

The background of the cover is a light yellow-green color. It is decorated with several stylized, light green leaf motifs that appear to be floating or falling from the top left towards the bottom right. These motifs are scattered across the entire page, adding a natural and organic feel to the design.

LAUNCH YOUR CAREER IN COLLEGE

Strategies for Students, Educators, and Parents

Adele M. Scheele

 **Greenwood**
PUBLISHING GROUP

Launch Your Career in College

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Strategies for Students, Educators, and Parents

Adele M. Scheele

Foreword by Alexander W. Astin

PRAEGER

**Westport, Connecticut
London**

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Scheele, Adele M.

Launch your career in college : strategies for students, educators, and parents / Adele M. Scheele ; foreword by Alexander W. Astin.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-275-98512-1 (alk. paper)

1. College student orientation. 2. College students—Vocational guidance. 3. College students—Employment. 4. Career development. 5. Business networks. 6. School-to-work transition. I. Title.

LB2343.3.S32 2005

378.1'98—dc22

2005018684

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2005018684

ISBN: 0-275-98512-1

First published in 2005

Praeger Publishers, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881

An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

www.praeger.com

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48-1984)

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To my husband, Mercer David Distler

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Foreword

One of the common mistakes that prospective college students make is to assume a passive stance toward their college experience: “What can this college do for me?” Adele Scheele’s basic message in this lively and informative book is a very different and empowering one: “What can I do that will enrich my college experience and enhance my career development?”

Taking a proactive stance toward one’s higher education experience not only opens doors and widens one’s range of options; it also changes the individual by developing new knowledge, new skills, and new perspectives. Scheele thus likens the college and graduate school experience to a kind of laboratory, where the student uses all of the available resources—people, programs, and facilities—as tools for learning and creating opportunities.

In putting forward her many creative suggestions for how to take charge of your own higher education experience, Scheele makes an important point that most students are probably only vaguely aware of: our educational system tends to encourage student passivity and conformity through its regimented system of uniform curricular requirements, course assignments, testing, and grading. Classroom teachers are well aware of this problem, whereby many students seem content merely to comply with whatever it is that they think their instructor expects—no more, no less.

Scheele’s basic point is that this kind of passivity and compliance on the part of the student represents a wasted opportunity to learn, develop, and prepare for the future beyond college.

Scheele’s many specific suggestions can be especially valuable for commuter students and for that substantial majority of college students who attend large public institutions. Thus, while passive or reticent students who attend small private residential colleges may be “noticed” by fellow students or by faculty or staff, who might subsequently encourage them to become more engaged, such students can spend four or five years

attending a large public institution, not have any significant interaction either with student peers or with institutional personnel, and not be noticed by anyone.

If there is a single, fundamental principle that informs Scheele's wide-ranging advice, it would be to cultivate relationships, not just with fellow students, but also with professors, advisors, administrators, recruiters, and professionals in the field. The opportunities for initiating and nurturing such relationships are everywhere: the classroom, the private office, meetings, workshops, job interviews, social and cultural events, volunteer work, and the many dozens of student organizations that one finds on the typical campus.

While most of the book is devoted to showing students how to get the most out of the college experience, Chapter 8 nicely complements the other chapters by providing extremely useful information concerning how to go about finding a job. Among the many critical topics covered are résumés, application letters, references, and that most critical of all events—the job interview. Even people who are decades beyond their college years could benefit from reading this chapter.

While Scheele has wisely made this book readily accessible to the reader by avoiding the use of distracting footnotes and references, much of what she is recommending has, in fact, been supported by systematic research on college students. Thus, when she speaks of the benefits to be derived from such diverse experiences as membership in student organizations, volunteer service, and internships and when she advises the student to forge close connections with other students and with professors, there is a considerable body of empirical research evidence to back her up. Indeed, perhaps the most important practical generalization to be derived from the many hundreds of studies that have been done on college students is right at the heart of Scheele's wise counsel: if you want to get the most of our your college experience, get involved.

