person who can make your own decisions wisely.
- Stay in touch. You may be busier than ever and feel you haven't time for a phone call or e-mail, but communication is very important for parents—especially if they are now empty nesters without other children at home. Even if they seem to want too much involvement in your life and to make decisions for you, realize that this at least in part

is simply a desire to stay in touch with you—and to feel they still matter in your life.

- Use your best listening skills. Understanding what they're really feeling, which is often simply a concern for you born of their love for you, will usually help you know best to respond.
- Be assured that over time your parents and other family members will get used to your being on your own and will accept your ability to make your own decisions. Time itself often solves issues.
- With your own family, now that you are busier than ever with classes and work, you may need to pay special attention to ensuring you stay active in family relationships. Schedule times for family outings and make room in your days for casual interactions. But remember, it's not how much time you spend together but the quality of that time, so give your family your full attention when you are together.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A rich, diverse social life is an important dimension of the college experience that contributes also to academic success.
- Getting along with others involves communication skills and a willingness to interact with different people in a number of different ways.
- Effective listening skills are as important as expressing yourself well verbally and nonverbally.
- Online social networking used in moderation can be beneficial.
- Balancing one's social life with schoolwork requires time management skills as well as good study skills.
- Because social interactions frequently involve conflicting values, behaviors, or ideas, it's important to respect others, stay open minded, be open to compromise, and understand how to resolve conflicts.
- Acknowledge that family relationships will likely change after you enter college and work to ease the transition for everyone.

CHECKPOINT EXERCISES

1. List three or four guidelines for interacting successfully with others.

2. You are talking after class with another student with whom you'd like to be friends, but you're distracted by a test you have to study for. If you're not careful, what nonverbal communication signals might you accidentally send that could make the other person feel you are *not* friendly? Describe two or three nonverbal signals that could give the wrong impression.

3. What are the best things *to say* when you're actively engaged in *listening* to another?

4. For each of the following statements about effective communication, circle T for true or F for false:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| T | F | Avoid eye contact until you've gotten to know the person well enough to be sure they will not misinterpret your interest. |
| T | F | Using the same slang or accent as other people will make them see you respect them as they are. |
| T | F | Communicating your ideas with honesty and confidence is usually more effective than just agreeing with what others are saying. |
| T | F | Communicating with people online is seldom as effective as calling them on the telephone or seeing them in person. |
| T | F | It's usually best to accept spontaneous opportunities for social interaction, because you'll always have time later for your studies. |

5. You are upset because your roommate (or a family member) always seems to have several friends over just when you need to study most. Write in the space below what you might say to this person to explain the problem, using "I statements" rather than "you statements."

6. If another person is acting very emotionally and is harassing you, what should you *not* do at that moment?

9.2 Living with Diversity

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define diversity and explain the benefits of a diverse college campus for all students.
2. List ten or more ways in which different groups of people can have significant

differences, experiences, and perspectives.

3. Explain why all college students are more successful academically in a diverse environment and list several additional benefits of diversity for all students.
4. Describe the valuable characteristics of “nontraditional” older college students.
5. Explain what students can do to foster multiculturalism and celebrate diversity on campus. For students who have few experiences with diversity in the past, outline steps that can be taken to gain cultural sensitivity and a multicultural outlook.
6. Describe how instructors help create a positive, inclusive learning environment in the classroom.

Ours is a very diverse society—and increasingly so. Already in many parts of the country, non-Hispanic whites comprise less than 50 percent of the population, and by 2020 an estimated one in three Americans will be a person of color, as will be about half of all college students. But “diversity” means much more than a variety of racial and ethnic differences. As we’ll use the term here, **diversity** refers to the great variety of human characteristics—ways that we are different even as we are all human and share more similarities than differences. These differences are an essential part of what enriches humanity.

We’ll look first at some of the ways that people differ and explore the benefits of diversity for our society generally and for the college experience. While we should all celebrate diversity, at the same time we need to acknowledge past issues that grew from misunderstandings of such differences and work together to bring change where needed.

What Diversity Really Means

Differences among people may involve where a person was born and raised, the person’s family and cultural group, factual differences in personal identity, and chosen differences in significant beliefs. Some diversity is primarily cultural (involving shared beliefs and behaviors), other diversity may be biological (race, age, gender), and some diversity is defined in personal terms (sexual orientation, religion). Diversity generally involves things that may significantly affect some people’s perceptions of others—not just any way people happen to be different. For example, having different tastes in music, movies, or books is not what we usually refer to as diversity.

