

Professor Raymond Gerson answers questions about President Obama's education plan and his own new book, *Learn How to Achieve College Success...In 20 Hours or Less.*

1. President Obama and his education secretary want every student in the U.S. to get a college education. As a professor who teaches students how to succeed in college, what are your ideas for helping schools and students to move closer to this goal?

Many changes and new strategies will be needed. A major problem is that most high school graduates are not prepared to succeed in college. In a 2008 report by American College Training (ACT) they concluded, "Only 22% of high school graduates are college ready." The numbers are even worse for low income and underserved students.

One solution is to offer both high school and college student's college readiness and success courses. Many colleges are offering college success strategy courses, but they are desperately needed in high schools before students attend college.

2. What do college success courses teach students?

Students learn knowledge, skills, and strategies to succeed in school; and in their career and life. For example they learn: reading comprehension strategies, problem solving, reasoning and critical thinking, writing, note-taking, test taking, time management, goal setting, knowing their learning styles and types of intelligence, greater self-knowledge and self-management and how to learn more effectively.

3. What consequences do you see for students and for our society if we don't close this achievement gap between high school and college?

Most students who do not go beyond high school will not be able to get decent jobs. This is especially true because 21st century knowledge and skills are needed and because of current economic conditions. Most higher paying and better jobs require more than a high school diploma or GED. Plus, there is a strong relationship between less education and more crime, more health problems, and less of a contribution to society. So, the consequences of the achievement gap are quite negative.

4. Are you saying that without a college education or at least more than a high school diploma one won't be successful?

There are always exceptions. In the past there were more exceptions, but it will become increasingly more difficult to get the good jobs without at least some post-secondary education. This could include education at a vocational school or trade school, not necessarily getting an academic degree. Generally, those with a good education will have better opportunities, will face less unemployment, and will earn more.

5. You are a college professor who teaches career development and college success strategy courses. What kind of results are you seeing when students take these courses?

One of the courses that I teach at Austin Community College (ACC) is an eight week 20 hour course called "Transition to College Success." Several professors and I are using my latest book, *Learn How to Achieve College Success...In 20 Hours or Less* to teach the course.

Most students who drop out of college do so during their first semester or first year of college. Studies by ACC comparing students who have taken the Transition course to similar students who had not yet taken it have been conducted. Those who took the course re-enrolled the next semester at a mean rate of 83%. Students who did not take the course re-enrolled at a rate of 59% - a 24% difference. Also significantly fewer students who took the course withdrew from their other courses. In another full-semester college success course that we offer where students had more time to apply these ideas, the grades of students who took the course improved significantly compared to students who did not take it.

6. How can students learn how to succeed in college in only 20 hours or less?

When they apply these ideas and strategies to their other courses the results are excellent. They begin to see improvements during the 20 hour course and continue to improve with the passage of time as they use them. Most of my students do easily understand and use these ideas and experience positive results. About 10% of my students do not take the course seriously, do not try these strategies out, and receive little benefit. As a rule those students drop out of the course during the first two weeks without giving it much of a chance. At first many students think that the course will be a waste of time, but if they stay for a few weeks and try the ideas out they begin to see its value.

7. Do you have success with students who are considered “at-risk” or who have learning disabilities?

Definitely. The majority of students who take the course are required to take it because they are taking two or more developmental or remedial courses. They are considered “at-risk.” It is not uncommon for several students in the course to be referred by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) due to learning disabilities. So the earlier study and positive results that I mentioned were classes which consisted mostly of students considered “at-risk.”

8. What is an example of something you teach your students so they can do well in college?

Many students who believe that they have a reading comprehension problem, actually have a problem of inattentiveness when reading their textbooks. If the attention is not there, no one will be able to understand or retain information. The information must get into our brains. Inattentively covering the page with the eyeballs won't do it.

I teach my students a variety of ways to keep their attention on what they are reading, to increase both understanding and retention of the material. One way I do this is by having them pause after they read a section and then write down a question that the section just answered. Then I teach them to write the key ideas in the margin of their text books, but in their own words. This combination of asking questions and writing comments in their own words makes them active readers. It holds their attention and increases understanding and retention. Test preparation becomes easier because they are reviewing their own questions (many of which are usually on the test) and their own comments.

9. You are offering a free online college success evaluation quiz on one of your web sites. What is its purpose?

I developed an online quiz, which is available at www.achievecollegesuccess.com and students can take it in a couple of minutes. The quiz is instantly scored and generates a customized report, indicating the student's level of knowledge about what is needed to succeed in college. It includes a synopsis of strategies for college success.

10. How can your book be ordered?

One way to order the book is to go to my web site, www.achievecollegesuccess.com and click on the photo of the book. This will take you to a special section of Amazon where you can see details about the book and order it.

The book is both a book and workbook which can be used by teachers and counselors to teach a college success course. Schools, bookstores, and educators can call Novus Publishing at 1(866) 616-6887 for special quantity rates. Educators who use the book to teach a course to their students will also receive an instructor's manual with tests, additional class room activities and PowerPoint presentations covering every chapter, and other resources.

Raymond Gerson has a Masters Degree in Psychology and is an adjunct college professor of career development and college success courses for Austin Community College in Austin, Texas. He is a former career counselor, vocational rehabilitation counselor, job placement specialist, trainer, and owner of an executive and recruiting business. He is the author of six books including *Learn How to Achieve College Success...In 20 Hours or Less*.

For more information about Professor Gerson you can go to www.successforcollegestudents.com .

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