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Preface

This book is a guide to finding yourself in college by being active and not just letting things happen. I have included inspiring stories of highly successful people whose college lives, by their own admission, were not so clearly defined at the beginning. Yet, they made their way through the sometimes unplanned or chaotic process to find intellectual challenges, connections, and opportunities that led them to realize their passionate pursuits, their callings. You, too, can learn college success skills that will allow you to learn how to identify your talents and passions and find direction from mentors, assignments, and projects. You can make college even more significant than you ever dared to dream.

I understand college from every side now. I learned each time I enrolled as a student—earning a BS, an MA, and then a PhD. I learned from teaching in high school and college and from conducting corporate training programs. I learned from interviewing achievers about their college and professional experiences and from my career-coaching clients, who shared their achievements and frustrations. For years I have been regularly giving presentations to business organizations, encouraging their members to live more productively and purposefully, and to college classes, teaching students to think about how to “use” college in the largest sense possible.

My intention is so much greater than simply helping you pass your courses, get good grades, or just do adequate work. I hope that you will learn to develop the life skills that will enable you, too, to work and live more meaningfully. After all, it is the reason you are coming to college and investing your time, money, and hope.

College sounds so simple: apply, get accepted, and fulfill your requirements. However, that is less than half the story of the glory that you can find in college—if you are willing. Too often, students miss out. Even smart students misuse their college years. Let me show you the profound difference between being just a good student and being an adventurous,

proactive student. By choosing proactivity, you open yourself to the transforming power of college and graduate school. Higher education offers you the chance to have quality time with professors—great thinkers whose brilliance can direct or redirect your lives. College is a time to forge such relationships. It is a time to experiment with ideas and leadership in clubs, activities, and new programs. It is the truest training ground. College can be a catalyst for your life, if you pursue it that way, and if you are willing to be active and give up a more passive role of just following instructions.

I hope you are listening. I hope you will think about the ideas in this book and try them. If you do, you are bound to change your life for the good, even for the great! Because I have made finding your calling my own passionate calling, think of me as your coach, and allow each chapter to act as a session. I welcome your experiences.

Acknowledgments

I am lucky to have Susan Slesinger, Praeger Publishers' Editor, as a true friend. She is not only a brilliant editor, but she is also encouraging and empathetic, a rare combination. And she shares my profound belief that the ideas in this book deserve to live.

I also have had the good fortune to have Ann Morey, my genius successor as director of Cal State Northridge's career center, at my side for nine years. She has enthusiastically joined me in extending the notion that a student can transform a meager life of waiting in line for life to happen into the adventure of an explorer of all that college can offer. Victor Diamante has been my computer savior, guru, and formatter; I hired him as a part-time tech assistant when he was a freshman, and now he works full-time in a larger department. Technologically intuitive, he has never, ever let me down. Thanks, too, to Nancy Worsham, who gathered student FAQs and helped put ideas in order.

I am indebted to great friends whose support has meant so much. Millie Loeb has always been a source of strength and ready repartee on the promise of books, college, politics, and work. Nancy Hathaway, a writer herself, read my manuscript at the eleventh hour and buoyed me up with her enthusiasm for these ideas, which do not usually appear in college books. Janet Albaugh, with her succinct and precise knowledge and style, turned endless lists into paragraphs and helped reorganize ideas.

In my own college experience, enrolling in three academic programs, each seven years apart, I sought out the best professors I could find. I was rewarded every time. In ways they will never know, each of them inspired me and helped shape my life. Here are just some of their names to share with you: at the University of Pennsylvania's undergraduate program, Woody Woodhouse, Moshe Greenberg, and Morse Peckam; at Cal State Northridge's Graduate English Fellowship, Harry Stone and Ann Stanford; and at UCLA in the Change Management Doctoral Fellowship, Helen S. Astin, a courageous and inspiring mentor, who chaired my dissertation committee and became a lifelong friend.

Finally, here's to students everywhere, who might turn college into a catalyst and make it their own personal laboratory to discover the ways that brilliant professors, exciting programs, and chance events can transform their future by opening and expanding new vistas, opportunities, and dreams.

Chapter 1

Transforming the College Experience

Education is not filling a bucket but lighting a fire.