When discussing diversity, it is often difficult to avoid seeming to generalize about different types of people—and such generalizations can seem similar to dangerous **stereotypes**. The following descriptions are meant only to suggest that individuals are different from other individuals in many possible ways and that we can all learn things from people whose ideas, beliefs, attitudes, values, backgrounds, experiences, and behaviors are different from our own. This is a primary reason college admissions departments frequently seek diversity in the student body. Following are various aspects of diversity:

- **Diversity of race.** **Race** refers to what we generally think of as biological differences and is often defined by what some think of as skin color. Such perceptions are often at least as much social as they are biological.
- **Diversity of ethnicity.** **Ethnicity** is a cultural distinction that is different from race. An ethnic group is a group of people who share a common identity and a perceived cultural heritage that often involves shared ways of speaking and behaving, religion,

traditions, and other traits. The term “ethnic” also refers to such a group that is a minority within the larger society. Race and ethnicity are sometimes interrelated but not automatically so.

- **Diversity of cultural background.** Culture, like ethnicity, refers to shared characteristics, language, beliefs, behaviors, and identity. We are all influenced by our culture to some extent. While ethnic groups are typically smaller groups within a larger society, the larger society itself is often called the “dominant culture.” The term is often used rather loosely to refer to any group with identifiable shared characteristics.
- **Diversity of educational background.** Colleges do not use a cookie-cutter approach to admit only students with identical academic skills. Diversity of educational background helps ensure a free flow of ideas and challenges those who might become set in their ways.
- **Diversity of geography.** People from different places within the United States or the world often have a range of differences in ideas, attitudes, and behaviors.
- **Diversity of socioeconomic background.** People’s identities are influenced by how they grow up, and part of that background often involves socioeconomic factors. Socioeconomic diversity can contribute a wide variety of ideas and attitudes.
- **Diversity of gender roles.** Women have virtually all professional and social roles, including those once dominated by men, and men have taken on many roles, such as raising a child, that were formerly occupied mostly by women. These changing roles have brought diverse new ideas and attitudes to college campuses.
- **Diversity of age.** While younger students attending college immediately after high school are generally within the same age range, older students returning to school bring a diversity of age. Because they often have broader life experiences, many older students bring different ideas and attitudes to the campus.
- **Diversity of sexual orientation.** Gays and lesbians make up a significant percentage of people in American society and students on college campuses. Exposure to this diversity helps others overcome stereotypes and become more accepting of human differences.
- **Diversity of religion.** For many people, religion is not just a Sunday morning practice but a larger spiritual force that infuses their lives. Religion helps shape different ways of thinking and behaving, and thus diversity of religion brings a wider benefit of diversity to college.
- **Diversity of political views.** A diversity of political views helps broaden the level of discourse on campuses concerning current events and the roles of government and leadership at all levels. College students are frequently concerned about issues such as environmentalism and civil rights and can help bring about change.
- **Diversity of physical ability.** Some students have athletic talents. Some students have physical disabilities. Physical differences among students brings yet another kind of diversity to colleges—a diversity that both widens opportunities for a college education and also helps all students better understand how people relate to the world in physical as well as intellectual ways.
- **Diversity of extracurricular abilities.** As you remember from your college applications, colleges ask about what you do outside of class—clubs, activities, abilities in music and the arts, and so on. A student body with diverse interests and skills benefits all students by helping make the college experience full and enriching at all levels.

These are just some of the types of diversity you are likely to encounter on college campuses and in our society generally.

The Benefits of Diversity

The goal of many college admissions departments is to attract diverse students from a broad range of backgrounds involving different cultural, socioeconomic, age, and other factors—everything in the preceding list. But why is diversity so important? There are many reasons:

- **Experiencing diversity at college prepares students for the diversity they will encounter the rest of their lives.** Learning to understand and accept people different from ourselves is very important in our world. While many high school students may not have met or gotten to know well many people with different backgrounds, this often changes in college. Success in one's career and future social life also requires understanding people in new ways and interacting with new skills. Experiencing diversity in college assists in this process.
- **Students learn better in a diverse educational setting.** Encountering new concepts, values, and behaviors leads to thinking in deeper, more complex, and more creative ways, rather than furthering past ideas and attitudes. Students who experience the most racial and ethnic diversity in their classes are more engaged in active thinking processes and develop more intellectual and academic skills (and have higher grade point averages) than others with limited experience of diversity.
- **Attention to diversity leads to a broader range of teaching methods, which benefits the learning process for all students.** Just as people are different in diverse ways, people from different backgrounds and experiences learn in different ways. College teaching has expanded to include many new teaching techniques. All students gain when instructors make the effort to address the diverse learning needs of all students.
- **Experiencing diversity on campus is beneficial for both minority and majority students.** Students have more fulfilling social relationships and report more satisfaction and involvement with their college experience. Studies show *all* students on campus gain from diversity programs. All the social and intellectual benefits of diversity cited in this list hold true for all students.
- **Diversity experiences help break the patterns of segregation and prejudice that have characterized American history.** Discrimination against others—whether by race, gender, age, sexual orientation, or anything else—is rooted in ignorance and sometimes fear of people who are different. Getting to know people who are different is the first step in accepting those differences, furthering the goal of a society free of all forms of prejudice and the unfair treatment of people.
- **Students of a traditional college age are in an ideal stage of development for forming healthy attitudes about diversity.** Younger students may not yet have reached a point at which they can fully understand and accept very different ideas and behaviors in others. The college years are a time of growth and maturation intellectually, socially, and emotionally, and a sustained experience of diversity is an opportunity to heighten this process.
- **Experiencing diversity makes us all better citizens in our democracy.** When people can better understand and consider the ideas and perspectives of others, they are better equipped to participate meaningfully in our society. Democratic government depends on shared values of equality and the public good. An attitude of “us versus them,” in contrast, does not further the public good or advance democratic government. Studies have shown that college graduates with a good experience of diversity generally maintain patterns of openness and inclusivity in their future lives.
- **Diversity enhances self-awareness.** We gain insights into our own thought processes, life experiences, and values as we learn from people whose backgrounds

and experiences are different from our own.

