## Challenges of College: Insights From the Research Literature

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<th>Issue</th>
<th>Implication</th>
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<td><strong>Issue 1:</strong> College courses are not direct continuations of high school courses, for several reasons.</td>
<td>A student may have studied a topic (e.g., the Civil War or photosynthesis) in high school; however, this topic may be presented quite differently in college. For example, a college class may be more devoted to controversies surrounding a topic than “the facts” about the topic itself. In addition, college classes, especially language courses, move much faster than they do in most high schools. Assessments may differ significantly in courses of all types, as well.</td>
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<td><strong>Issue 2:</strong> It is difficult to predict what a specific college class will include. Due to “academic freedom,” there are few common standards for college students, so there may be considerable variation in requirements and assessments, even for classes with the same title.</td>
<td>Students need to be prepared to be rhetorically flexible, to be open to how objectives, lectures, and assessments are presented, even in a class where they believe they should be familiar with the content and processes required. They cannot assume that their college composition/rhetorical classes will be like their high school English classes, nor that their college biology classes will cover the same material—or have the same expectations—as their high school biology classes. New college students have been shocked by the fact that their course grades are based on few assessments, perhaps two tests in a semester. Thus, students need to be open to the different ways that college instructors may organize their courses, present their syllabi, and assess student progress.</td>
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| **Issue 3:** College faculty expect students to already have the key academic skills required to succeed in their courses—and the study habits that will support the enhancement of these skills. | According to ACT News (April, 2007), high school standards are too broad—and not deep enough—so “key academic skills needed for success in college get the short shrift.” Here are some examples from that publication:  
  - In mathematics, high school teachers tend to give advanced content greater importance than do college instructors. College instructors rate a rigorous understanding of math fundamentals as more important than advanced content.  
  - In science and history/social science, high school teachers rate knowledge of specific facts as more important than processes, analyses, or inquiry skills. College instructors rate these in the opposite way. |
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<th>Issue 4: Critical thinking demands in college are often different from those in high school. Most college faculty are much more interested in analysis and synthesis—and a deep understanding of complex material—than they are in “facts” that students have learned in high school.</th>
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<td>When students ask college faculty whether they should read, or write, about “facts” or “opinions” in their classes, the faculty members often scoff at this contrast, which is essential to many high school assessments of critical thinking. In college, faculty want students to identify (or produce) an argument, based upon evidence from reliable sources (perhaps including facts), observation, or experimentation. Argumentation is essential for all academic disciplines (see AVID College Readiness, Teacher Resource 1.9b, pp. 98–103), and understanding the types of claims and evidence characteristic of different disciplines is central to academic success.</td>
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- **Analysis/Synthesis v. Facts**
  - Upper level Bloom's
  - v. lower
  - **Argumentation essential**

- **Issue 5: Assignment prompts in college can be complex, incomplete, or deceptive.**

- **Issue 6: College requires much more student independence on academic, personal, and financial levels.**

- The most important predictors of academic success in college are the student's self-discipline and motivation, as well as the ability to concentrate and read and write independently. However, successful students also know how to make use of the assistance on campus when they need it. For academic assistance, they visit faculty during their office hours to ask questions about class requirements, demonstrating that they are motivated—and studying (see AVID College Readiness, Student Handout 2.6e, pp. 226–227). Outside of class, they join clubs that represent their major or interest group, and they organize study groups consisting of other students who are focused and determined to succeed.
References:


