How to Fail in College and Life

By RANDAL BEEMAN

Each fall semester, hundreds of new students pour into my classroom at Bakersfield College. Most of these students come to “Panorama High,” as it is sometimes called, thinking that a college education is the key to a better future. They are correct. College graduates make at least 50% more money than non-graduates, and as I learned from one of my professors, “whoever says money can’t buy you happiness doesn’t know where to shop.”

Yet most of the students who come to BC, especially as freshmen, will end up failing and struggling and will not realize the true purpose of higher education. College is far more than job training; the purpose of earning a degree is not simply to acquire vocational expertise. In my opinion, the very future of our nation is tied to each of us being educated, self-aware, literate citizens. As the motto of the Bakersfield College Foundation suggests, “Only the Educated are Free.” Yet as much as I remind people of their responsibility and right to be educated, most of my students, like most of my fellow Americans, prefer to be lazy, easily misled, and uncommitted to the cause of improving their lives.

So if you love to run with the pack, here are some strategies for failure for you, the reader, if you are attending college or university this fall:

Keep on believing that you don’t have to read to be an educated person. If students spent less time complaining about the cost of the book, and more time actually reading them, then our failure rate would be dramatically reduced. But reading is sometimes tedious and boring, and in these times we like to call ourselves “visual learners.” If you keep resisting picking up that expensive book, maybe you can convince your professor to just show videos all semester.

Decide it is more important to go to your low-paying minimum wage job than going to class. Pleasing your “manager” can always come above attending school, especially if you welcome a lifetime of low-paying menial labor under the constant supervision of your boss. That pickup truck with the shiny chrome wheels can define your personality, not your knowledge of history, the classics, writing, and basic arithmetic and logic.

Always remember, the party comes first. Drink yourself silly and smoke lots of pot. Then you can be hung over, forgetful, and unconcerned with studying. At test time, this will be reflected in your grade, and you can tell your folks you are dropping out or have been placed on academic probation at the end of the semester, and that you will be staying with them until someone else as pathetic as yourself comes along to marry you.

Reinforce the idea that your self-esteem and TV time is far more important than exploring new ideas, meeting motivated people, and humbling yourself by studying long hours in the library and forming study groups, like all those successful international students here at BC who realize that “the pearl” is not just going to be handed to them because of their birthright as Americans.

Concentrate only on courses that apply to your chosen major. After all, who cares if that Anthropology or English class will help you better understand and enjoy movies, music, museums, and other accoutrements inherent to the educated mind? Stay stupid, watch more sports and reality shows, and don’t exercise your mind and body. After all, politicians and corporations are counting on you being a blind follower, and you wouldn’t want to let them down or even question the basic assumptions of American society. Let someone else do it for you. That is the “American way.”

These are just a few tips on what 12 years of studying and 12 years of teaching at six different colleges and universities has taught me. I have finally decided that the point of it all is to prepare Americans to become the grateful slaves of our more motivated competitors. Keep up the bad work; the Chinese are counting on you!

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Do you agree or disagree with Professor Beeman that students entering BC will end up failing because they don’t realize the purpose of higher education?