While all the benefits described have been demonstrated repeatedly on campuses all across the country in study after study, and while admissions and retention programs on virtually all campuses promote and celebrate diversity, some problems still remain. Society changes only slowly, and sadly, many students in some areas—including gay and lesbian students, students with disabilities, and many minority students—still feel marginalized in the dominant culture of their campuses. Even in a country that elected an African American president, racism exists in many places. Gays and lesbians are still fighting for equal rights under the law and acceptance everywhere. Women still earn less than men in the same jobs. Thus society as a whole, and colleges in particular, need to continue to work to destroy old stereotypes and achieve a full acceptance of our human differences.

Multiculturalism is *not* political correctness. We've all heard jokes about "political correctness," which suggests that we do or say certain things not because they are right but because we're expected to pay lip service to them. Unfortunately, some people think of colleges' diversity programs as just the politically correct thing to do. Use your critical thinking skills if you hear such statements. In the world of higher education, truth is discovered through investigation and research—and research has shown repeatedly the value of diversity as well as programs designed to promote diversity.

Older "Nontraditional" Students and Diversity

Sometimes overlooked among the types of diversity on most college campuses are older students, often called **nontraditional students**, who are returning to education usually after working a number of years. While many college students are younger and enroll in college immediately after high school, these older students help bring a wider range of diversity to campuses and deserve special attention for the benefits they bring for all students. As a group, older students often share certain characteristics that bring unique value to the college experience overall. Older students often

- have well-established identities and broader roles and responsibilities on which to base their thinking;
- more fully represent the local community and its values;
- have greater emotional independence and self-reliance;
- have well-developed problem-solving, self-directing, and decision-making skills;
- can share important life lessons and insights not found in textbooks;
- have relationships and experience with a greater variety of people;
- can be positive role models for younger students with less experience and maturity.

In many ways, these "nontraditional" students benefit the campus as a whole and contribute in meaningful ways to the educational process. Both instructors and "traditional" students gain when older students share their ideas and feelings in class discussions, study groups, and all forms of social interaction.

Accepting and Celebrating Diversity and Working for Change

More than anything, multiculturalism is an attitude. Multiculturalism involves accepting and respecting the ideas, feelings, behaviors, and experiences of people different from oneself—all the forms of diversity described earlier. America is not actually a “melting pot” in the sense that people from diverse backgrounds somehow all become the same. America has always included a great diversity of ideas, attitudes, and behaviors. For example, the constitutional separation of church and state, a fundamental principle present since early days in the United States, guarantees that people of all religion have the same freedoms and rights for worship and religious behavior. People of diverse religious backgrounds are not expected to “melt” together into one religion. Other laws guarantee the equal rights of all people regardless of skin color, gender, age, and other differences—including more recently, in some states, equality under the law for those with diverse sexual orientation. The United States does not even have an official national language—and many government and other publications in various geographical areas are offered in a variety of languages as well. In short, America as a nation has always recognized the realities and benefits of diversity.

Colleges similarly make commitments to ensure they respect and value differences among people and promote a wide understanding of such differences. Most colleges now have formal diversity programs to help all students not only accept and understand differences among students of varied backgrounds but also celebrate the benefits for all.

What Students Can Do

While diversity exists in most places, not everyone automatically understands differences among people and celebrates the value of those differences. Students who never think about diversity and who make no conscious effort to experience and understand others gain less than others who do. There are many ways you can experience the benefits of diversity on your college campus, however, beginning with your own attitudes and by taking steps to increase your experiences with diverse individuals.

Acknowledge your own uniqueness, for you are diverse, too. Diversity doesn’t involve just other people. Consider that you may be just as different to other people as they are to you. Don’t think of the other person as being the one who is different, that you are somehow the “norm.” Your religion may seem just as odd to them as theirs does to you, and your clothing may seem just as strange looking to them as theirs is to you—until you accept there is no one “normal” or right way to be. Look at yourself in a mirror and consider why you look as you do. Why do you use the slang you do with your friends? Why did you just have that type of food for breakfast? How is it that you prefer certain types of music? Read certain books? Talk about certain things? Much of this has to do with your cultural background—so it makes sense that someone from another cultural or ethnic background is different in some ways. But both of you are also individuals with your own tastes, preferences, ideas, and attitudes—making you unique. It’s only when you realize your own uniqueness that you can begin to understand and respect the uniqueness of others, too.

