



Five ways college can prepare you for a career

📅 10/21/20



By Seeta Mangra-Stubbs

Red ink on papers. \$300 textbooks. An 8 a.m. math classes you might never use: Maybe college never sounded worth it to you, but everyone says getting a degree or at least some college experience makes a difference in finding a good job. So, what's the answer to making that college education relevant to landing a career? The answer is skill building.

Instead of focusing on English, math, or history as the subjects, what an educator asks you to do is where the real lessons are. Here are five opportunities to translate your higher education experience into workforce skills:

Interactions

While every college class is structured differently, you'll have to interact with someone along the way. That might be the instructor, your fellow students, or a librarian—and often they are total strangers. This is the same in the workforce. You'll interact with your supervisor, your coworkers, another staff member, or new clients and customers. Think deeper about how you're managing those interactions. Are you listening carefully and respectfully? Are you engaging in a respectful way? Are you asking questions? Now is the time to build those communication skills to use in the workforce.

Networking

There's nothing scarier than walking into a room, not knowing anyone, and feeling immediately judged. That happens in both a new classroom and at networking events. Both can be so intimidating that some folks simply won't do either. But you can use higher education to work on feeling comfortable in new groups. You can learn—even in small steps—to introduce yourself. You can leverage relationships in one class to help in another, such as asking one instructor to introduce you to another just as you might ask a colleague to introduce you to a CEO. We build relationships and social connections in college just as we would at work, and these relationships may even help connect you to a first job.

Teamwork

A lot of us don't love working in groups. Someone inevitably doesn't pull their weight. They're what sociology calls the "social loafer," and who wants to carry a loaf around when you're doing hard work? However, learning to motivate your group members or assign roles in college group work teaches you to pull the best out of our coworkers, to delegate or assign tasks, and to encourage involvement by asking everyone for their thoughts. Most challenges in group work stem from insecurities among those participating, and if you know that, you can support your team members and lead your group to success.

Critical thinking

This term gets thrown around a lot in colleges and universities, but it's not always easy to explain the relevance to employment. To think critically means to think about thinking. Not helpful? Try this: If you're asked to complete a task at work that's completely new to you, you have to troubleshoot it. This might mean figuring out how you work best, looking for problems to solve, thinking through how to solve those problems in a step-by-step process, etc. If you use college classes to practice your critical thinking skills when working on new projects or facing new challenges, you'll feel confident and ready for the same struggles at work.

Soft skills

Nearly every employer wants someone with strong soft skills, such as good time management, flexibility, and ability to communicate. Oftentimes, college orientation classes introduce you to these ideas because you'll need them in every class—let alone daily life. For instance, working 40 hours a week, taking two classes, and caring for your family may mean you don't have a lot of free time. But the ability to manage your time wisely, communicate your needs, set boundaries, and demonstrate flexibility and adaptability as a student shows you are ready for the workforce where you'll do the same things. Building these skills in college can help you become not only a strong worker but a leader in your field.

Translate your skills to a job

In truth, employers want the same skills you learn in class. Even if you hate the math homework, then learning to adapt, develop the discipline, and gain something meaningful even in unenviable situations will make you an asset. These are the skills you should also highlight on your resume when it comes time to apply for that job.

Find other tips for seeking a job by clicking the button below to access the guide:

[TAGS: Thriving Workforce](#)