Chapter 1 – When learning job skills is not enough

- News agency director doesn't hire communication majors, but philosophy, political science, English majors
  - “I can teach anyone to write a good news story.”
  - “I’m looking for people who can think critically and analytically, who are problem solvers.”
- Author’s concerns – how were people getting jobs outside their major? Would he measure up?

- Best recruiter in computer science industry – his secret: hire honors history majors instead of C+ computer science majors
  - Question: if job skills aren't the most important outcome of a college education, why earn a degree?
  - Answer: primary purpose isn't to gain job skills – it is to BECOME A LEARNER

- Job skills are necessary but not sufficient
- Thinking critically, solving problems requires creativity, intelligence, personal capacity
  - these become part of who you are, not easily forgotten
  - never outdated or obsolete
  - apply to all courses, majors, and professions
- Don't ignore obtaining job skills and professional experience
  - BUT employers will evaluate who you have become and your capacity to keep learning and growing – these give potential for long term success
  - focus MORE on who you are becoming than on specific job skills
  - focusing solely on professional skills is short-sighted and works against your best interests
  - focusing on who you are becoming allows you to recognize the need for professional skills without neglecting the most important product – you.

- The primary purpose of education is not just to get a job
  - Education helps you to become more capable and contributing citizen.
  - It will impact your career, your family, your community, every organization you participate in

An Invitation to a New Kind of Conversation

- How you talk about education and learning matters
  - Words and stories orient you toward taking advantage of opportunities or obscuring the most important goals of higher education
  - How you talk about your education determines what you deem useful and useless, important and unimportant
  - Conversations determine kind of effort and attention you give to your studies

- Most conversations focus on job skills and “doing”
  - “what will you do with that major?”
  - “how will this class help me get a job?”
• “when will I use this knowledge in the real world?”
  • these seem natural and legitimate, but are actually loaded
  • people who ask often insist that all assignments, classes, and degrees be directly related to a job
  • wrong questions → give an incredibly narrow focus to your time in college
  • you will be unnecessarily confused, frustrated
  • many things (research, GE courses) are instead designed to help you become a more capable, intelligent, understanding, aware, competent person – regardless of major

• This book is designed to introduce a more helpful conversation about college and learning
  • It will help take full advantage of your education
  • Reconsider the conventional common sense
  • Begin a new conversation that focuses on BECOMING A LEARNER
Chapter 2 – Becoming A Learner

Too much focus on job skills, what to do with a major, how a class or assignment will apply to career leads to overlooking primary purpose of education – who we become. We fail to take advantage of the most important and valuable learning opportunities a college education offers.

Brian McCoy - To be successful, it's not what you do but who you become.

From the perspective of becoming:
- EVERYTHING you do in college matters
- it's not only WHAT you do but HOW you do it

Everyday efforts and actions determine who you become
- steadiness of work ethic
- daily diligence in doing what is expected
- how you handle yourself in social situations
- learn to think carefully and critically
- learn new and challenging ideas

Getting a degree doesn't guarantee that you'll increase your capacity.
- just getting by, working the system, cramming, cheating, procrastinating, avoiding responsibility, making excuses, doing the least amount of work possible leads you to become a lazy, unethical, person unable to solve problems, unprepared to be excellent → not in demand anywhere

- consistently striving for excellence, working to your potential, steadily completing assignments, working hard, meeting challenges, being prepared, overcoming mistakes and failures leads you to become the kind of person who can excel in any environment

It is a mistake to think that everyone is equal at graduation
- same diploma, but not the same skills, abilities, potential
- it's the cumulative effects of your education that matters

Why Becoming Matters

3 important realities you'll overlook if you focus on professional skills

Reality 1: Your Degree Doesn't Guarantee You a Good Job

- It used to be this way – a degree automatically meant higher level or work more pay; not anymore.
- Many struggle right out of school, take internships, low paying jobs to experience and get started.
- More educational opportunities mean more people will have degrees, more jobs will require them. Having a college degree will make you less unique, but it will become more required.
Reality 2: You are Going to Forget Much of What You Learn

- You will forget a lot of the information you learn in your classes – so what is the point?
- It is the broader concepts that frame the facts that you retain – and what society values. It is also the experience of working through the requirements for your classes; you learn to think like a writer [or a chemist, etc]
- take history courses and learn how to analyze and evaluate people and events, gain an appreciation for the importance of history in understanding current events OR avoid careful reading, cram for exams, do sloppy work at the last minute, complain, slide through, gain nothing
- “Mastering the process of learning through study, analysis, and experimentation is more important that the details of what you learn.”

Reality 3: Many of the job skills you learn in college will become obsolete

- A successful engineer told students – don't worry excessively about technical skills. Data storage has increased 1 billion times during his career. What he learned in college was quickly obsolete. He suggests learning broadly across several disciplines.
- This holds true for every field of study. How we do things continually changes. Instead, develop: communication skills, learn a language, develop a global perspective, learn to ask the right questions, zero tolerance for unethical behavior
- Professional skills get you your first job, or at least the chance to interview; broader skills will enable you to continue to grow and flourish professionally.

Outcomes of Becoming

Outcomes of education go beyond grades; are transferable from job to job and career to career, don't become obsolete, can be learned from any discipline or field of study.

Creativity

- Creativity = having original ideas that have value
- starts high when we are young, lost with age
- can be sapped by education - if all you do is listen, take notes, regurgitate information
- yet it is essential in a career, community, family
- you must work to find opportunities to be creative
- not confined to art/music/dance - possible in every field of study
- key can be just asking to do things in a different way

Critical Thinking

- the world pays you to solve problems
- you are paid according to the level of complexity and expertise the problems you can solve requires
- being a problem-solver requires critical thinking
- critical thinking: the art of asking good questions in order to solve problems and improve circumstances
• business and politics often suffer from using the same “safe” and known solutions, but the problems we face aren’t being solved by them
• critical thinkers can look at a problem from multiple perspectives, gather contrasting ideas, understand differing arguments, gather good information, develop informed conclusions
• every new subject gives you a chance to develop your critical thinking skills, preparing you to be a problem-solver

Communication Skills
• success in life depends on building and maintaining trusting relationships
• dealing with professors, peers, roommates, friends provide opportunities to develop communication skills
• employers say this skill set matters most when they hire college graduates
• ability to work with others, appreciate differences, deal with conflicts, handle feedback and criticism can all be developed in college

Character
• = sum of qualities that influence HOW you accomplish tasks, achieve goals
• when you graduate, you should be able to do much more than when you started - personal capacity and work ethic should expand - this will prepare you for the even bigger challenges that await
• some college students try to do as little work as possible, avoid challenging situations, or even think it’s “smart” to find ways to get the best grades with the least work - this attitude assumes that grades are all that matter
• don’t shy away from hard things - your effort will pay off in who you become
• integrity and ability to manage time is also critical to character
• employers (as well as other important people in your life) expect you to have good character - work hard, meet obligations, be honest
• if you become lazy and dishonest in college you will be that way in work situations and in personal life; but if you become a person of high character, people will trust you, you will be successful even in challenging circumstances

From Student to Learner

What changes when you switch from student to learner:
• learning isn’t just in the classroom, it’s everything you do
• less focus on grade, measure success by how you see and engage the world

Many people engage education passively - sitting back waiting to be taught
“‘What exactly do I have to do to get an A?’” implies a desire to do the least work possible

To get out of passive mode, drop STUDENT and become a LEARNER - active, hard-working, energized

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>student</th>
<th>learner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>waits to be directed</td>
<td>seeks out opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learns for the test</td>
<td>learns for understanding</td>
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<td>externally motivated</td>
<td>internally motivated</td>
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<td>avoids challenges</td>
<td>seeks out challenges</td>
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<td>sees learning as an obligation</td>
<td>sees learning as an opportunity</td>
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<td>learns to do</td>
<td>learns to be</td>
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Example: students assigned 6 papers, topic choice open, assignment to be creative, organized, and think critically.
- “Students” disliked open-ended assignments, wanted multiple choice exams, assigned topics, didn’t excel, blamed struggles on teacher.
- “Learners” thrived on freedom to choose topics, be creative, think critically; improved abilities with each paper.

Becoming a learner isn’t easy, doesn’t come naturally, education system conditions students to become passive.

Each person has played both roles; but success or failure is largely determined by which role you take in that situation.

Striving to be a learner gives great power, tremendous control over how you learn, who you become. Once you break the mold of passive student, you can become successful no matter how good or bad your educational opportunities, how competent your professors, your intellectual abilities.

Do not wait for someone else to make your education better. Take responsibility for who you are becoming.
Chapter 3 - Distracting Conversations

Common sense assumptions create conversations that distract us from the true purpose of education.
they occur in hallways, classrooms, homes, even legislatures
think about how they influence your assumptions and attitudes

“I’m going to college so I can get a good job”
vocational training vs. education

Logic behind this assumption:
No question - earning a college degree significantly increases your potential to land a better job than you’d get without one.
Over a lifetime, college graduates make significantly more money than those without a degree.
(There are notable exceptions, but they are one in thousands.)

BUT - do not mistake a college education for job training.
Looking at it this way, GE, assignments, research become frustrating, don’t make sense.

Primary purpose of education in the US is NOT to develop workers and teach them job skills;
it IS to help them mature into capable, contributing members of society
can vote, govern themselves, contribute to the common good

Colleges and universities ARE interested in successful employment of graduates.
That’s WHY college is set up the way it is
The REASON college graduates get higher paying jobs is not just job skills, it is the skills they have that enable them to be successful anywhere
how they think, how they participate
GE, writing, broad education

Vocational training is narrower.
skill sets are external, developed through practice and routine
not critical thinking, careful, complex analysis

Turning away from focus on job training won’t make you a worse job candidate, it will make you a better one.

“I have to go to college if I want to have a good life.”
obligation vs. opportunity

Logic behind this assumption: College graduates DO have a better opportunity to create a better life for themselves and their children.

BUT - it turns education into an obligation rather than an opportunity
● it seems like a chore, a drag
● you could view it with indifference
● get frustrated by the amount of time and effort required
● it becomes an obstacle, something to get through and over with
● you lose ownership over your learning
● everything that contributes to your development seems like a burden
● makes sense to do the least amount of work possible with least effort
● you can become less of a learner than when you started!

Seeing college as an opportunity
● you approach education with *gratitude*
● this perspective generates energy to do your best work
● this maximizes your personal development
● education becomes a journey that you have ownership of
● you work to overcome obstacles, seek challenges, overcoming shortcomings or circumstances

College will open up paths you would not have had otherwise. Enjoy the opportunity to make choices (GE, etc).

“I’m paying for this so it better be good.”
consumer vs. apprentice

Quality of your education is extremely important; you have every right to expect that college will be a valuable and worthwhile experience.

BUT you aren’t paying for an education, you are paying for access and opportunity. It’s like a gym membership - you aren’t buying strength or fitness, you are buying access to exercise equipment. It’s up to you to use them.

Instead, think of yourself as an apprentice.

Consumers:
● see education as something they pay for and receive, instead of something that requires personal commitment and responsibility
● tend to be impatient, want results quickly
● put responsibility for quality on the university

Apprentices:
● take responsibility to study hard, sacrifice, develop new capabilities
● realize it is a steady process that takes time
● take responsibility for quality

“In the real world…”

College life will certainly be different from life afterward. Looking forward to graduation and starting your career can provide motivation during difficult times. But that doesn’t make college any less real.

Talking about life after college as the “real world” implies that college is a “fake world.” But who you are becoming now is the person you’ll be when you finish.
Many students complain about professors who won’t accept late work, assuming that they will be able to juggle priorities, do quality work, and organize time when they get jobs. In reality, you develop those skills now.

The only truth to this is that it is a safer place to make mistakes; you can learn from them and move on with fewer consequences than later.

“When I’m done with school…”
ending vs continuing education

It is easy to see graduation as an ending point and think you’ll have all the cutting-edge knowledge and skills to get a great job. But it is a mistake to see yourself as complete. You don’t yet have everything you need to be independently successful.

Graduation is called commencement because it is a new beginning. In most cases the depth and intensity of your learning will increase after graduation.

Seeing yourself as complete makes learning something you need to finish instead of a vehicle that will continue to carry you.

Will you become a learner before you graduate, or will you still have to figure that out when everyone already expects you to be one?
Chapter 4 - Principles of Learning

1 - The most important things you learn will not be graded

- It is easy to get caught up in grades because that is how success in learning is communicated to you.
- Good grades do not always indicate good learning, and vise versa.
- Grades are important - they lead to internships, admission to academic programs, graduate school, first jobs.
- Grades are immediate results; learning brings more lasting results.
- Only a few years into your career, grades won’t matter much, but the results of real learning will.

2 - Knowledge is interconnected

- Our educational system is built on a model of mass production; subjects are broken down and separated, with check marks by each.
- While efficient, this doesn’t necessarily produce the best learning.
- Students tend to see skills as only related to the class they are in: writing is only for English, math is only needed in math courses, you only need to know history until you pass you history course.
- However, every profession requires writing skills and communication skills; all science is based on math; many problems have a historical basis, etc.
- To function in society, you need to be able to connect different kinds of knowledge, apply it in a variety of ways.
- Your challenge is to look past the separations and find connections.
- Don’t assume you won’t need a particular subject in your future job - you never know what unexpected directions your career may take.

3 - You must take responsibility for your learning

- Education is not a set of knowledge and skills that you are being given to you; you’ll be frustrated if you show up to class expecting the professor to deliver them to you.
- Learners take responsibility for their education, and can thrive in classes despite poor teaching or other obstacles.
- If you don’t take responsibility to learn what you need to know, you’re the one who will pay the price later when you need that information.
- Don’t leave your learning in the hands of your teachers.

4 - Learning Requires a relationship

- You can’t become excellent at anything just by reading books and taking tests; you need strong, professional relationships.
- Having relationships with professors allows you to ask questions, get additional help, and get feedback on your work.
- You also need connection to your peers; they can help you study, review your work, answer questions, provide encouragement.
● Large lecture halls can make it seem that you could get through without making a connection to anyone - don’t be fooled.
● The kinds of everyday courtesies that we extend to each other should also be given to professors (they often aren’t).
● These are the very people who have the expertise in their field, and the job to help you learn - seek out these relationships.

5 - Learners are Courageous

● It is common for students to be afraid of failing, not understanding, looking foolish, facing issues they don’t want to, having prejudices exposed, etc. (Teachers are afraid too - of being judged, of having classes go badly, not reaching students.) Fear paralyzes learning.
● To increase your abilities, you must master difficult ideas, complete challenging work, stretch beyond your current abilities.
● Trying to find the easiest classes and do the least amount of work necessary gives you fewer opportunities to learn. The path of least resistance doesn’t lead to personal growth.
● Embracing challenge, mastering difficult knowledge, seeking new opportunities to grow is fulfilling, exciting, satisfying, and worthwhile; avoiding them is the opposite.

6 - Learning Requires Humility

● Quizzes, exams, and grades foster fear of not having the right answer.
● Significant challenges and problems aren’t solving by ready-made answers, but good questions, thinking critically, developing solutions. Knowing how to find answers to questions is more important.
● Students are often afraid to experiment, make mistakes, ask questions, get feedback, ask “dumb” questions, clarify instructions. Humility allows you to be teachable, learn from mistakes and failures, and therefore build confidence as you increase your capacity to do good work.