Consider your own (possibly unconscious) stereotypes. A stereotype is a fixed, simplistic view of what people in a certain group are like. It is often the basis for prejudice and discrimination: behaving differently toward someone because you stereotype them in some way. Stereotypes are generally learned and emerge in the dominant culture’s attitudes toward those from outside that dominant group. A stereotype may be explicitly racist and destructive, and it may also be a simplistic generalization applied to any group of people, even if intended to be flattering rather

than negative. As you have read this chapter so far, did you find yourself thinking about any group of people, based on any kind of difference, and perhaps thinking in terms of stereotypes? If you walked into a party and saw many different kinds of people standing about, would you naturally avoid some and move toward others? Remember, we learn stereotypes from our cultural background—so it's not a terrible thing to admit you have inherited some stereotypes. Thinking about them is a first step in breaking out of these irrational thought patterns.

Examples of Cultural Differences in Body Language

While we should be careful not to stereotype individuals or whole cultures, it is important to be aware of potential differences among cultures when interacting with other people. For example, body language often has different meanings in different cultures. Understanding such differences can help you better understand your interaction with others. Here are a few examples:

- Some Americans clap their hands together to emphasize a point, while some French clap to end a conversation.
- Many Americans cross their legs when seated and thus may point the bottom of their shoe toward another person; many Japanese find this gesture offensive.
- Many Americans may wave their index fingers at someone else to make a point, but this gesture is often offensive to Mexicans and Somali, who may use that gesture only for dogs.
- In America, men and women shake hands with each other, but in some other cultures, handshakes across genders are not acceptable.
- In America, eye contact is generally considered polite and a sign of interest, whereas in many Asian cultures, people show their respect for others by bowing their head slightly and consider steady eye contact aggressive.

ACTIVITY: CHALLENGE YOUR THINKING

Read each of the following scenarios quickly and respond immediately without stopping to think. There are no right or wrong answers.

Scenario 1. You are walking home down a dark sidewalk when ahead you see three people standing around. Something about the way they are hanging out makes you a little frightened to walk past them.

Be honest with yourself: what did you just imagine these people looked like?

Why do think you might have associated this particular mental picture with the emotion of feeling frightened?

Scenario 2. In a café on campus, you see a student from another country sitting alone—someone you know casually from a class—and you walk over and are just about to ask if you can join him, when two other students also from his country appear and sit down with him. You hesitate.

Would you have hesitated if this person had the same cultural background as you?
What makes this situation different?

As you hesitate, you overhear them conversing in a language other than English.

Be honest with yourself: how does that make you feel now?

Scenario 3. A couple you know invites you to join them and one of their friends, whom you have not met, on a “double date”—a movie and dinner after. When you meet them outside the theater, you see that their friend, your date, is of a race different from your own.

Are you surprised or shocked? What is your first reaction?

Do you anticipate any more difficulty making conversation with your date than with anyone else whom you have just met?

Should your friends have told you in advance? Why or why not?

If they had told you, would that have made any difference? Explain.

*Now think for a minute about how you responded in these scenarios. Did your mental image in the first scenario involve a negative stereotype? What images in the media or society might have contributed to that response? The second and third scenarios involve simple situations in which you couldn't help but note some difference between you and another person. What might you feel in such situations in real life? Again, there is no “right” answer, and an awareness of differences is normal and natural even if it may cause some discomfort at first. On the other hand, if you have had significant experiences with diverse others, you might have read these scenarios and simply wondered, “So what? What's the big deal?” *It's worthwhile thinking about what that means.**

Do not try to ignore differences among people. Some people try so hard to avoid stereotyping that they go to the other extreme and try to avoid seeing any differences at all among people. But as we have seen throughout this chapter, people *are* different in many ways, and we should accept that if we are to experience the benefits of diversity.

Don't apply any group generalizations to individuals. As an extension of not stereotyping any group, also don't think of any individual person in terms of group characteristics. People are individuals first, members of a group second, and any given generalization simply may not apply to an individual. Be open minded and treat everyone

with respect as an individual with his or her own ideas, attitudes, and preferences.

Develop cultural sensitivity for communication. Realize that your words may not mean quite the same thing in different cultural contexts or to individuals from different backgrounds. This is particularly true of slang words, which you should generally avoid until you are sure the other person will know what you mean. Never try to use slang or expressions you think are common in the cultural group of the person you are speaking with. Similarly, since body language often varies among different cultures, avoid strong gestures and expressions until the responses of the other person signify he or she will not misinterpret the messages sent by your body language.

Take advantage of campus opportunities to increase your cultural awareness. Your college likely has multiculturalism courses or workshops you can sign up for. Special events, cultural fairs and celebrations, concerts, and other programs are held frequently on most campuses. There may also be opportunities to participate in group travel to other countries or regions of cultural diversity.

Take the initiative in social interactions. Many students just naturally hang out with other students they are most like—that almost seems to be part of human nature. Even when we're open minded and want to learn about others different from ourselves, it often seems easier and more comfortable to interact with others of the same age, cultural group, and so on. If we don't make a small effort to meet others, however, we miss a great opportunity to learn and broaden our horizons. Next time you're looking around the classroom or dorm for someone to ask about a class you missed or to study together for a test or group project, choose someone different from you in some way. Making friends with others of different backgrounds is often one of the most fulfilling experiences of college students.

Work through conflicts as in any other interaction. Conflicts simply occur among people, whether of the same or different background. If you are afraid of making a mistake when interacting with someone from a different background, you might avoid interaction altogether—and thus miss the benefits of diversity. Nothing risked, nothing gained. If you are sincere and respect the other, there is less risk of a misunderstanding occurring. If conflict does occur, work to resolve it as you would any other tension with another person, as described earlier.

Take a Stand against Prejudice and Hate

Unfortunately prejudice and hate still exist in America, even on college campuses. In addition to racial prejudice, some people are also prejudiced against women, people with disabilities, older adults, gays and lesbians—virtually all groups that can be characterized as “different.” All campuses have policies against all forms of prejudice and discriminatory behaviors. But it is not enough for only college administrators to fight prejudice and hate—this is a responsibility for all good citizens who take seriously the shared American value of equality for all people. So what can you as a college student do?

- **Decide that it does matter.** Prejudice threatens us all, not just the particular group being discriminated against in a specific incident. Don't stand on the sidelines or think it's up to the people who may be victimized by prejudice or hate to do something about it. We can all do something.
- **Talk with others.** Communication has great value on campuses. Let others know

how you feel about any acts of prejudice or hatred that you witness. The more everyone openly condemns such behavior, the less likely it is to reappear in the future. This applies even if you hear another student telling a racist joke or putting down the opposite sex—speak up and tell the person you find such statements offensive. You don't want that person to think you agree with them. Speaking up can be difficult to do, but it can be done tactfully. People can and do learn what is acceptable in a diverse environment.

- **Report incidents you observe.** If you happen to see someone spray-painting a hateful slogan, for example, be a good citizen and report it to the appropriate campus office or the police.
- **Support student groups working for change.** America has a great tradition of college students banding together to help solve social problems. Show your support for groups and activities that celebrate diversity and condemn prejudice. Even if you are a shy, quiet person, your attendance at a parade or gathering lends support. Or you can write a letter to the editor in a student newspaper, help hand out leaflets for an upcoming rally, or put up posters on campus. Once you become aware of such student activities on campus, you'll find many ways you can help take a stand.
- **Celebrate diversity.** In many ways, you can learn more about diversity through campus programs and activities. The more all students participate, the closer the campus will come to being free of prejudice and hate. Be a role model in how you act and what you say in relation to diversity, and you may have more effect on others than you realize.

Dealing with Prejudice

If you yourself experience prejudice or discrimination related to your race or ethnicity, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion, or any other aspect of diversity, don't just try to ignore it or accept it as something that cannot be changed. As discussed earlier, college students can do much to minimize intolerance on campus. Many overt forms of discrimination are frankly illegal and against college policies. You owe it to yourself, first and foremost, to report it to the appropriate college authority.

You can also attack prejudice in other ways. Join a campus organization that works to reduce prejudice or start a new group and discuss ways you can confront the problem and work for a solution. Seek solidarity with other groups. Organize positive celebrations and events to promote understanding. Write an article for a campus publication explaining the values of diversity and condemning intolerance.

What if you are directly confronted by an individual or group making racist or other discriminatory remarks? In an emotionally charged situation, rational dialogue may be difficult or impossible, and a shouting match or name-calling seldom is productive. If the person may have made an offensive remark inadvertently or because of a misunderstanding, then you may be able to calmly explain the problem with what they said or did. Hopefully the person will apologize and learn from the experience. But if the person made the remark or acted that way intentionally, confronting this negative person directly may be difficult and not have a positive outcome. Most important, take care that the situation does not escalate in the direction of violence. Reporting the incident instead to college authorities may better serve the larger purpose of working toward harmony and tolerance.

If you are in the dominant cultural group on your campus, write a paragraph describing values you share with your cultural group. Then list things that students with a different background may have difficulty understanding about your group. If your racial, ethnic, or cultural background is different from the dominant cultural group on your campus, write a paragraph describing how students in the dominant culture seem to differ from your own culture.

Look back at what you just wrote. Did you focus on characteristics that seem either positive or negative? Might there be any stereotypes creeping into your thinking?