—William Butler Yeats

College is an experiment in hope. It is also a risky investment of thousands of dollars and many years of study. Whether it is a matter of graduate or undergraduate school, a 2-year or an 8-year program—the 2000 Current Population Survey found that fifteen million people dedicate part of their lives to attending college. For the time and money spent, students rightly expect a great return in the form of a professional career. Having a college degree makes students nearly 40% more likely to gain access to jobs of importance and allows for quick career advancement beyond the entry level. Still, we expect even more: a ticket to the outside world and an enhanced identity.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Here's an example of someone who was a good student and did everything she thought was right. But she couldn't find a job after she graduated and thought she had wasted her college experience. This, like all the stories included in this book, is a true story.

Suzie's Story: Voulez-Vouz Fries with That?

Suzie was used to getting As. She graduated at the top of her small liberal arts college class with a BA in French—went to class and studied by

day, and waited tables at a local coffee shop at night. Suzie hoped that a job in Paris, the city of her dreams, would be hers after graduation. Near the end of her last semester, Suzie mailed out dozens of letters requesting job information, but she didn't get a single response. To her disappointment, Suzie discovered that getting employment overseas with an American company was a plum assignment given as a reward to those who were already working in that company. There were two other alternatives open to her—teaching or applying to graduate school—but she didn't want to do either. Depressed, Suzie felt that college had been a complete failure, a waste of her time and money.

But it didn't have to be like that at all. Suzie's major was definitely not wasted: studying another language and culture is, in itself, profoundly valuable. It's just not enough. By not *using* college in an active, engaging way, Suzie failed to uncover and create valuable opportunities. While she was not totally passive, she was *unimaginative*. Just think of what she could have done while she was in college to chart her path to Paris if she had thought of the following opportunities.

1. She could have gotten to know her French professors by talking to them during office hours and/or by working for them. They might, in turn, find interesting projects for her and connect her to potential employers.
2. She could have chosen a French import business as a project and/or written a paper about it, interviewing some key people who might have led her to an exciting career.
3. She could have volunteered at the French consulate, making contacts for future friendships or networking.
4. She could have worked as a translator at the mayor's office in her college town and may have found a variety of prospects.
5. She could have worked part time at a bank based in France, getting exposure to people doing business there.
6. She could have waited tables at a French restaurant rather than a coffee shop, connecting herself to a French chef or owner and even French customers or suppliers.
7. She could have developed her leadership skills by joining the French club and becoming an officer and inviting French artists, politicians, and business people to campus. Great leads might have come through these contacts.
8. She could have spent her junior year in France, working or volunteering part time for an American company with offices in Paris. This might have led to a job offer after graduation.

Pursuing these projects and cocurricular activities would have taken time, courage, research, and energy. But any one of them would have paid off for Suzie with more than just the job she was looking for. These explorations would have developed her sense of courage and maybe even ignited some passion for a way to use her talents. It certainly would have been a lot more fun. These opportunities could have been building blocks to construct her future—and perhaps a passport to Paris, as well as into her heart. How might this kind of thinking work for you in your major? What could you do now?

You can apply these imaginative activities to enhance what you are required to do and the major you have chosen. This book is about your taking action in college where you thought you should be passive. But there is every chance for you to be proactive. For example, use test-taking or paper-writing as ways to learn about successful people, great companies, professional fields, or challenging ideas. You can stimulate and discover your own interests so that your dreams have a chance of being fulfilled. Combining your curriculum with your life is a great way to create a set of goals that lead to self-discovery.

Dare to experience college as your own *laboratory*, not as an isolated ivory tower. In order to do that, you have to view college as a source of people, contacts, ideas, power, creativity, and opportunity. If you do, you'll find that the real possibilities of college can be as open-ended as you are open-minded and willing to take risks. It requires exploration of what is yet unknown to you but is beckoning. Change is scary; be brave.

When it comes down to it, you are the one who figures out how to “use” college. It can be either a continuation of merely fulfilling other people's assignments, a time-out from the real world, or it can be a head start into the real world as you create it and contribute to it. It is what you make it. And through your college experience, you shape your future self.

