

# Chapter 10

## Looking Forward/ Looking Back: Claiming a University Education

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Students arrive excited to be in college, but when the semester starts there is a seemingly shared, static view of what a college education is. That static notion includes the teacher having the knowledge and the students showing up to class to be filled with that information to then regurgitate on a high-stakes test. The author is genuinely curious about students' reactions to course reading; even when the students are convinced that the author has predetermined notions of what the "best" things to get out of the reading are, the author often challenges that assumed banking model of education where the teacher knows best, and learning is just a means to a grade to talk about how to leverage all the resources that being on a college campus opens up for them inside the classroom and across campus. A great part of this job is meeting students at the very start of their college experience. This location, at the very start of students' time in college, gives the author a unique perspective on how students bridge K-12 school with college.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Students show up in my first-year college classroom eager but skittish. There are lots of reasons for this, but one they tell me over and over is they were told their college professors won't care about them. They tell me how they were told they will have to "keep up or be left behind." They also have voices in their lives reminding them how expensive college is (and it is!), so pick a major that will lead to a career: medicine, nursing, and business all seem to directly flow from college to job by those who are talking to students. Grind through college quickly so you can get a job. One common strategy is to take all the AP and early college credits they can so they don't have to do the "extra" classes in college because, it seems, general education curriculum is seen as something to get through rather than a foundation for all learning that can happen in college. In those voices are very real issues: college is expensive, and we need jobs to live. Choosing a major is important and it can influence, but not completely predict, your career after college. Even choosing to come to university is something to be considered against other, equally valid, paths like community college, trade schools, apprenticeships, entrepreneurship, and careers.

Taking into consideration who I am teaching is important. I teach residential students in an academic program designed for first- and second-year students. My office is in their residence hall and they see me in and out of the classroom. There is no singular description of a college student and how people find and choose their university is a complex algorithm that includes affordability, location, and academic interests (Ezarik, 2022). My institution is designated a minority serving institution (MSI) with a third of students classified as first-generation college students and almost 50% Pell Grant eligible based on family income (OSP News, 2019). We are a regional university and most of our students come from about a 2-hour radius around our city. While my program requires an additional application, it reflects the demographics of our institution. This means my students are often the first in their family to go to college and almost all of them have financial aid packages. They are aware of the cost of college and talk about the impacts of their education on their family and their community. In the two years they are part of the program, many students work part time locally or go home to work on the weekends. Opportunities like internships and leadership roles, if unpaid, are sometimes not considered. As college has gotten more expensive and the increase in the public discourse on the value of higher education has reached a fever pitch, I see the reality of students navigating these waters from a unique perspective because the classroom I teach in and the office I advise in are in their residence hall. I see many of them almost every day and my office as long as my office door is open, they are free to come in.

Students arrive in my classroom excited to be in college, but when we start our semester there is a seemingly shared, static view of what a college education is. As

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