Write a second paragraph focusing on yourself as a unique individual, not a part of a group. How would others benefit from getting to know you better?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Diversity refers to a great variety of human characteristics, and ways in which people differ.
- Diversity in the college environment has many benefits for all students, faculty, and others. Students learn more in a diverse setting, are better prepared for the future, and contribute more fully in positive ways to society.
- Nontraditional students bring many unique characteristics to the college environment that help enrich all students' social and educational experiences.
- Multiculturalism involves respecting the ideas, feelings, behaviors, and experiences different from oneself in any way. Colleges promote both diversity in the student body and multiculturalism among all students.
- As an individual, each of us can gain the benefits of diversity as we challenge our own stereotypes, understand and celebrate differences in others, and learn to interact well with others different from ourselves. Take advantage of campus opportunities to increase your cultural awareness and to form social relationships with diverse others.
- Although we would hope that all college campuses would be free of hate and discrimination, it can become necessary to take a stand against prejudice.

CHECKPOINT EXERCISES

1. List as many types of diversity as you can think of.

2. Write a description of someone who is of a different race from yourself but who may not be different ethnically.

3. List several characteristics of *your own* cultural background that may be

different from the cultural background of some others on your campus.

4. For each of the following statements about diversity, circle T for true or F for false:

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| T | F | A diverse educational environment is primarily good for students from minority groups. |
| T | F | Students of traditional college age are usually already too old to be open to new ideas and attitudes learned from others with diverse backgrounds. |
| T | F | We gain insights into ourselves when we learn from others who are different from ourselves. |
| T | F | You can better understand an individual from a cultural group other than your own if you apply generalizations about that other culture to the person. |
| T | F | The best way to avoid a conflict that may arise from cultural differences is to interact only politely and in superficial ways with people who seem different from yourself. |

5. Is it a cultural observation or a stereotype to say, for example, that Mexicans are more relaxed about time commitments than Americans? (Think a minute before answering. How would you justify and explain your answer if challenged? Could both answers be right in some way?)

6. List at least three ways you may be able to increase your cultural awareness and understanding of diversity on your campus.

9.3 Campus Groups

1. Describe several benefits of participating in campus life by joining organized groups and participating in campus activities.
2. Identify how participation in organized activities can promote multiculturalism and a better understanding of diversity.
3. List several ways you can learn about groups and activities on your own campus.

The college social experience also includes organized campus groups and activities. Participating in organized activities requires taking some initiative—you can't be passive and expect these opportunities to come knocking on your door—but is well worthwhile for fully enriching college interactions. The active pursuit of a stimulating life on campus offers many benefits:

- **Organized groups and activities speed your transition into your new life.** New students can be overwhelmed by their studies and every aspect of a new life, and they may be slow to build a new life. Rather than waiting for it to come along on its own, you can immediately begin broadening your social contacts and experiences by joining groups that share your interests.
- **Organized groups and activities help you experience a much greater variety of social life than you might otherwise.** New students often tend to interact more with other students their own age and with similar backgrounds—this is just natural. But if you simply go with the flow and don't actively reach out, you are much less likely to meet and interact with others from the broader campus diversity: students who are older and may have a perspective you may otherwise miss, upper-level students who have much to share from their years on campus, and students of diverse heritage or culture with whom you might otherwise be slow to interact.
- **Organized groups and activities help you gain new skills, whether technical, physical, intellectual, or social.** Such skills may find their way into your résumé when you next seek a job or your application for a scholarship or other future educational opportunity. Employers and others like to see well-rounded students with a range of proficiencies and experiences.
- **Organized groups and activities are fun and a great way to stay healthy and relieve stress.** As [Chapter 10 "Taking Control of Your Health"](#) discusses, exercise and physical activity are essential for health and well-being, and many organized activities offer a good way to keep moving.

Participating in Groups and Activities

College campuses offer a wide range of clubs, organizations, and other activities open to all students. College administrators view this as a significant benefit and work to promote student involvement in such groups. When you made your decision to attend your college, you likely received printed materials or studied the college's Web site and saw many opportunities. But you may have been so busy attending to academic matters that you haven't thought of these groups since. It's a good time now to check out the possibilities:

- Browse the college Web site, where you're likely to find links to pages for student clubs and organizations.
- Watch for club fairs, open houses, and similar activities on campus. Especially near the beginning of the year, an activity fair may include tables set up by many groups to provide students with information. Talk with the representatives from any group in which you may be interested.

- Look for notices on bulletin boards around campus. Student groups really do want new students to join, so they usually try to post information where you can find it.
- Stop by the appropriate college office, such as the student affairs or student activities office or cultural center.
- If you are looking for a group with very specialized interests, check with the academic offices of departments where many students with that interest may be majoring.
- Consider a wide variety of types of organizations. Some are primarily social; some are political or activist; some are based on hobbies (photography, chess, equestrianism, bird watching, videogaming, computer programming); some involve the arts (instrumental music, choral singing, painting, poetry writing, drama club); some are forms of physical recreation (rock-climbing, ballroom dancing, archery, yoga, table tennis, tai chi, team sports); some focus on volunteerism (tutoring other students, community service projects, food drives); and others are related to academic or intellectual pursuits (nursing club, math club, chess club, engineering club, debate club, student literary magazine).
- Consider other forms of involvement and roles beyond clubs. Gain leadership experience by running for office in student government or applying for a residence hall support position. If you are looking for a job, consider what kinds of people you'll have the opportunity to interact with. Chapter 11 "Taking Control of Your Finances" will give you more tips for finding a job.
- If your campus doesn't have a group focused on a particular activity you enjoy yourself, think about starting a new club. Your college will help you get started; talk with the student activities or affairs office.