7 - Learning Cannot be Cheated

● Many students argue that some cheating is excusable, that what matters is how much influence it has on the grade. But any kind of cheating, no matter how small, damages their ability to learn.
● When you are focused on who you are becoming, there is no way to see cheating in a positive light.
● Students who cheat have lost the vision - that what they are becoming matters. Cheaters become people who always seek a way to cut corners, avoid responsibility, not do what is expected.
● Cheating not only short-circuits learning; your integrity is at stake. You are developing or destroying it constantly. Integrity is critical to success in family, community, and profession.
Chapter 5 - An Invitation

This book is about change. And that change is based on understanding a simple (but often overlooked) idea:

- the primary purpose of college isn't learning a specific set of professional skills
- the primary purpose of college is to become a learner

There's perhaps no better way to improve your college experience than to understand:

- that it's not just the accumulation of classes and grades and the earning a degree that matter when you finish college.
- What matters most is the overall effect those experiences and achievements have on the kind of person you've become.

[Bad news:] Admittedly, higher education has many problems that can affect your ability or opportunity to become a learner; most of these are out of your control:

- Large class sizes and sprawling campuses often make learning feel impersonal.
- Rising tuition and textbook costs increase your financial burdens.
- Many classes seem to encourage memorization more than inspire you to engage in meaningful learning.
- And sometimes professors are better scholars than they are teachers.

[Good news:] However, my purpose isn't to suggest that you have to have a perfect learning environment (or be a perfect learner in every situation).

- Rather, you need to consistently strive to become a learner in all of your classes and activities.
- As you work to become a learner, you'll be able to focus on those things that you can influence and control,
- those things that will enable you to create for yourself an excellent education despite any shortcomings in your circumstances.

You don't have to have a perfect learning experience in college to reach your potential.

- It's who you become as a result of that process – no matter how imperfect the process is – that matters most.

And since you will never have perfect circumstances in your community, profession, and relationships

- becoming a learner in a less-than-ideal college situation can prepare you for solving problems and succeeding in this less-than-ideal world.
Putting these Ideas into Action

Every person experiences education differently.

- Our experiences, interests, preparation, abilities, opportunities vary so much, it's impossible to tell someone how to pursue a college education in every detail.
- This isn't a step-by-step how-to guide for college success.
- But by focusing on who you are becoming as a result of your education, you will more clearly see crucial learning you might otherwise overlook.

It's not good enough to simply read the book and think – that's interesting. You need to do something with these ideas.

Your challenge and opportunity –

- carefully consider the idea that the primary outcome of a college education is the person you become
- you must figure out how this knowledge can improve your education;
- how you can adapt it to your own needs, circumstances, goals, and field of study
- thoughtfully examine your assumptions about college and learning
  - identify ways your assumptions hinder your ability to become a learner
  - recognize areas you've already been successful

Carefully consider the ideas presented; begin to create your own philosophy of learning, outline specific ways you will strive to become a learner:

1) What learning abilities do I want to develop? How will I go about learning them?
2) In what ways will I take advantage of GE classes, especially if I am not necessarily interested in the topic?
3) What is my plan to develop professional, productive relationships with my professors?
4) What will I do when I find myself in a difficult or challenging learning situation?
5) How will I evaluate my success in ways other than with my grades?
6) What is my plan to improve my work ethic and integrity?
7) How will I deal with failures, setbacks, and obstacles?

This is not THE END, but the beginning of a new conversation.

- Take up with discussion with peers, parents, and professors.
- Add your stories, others' stories; find narratives that will help you remember and apply these ideas.
- Share what you've learned, and teach others.
- Ask for feedback.
- Develop ideas and plans that will help you implement these principles.
- Use these principles as a lens to make sense of and assess your opportunities, challenges, and successes.