

Excerpt from

Giving Away the Keys

**A Professor Unlocks the Secrets
to College Success**

by Bruce R. Gibbs

Part 1: Arriving on Campus

1. Know Your Professor

Never forget this: your college professors want you to succeed. They want you to pass their classes and move up to the next level. So get to know these people who are on your side. And this means more than just learning their names. If your professors have office hours, pay them a visit. If you are new to a class, drop by, introduce yourself, and let the professor know who you are. But don't overuse the office hour or try to suck up to them; they know if you're being sincere. Besides, they are generally busy and overworked. If office visits aren't available, try sending an email to introduce yourself.

Professors like students who are motivated and look for those who want to be in their classes and want to work on projects. You may not always agree with the assignment the professor gives, but you should give it your best shot

and strive to impress upon the professor that you intend holding up your part of the deal by completing all assigned work.

Professors have radar that easily spots motivated students. You can spot them, too. They're the ones who show up for class on time, contribute to class discussions, and turn in on-time assignments that do more than just regurgitate what the professor said. Professors want you to think for yourself and apply what you learn.

When professors see you are really trying and want to succeed, most will gladly help you. The ones who may not help are those who are lecturing huge classes and, for lack of time, just can't provide individual attention.

If you're having problems in class, talk to your professor *before* it gets too late. What's *too late*? The last week of class is definitely too late. As soon as you realize that you're falling behind or not understanding the class material, immediately pay your professor a visit, explain the situation, and see what he or she recommends. Getting to know your professor can help you more than you might think.



2. Know School Officials

When people are starting a business, what's one of the suggestions they are given? To raise capital, first start with family and friends. Why is this? Because these are people you know. These are people who know you. They trust you, and they believe in you. These people have spent time with you and have a vested interest in you. This type of thinking cuts across all walks of life, even college.

It always helps to know people. At school you are surrounded by people who yield power. From the financial aid advisor to the dorm monitor, these people hold power that you may one day need on your side.

Get to know people on campus. This includes administrators, as well as faculty members. And, get to know people before you need their help. People can tell when you want something from them. If you wait until you need them, they may be less likely to open themselves up to you. But, if you take the time to get to know them in advance, you will have made a friend. Today you may need the professor's help, but tomorrow you may need your department's administrative assistant help. The key is to be nice to everyone.

Am I suggesting that you get to know people just so you can get something from them? No. Getting to know these people is a fun process. These people may become life long friends. I am not advocating these people could or would do something illegal or unfair. I'm saying it's harder to say no to a friend than a stranger. That's just a fact. So, get to know people, and help them when you can. If you

do, it's much more likely they'll go out of their way to do the same for you when you need help.

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3. Class on Time

Let's say I'm supposed to meet you at an agreed upon time and place, and you have a lot of information I've asked you to share with me. You are on time, but I'm not. Maybe I don't even show up. Okay, how would that make you feel?

Now turn that around and you'll understand how professors react when you are late for or cut class. By signing up for a course, you agree to meet with that professor at a set time and place. He has gone to the trouble of collecting a lot of information you need. If you aren't in your seat on time, every time, you shouldn't be surprised if his nose becomes a bit out of joint. After all, professors are human, too. Even though we may not seem to show it at times, every professor worthy of the title wants you to succeed in your college studies. We want you to excel, and we want you to graduate. Helping to assure your future success is the reason we teach. Trust me, we surely don't do it for the money.

By being on time for class, you tell the professor that you want to succeed. Don't be fooled into thinking that an professor who doesn't take roll isn't aware of who is and who isn't present – even when there are hundreds of students enrolled in a class. Your attendance and promptness record form the yardstick professors use to measure your determination to succeed.

I remember a student who came to see me during office hours, asking for help with some material she didn't understand. Do you think the fact that she was frequently

late for class, seldom took notes, and hadn't bothered to even attend class on the day I covered the material she considered a problem had any affect on my attitude concerning helping her? Of course. So I did what most professors in that situation do. I suggested she find someone who had taken good notes in class and ask to copy them. No professor should be expected to hold private classes for students who really aren't eager to learn. On the other hand, most professors are more than willing to spend extra time with students who are doing their best but still find the material difficult. I certainly am.

If someone surveyed professors, concerning their pet peeves, I'm convinced that late-for-class students and no-shows would top the list. The reason for this goes beyond disrespecting the professor. A sloppy attendance record also shows lack of consideration for your fellow students who are there to learn. Who knows? The person sitting next to you in class may turn out to be an important contact a few years from now.

Let's also put all of this on an even more personal level. Have you thought about how it affects *you*? One of the major lessons we all learn from the college experience is how to deal with others and building successful habits. I assure you that, in the business world, arriving late for a meeting loses you points. Why? It's obvious; people aren't eager to do business with anyone who is too disorganized to be punctual, wastes their time, and is inconsiderate.

Being on time in the business world and in the academic world means you need to go to bed at a reasonable hour and set your alarm clock a few minutes earlier. You should also allow for things beyond your control, such as a late bus or heavy traffic. If you get to class five minutes early every day, that's not five minutes wasted. That's time you can use to relax and look over the

class material again. (I say “again” because, as a good student, you have already read the material. Right?)

Just keep in mind that professors want you to take an interest in their class material. I realize there is an occasional required course that doesn’t give you a thrill. Still, since you are paying the tuition, you should want to learn the information that’s presented to you. More often than not, a required subject you don’t want to take is the very one in which your skills are weakest.

So get in the habit of being on time. In the real world, it’s a habit that can double – even triple – your income.

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4. Keeping in Contact with Family

I know you're glad to be on your own and that you're finally getting out from under your family's roof. You're an adult now, and you're living life on your own terms. This may all be true but you never want to forget or lose touch with your family. Take some time out of your busy schedule to call or send your parents a note. They will love hearing from you. And if you have siblings at home, send them a note, also. Family is too important to forget when you are away at college. I'm not advocating calling home everyday, but stay in touch with family members so that they know you are alive, well, and thinking about them.

Some of you may ask, "Why should I call home? They know how I am doing. Do they? Do they really know what you are going through at school? Your family is proud of your accomplishment of getting into college. They want to hear from you; yes, they want to hear from you even if you didn't ace that chemistry exam. Besides, you're not calling just to tell them about you. Don't you want to know how your family is doing? How are they getting along now that you're not there everyday?"

How can keeping in touch with family make you a better student? It can help ease your fears. Connecting back to your home life can give you a feeling of security. Connecting with family gives you something familiar to hold on to in the midst of all the change that's around you on campus. Family can also give you confidence. There will be many things at college that you will feel you can't accomplish. But your family can encourage you to keep trying and keep pushing forward. When this happens, you

become confident about yourself and what you can accomplish.

Keep in touch with your family members' lives. It keeps you grounded; it keeps you mindful of your roots. Like the saying goes: if you don't know where you've been, you really don't know where you're headed.