We usually assume that we just have to register for classes, show up regularly, do our assignments, and then the rewards will all come—we will begin a rewarding life. We expect to be made acceptable, valuable, knowledgeable, and finally prepared for graduate school or immediate professional employment. We also assume that by graduation, everything will suddenly become clear: we will find our callings automatically and then have a guarantee for a successful career. This expectation, seldom conscious, lies deep in our hearts. We expect the promise will be fulfilled, but we don't know how.

*Nothing will work
unless you do.*

—Maya Angelou

Using College as Your Laboratory for Self-Discovery

I have counseled thousands of people who once had faith in this magic. All of them had wanted something to happen to them after they had enrolled in college or signed up for a course; all of them had been keenly disappointed when the expected alchemy didn't take place. It took them years to discover that, when all you do is show up, such a transformation doesn't *just happen*. You have to *actively make it happen*. You went crazy trying to get accepted into college—now you need to make college yield an intellectual, social, and vocational life.

If you believe in magic, then you must learn to become the magician. You are the only one who can turn yourself into what you want to be—even if, at the beginning, you don't know what that is. If you are really smart, you will want a lot more for yourself than merely making the grade, getting a degree, and finding a job. Don't be satisfied with just going to college and getting several years older, unless you are content to sleepwalk through life. Learn to recognize your *passivity*—whether it's a little or a lot—and *avoid it*. Instead, use the time for all it's worth. You're paying for it—make it pay off. College is the ideal time to explore opportunities for the future.

You explore life by participating in it and by making it as intellectual, creative, and fulfilling as you can through a process of change, experimentation, belonging, and contributing. The journey will be both painful and joyous.

Unlearning Dependency on the System

Why is life so hard? The odd thing is that we haven't been taught how to live life, only to follow the plan. We are full of many "lifeless" lessons. We have all been conditioned—brainwashed, really—to wait passively for things to happen to us *instead of making things happen*. If you think you have escaped this conditioning, think again. Most of us learned as early as seventh grade that we would pass, and even excel, if we just did the work assigned to us by our teachers. Here is how we learned that. Remember asking whether the test covered all of chapter five or only a part of it? Whether the assigned paper should be ten pages long or thirty? Whether you'd get extra credit for two book reports on two books by the same author or two books written in the same period? But what were you really learning? You were learning the *formula*:

- Find out what's expected.
- Do it as well as you can.
- Wait for the grade.

And the formula always worked. You got good grades. But take a second look to understand what that process actually means. Yes, you took tests, wrote papers, got passing grades, and then were automatically promoted from one year to the next in elementary, junior, and senior high school. If you do what is asked, you are taken care of. You never have to compete for promotions. You never have to rehearse yourself or even persuade anyone to move you forward. It happens *automatically*. You never learn to *stretch*. We get used to *system dependency*! What does it cost? If doing what's expected is all you do, the cost is that you learn only to fill orders. Change that now. The same thing can happen in college and even in graduate or professional school unless you expand your expectations. Only in this way will you come alive. Discard the formula.

College: More Than You Expected (If You're Not Passive!)

Once learned, system dependency lies deep within us, unconscious, behind our eyelids, muzzling our brain. It doesn't change when we graduate, but lurks inside and rules our life, keeping us back from being our best selves. Rather than learning the subject *in our heart*, we've learned it *by heart*. And that makes all the difference between feeling fraudulent and feeling alive.

You can change everything if your attitude is to *expect more*. Once you find that studying history or art or anthropology can be much more than just obediently following orders, your academic pursuits can lead you to new worlds of experiences, courses, contacts, and later, *careers*.

If you could describe your own expectations of college before you set foot on campus and compare that to what you actually experience, you might be as surprised as the many students who responded to an online survey. In that survey, as many students were disappointed that college was less intellectually challenging than they had expected as those students who found it to be more challenging than they had expected. More than half of those responding expected that college would be a difficult place to make friends.

Disappointment in college comes from misusing college, by treating it as *school* instead of *life*. To reframe your attitude, train yourself to approach college in the same positive, productive, active way that most successful people approach their careers, and in the very same way they