Whatever your interests, don't be shy about checking out a club or organization. Take chances and explore. Attending a meeting or gathering is not a commitment—you're just going the first time to see what it's like, and you have no obligation to join. Keep an open mind as you meet and observe other students in the group, especially if you don't feel at first like you fit in: remember that part of the benefit of the experience is to meet others who are not necessarily just like everyone you already know.

EXERCISE: EXPLORE YOUR INTERESTS FOR COLLEGE CLUBS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Write things you may be interested in doing with others in each of these categories.

| Clubs Related to Hobbies and Personal Interests | Sports, Exercise, Physical Fitness | Interests Related to Your Major Area of Study | Purely for Fun |
|---|------------------------------------|---|----------------|
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Bridging the Generation Gap

Is there still a “generation gap” in our society? Maybe not in the same sense as when that phrase came into being in the 1960s, but it remains generally true that most people naturally gravitate toward others of similar age. Even in the open, accepting environment of most colleges, many students interact primarily with others of similar age—which, sadly, misses a great opportunity for both older and younger students to learn from each other.

Younger, “traditional” students just out of high school usually live in residence halls and immediately meet other students of the same age. New students who are just a few years older, who usually have spent some time in the workforce before returning to their education, are more likely to live in a house or apartment and probably spend less time on campus interacting with other students. Some students may be decades older than both traditional and most untraditional students, returning to college sometimes with the desire to change careers or simply to take classes of special interest; their lives may be so well settled in other respects that they have little interest at all in the social world of college. Students in all of these groups may be slow to initiate interactions with each other.

This is one of the great benefits of organized campus groups and activities, however. Regardless of your age or background, you can attend a meeting of those with similar interests and have the opportunity to meet people you simply would not have crossed paths with otherwise. Age barriers rapidly break down when people share the same interests.

When and How to Say No

For all the benefits of an active social and campus life, too much of any good thing can also cause trouble. If you join too many groups, or if you have limited time because of work and family commitments, you may spend less time with your studies—with negative results. Here are some guidelines for finding a good balance between social life and everything else you need to do:

- Don't join too many organizations or clubs. Most advisors suggest that two or three regular activities are the maximum that most students can handle.
- Work on your time management skills, as described in [Chapter 2 "Staying Motivated, Organized, and On Track"](#). Plan ahead for study time when you don't have schedule conflicts. If you have a rich social life, study in the library or places where you won't be tempted by additional social interaction with a roommate, family member, or others passing by.
- Don't be afraid to say no. You may be active in a club and have plenty of time for routine activities, but someone may ask you to spend extra time organizing an

upcoming event just when you have a major paper deadline coming up. Sometimes you have to remember the main reason you're in college and just say you can't do it because you have to get your work done.

- If you really can't resolve your time conflicts, seek help. Talk with your advisor or a college counselor. They'll help you get back on track.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- College students with an active social life and who interact with the campus community are generally more successful academically as well.
- Organized groups and activities promote a more varied and diverse social experience.
- Students participating in organized groups and activities gain skills that may become important for job and other professional applications.
- Most campuses offer a large variety of opportunities for involvement in clubs, associations, and other activities.
- Take the initiative to find organizations and activities you will most enjoy.
- To balance your social life and academic studies, avoid joining too many organizations and use your time management skills.

CHECKPOINT EXERCISES

1. List two specific skills (technical, intellectual, or social) that you personally may gain or improve by participating in a campus club or organization.

2. What events or campus groups have you noticed on a campus bulletin board or poster recently that caught your eye?

3. What academic subject might you major in? Imagine yourself joining a club formed by students in that major. What kinds of things might you do or talk about in such a club? (Use your imagination as you consider how you can have fun with others in such a club.)

9.4 Chapter Activities

Chapter Takeaways

- An active social life and social interaction with a variety of people on campus contribute to college students' well-being and overall academic success.
- Successfully interacting with diverse others requires effective communication skills, including both listening skills and assertive communication rather than passive or aggressive communication.
- Social interaction can be heightened by productive and moderate online networking.
- Time management and study skills help one avoid problems when balancing social life and academic studies.
- To prevent or resolve conflicts that may occur in any social interaction, maintain an attitude of respect for others, be open minded and willing to compromise, and know how to work together calmly to resolve conflicts.
- Diversity on campus is beneficial for all students, not just those from ethnic or minority groups. The wider perspectives of students from different backgrounds and the greater variety of teaching methods help everyone gain more fully in educational experiences. Socially, students develop a more mature worldview and are better prepared for interacting with a diverse world in the future.
- Multiculturalism involves an attitude of respect for the ideas, feelings, behaviors, and experiences of others who differ from oneself in any way. Colleges promote both diversity in the student body and multiculturalism among all students.
- To gain a multicultural perspective, challenge your own learned stereotypes while you learn more about other cultural groups. Understanding what can be learned from others leads to celebrating the diversity found on most campuses.
- Take a personal responsibility both for broadening your own social world and for speaking out against prejudice and discrimination wherever encountered.
- Take advantage of campus opportunities to increase your cultural awareness and to form social relationships with diverse others. Organized campus groups and events can help you broaden your horizons in many beneficial ways.
- Participation in campus clubs and other organizations is not only fun and a good way to reduce stress but also helps develop social, intellectual, and technical skills that may serve you well in your future career or other endeavors.

CHAPTER REVIEW

1. List at least three benefits of social interaction with a variety of different people on your college campus.

2. Describe what is involved in being a "good friend" to someone you have just recently met.

3. What can you do to demonstrate that you are really listening to the other person in a conversation?

4. Mark each of the following communication strategies as passive, assertive, or aggressive:

◦ Showing your very critical reaction to another's ideas:

◦ Agreeing with everything another person says: _____

◦ Hesitating to say something the other may disagree with:

◦ Being honest and confident when expressing your ideas:

◦ Joking sarcastically about something the other says: _____

◦ Offering your opinion while respecting other opinions:

5. True or false: Interactions on Facebook can strengthen one's personal relationships with others and make it easier to participate socially in a group.

6. Give two examples of how you can use time management skills to ensure you get your studies done while still maintaining an active social life.

7. Write an "I statement" sentence you might say to prevent a heated argument with another student who has just told a sexist joke.

8. Imagine this scenario: eight white college students between the ages of eighteen and twenty from a large U.S. city are spending a summer in a poverty-stricken rural Indonesian village in a volunteer project. Describe several behavioral characteristics of these students as an ethnic minority group that may not be understood by the villagers.

9. Imagine yourself working in your chosen career five years from now. Describe two experiences you may have in that career for which your current experience with diverse people on campus may help prepare you.

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10. What insights into your own attitudes, behaviors, or values have you gained through interactions with others different from yourself? Think of specific aspects of yourself that you have come to view in a new light.

11. What's wrong with the following statement? "People are what they are and you can't change them. The best thing you can do when someone's showing their prejudice is just walk away and don't let it bother you."

12. As you read the chapter section on clubs and organizations and all the possibilities that are likely on your campus, what thoughts did you have about your own interests? What kind of club would be ideal for you? If your college campus happens not to have that club at present, would you get together with others with similar interests to start one?

13. Read this case study and answer the following questions:

The International Student Office is sponsoring South Asian Night, a celebration in which students from this region will be showcasing their cultures and ethnic foods. Two groups of students, from India and Pakistan, have had disagreements during the planning and rehearsals. They have argued about how much time each group is allotted for their performances and how high on the evening's agenda their performances are scheduled. The conflict escalates and threatens cancellation of the whole celebration, which the school and the campus community have been looking forward to.

- a. If you were the director of the International Student Office, how would you handle this situation?

- b. What would you say to these two groups of students? What process would you use?

OUTSIDE THE BOOK

1. Visit your college's Web site and look for a section on student activities and organizations. Try to identify two or three groups you might be interested to learn more about.
2. Next time you walk across campus or through the student center, stop to look at bulletin boards and posters. Look for upcoming events that celebrate cultural diversity in some way. Read the information in detail and imagine how much fun the event might be while you also learn something new. Then ask a friend to go with you.
3. Go to <http://www.understandingrace.org/lived/sports/index.html>—a Web site of the American Anthropological Association—and take the short online sports quiz. Many things have been said about why certain races or people from certain geographic areas excel at certain sports. People often talk about differences in biology and other differences among ethnic groups as related to sports. How much is true, partly true, or blatantly false? How much do you know about what are real or not real differences?

MAKE AN ACTION LIST

Friendships

Sometimes I'm not as good a friend as I could be because I

I will work on the following things to be a better friend:

Social Interaction

Sometimes I have difficulty interacting well with these people:

I will use these communication techniques for more successful interactions in the future:

Communication Style

Sometimes I am too passive when talking with these people:

I can do these things to be more assertive in my communication:

Balance of Studies and Social Life

I sometimes don't get enough studying done because I am busy doing the following:

I will ensure I have enough time for studying by taking these steps:

Family Life

Since I am so busy with college now, I may have ignored my relationship(s) with

I will do better to stay in touch by

Diversity on Campus

I admit to knowing very little about these groups of people I often see on campus:

By this time next year, I hope to be more culturally aware as a result of doing these things more often:

Campus Activities

I would really enjoy doing the following one thing more often with other people:

To participate in this activity with a variety of people, I will look on campus for a club or group such as the following:

I can do these things to learn more about this club:

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