How To Have A Successful College Experience

"Why do some students make the most of college, while others struggle and look back on years of missed deadlines and missed opportunities? What choices can students make, and what can teachers and university leaders do, to improve more students’ experiences and help them achieve the most from their time and money? How is the increasing diversity on campus—cultural, racial, and religious—affecting education? What can students and faculty do to benefit from differences, and even learn from the inevitable moments of misunderstanding and awkwardness?" (Light, 2001)

In order to answer these questions, Harvard Professor Richard J. Light and his staff conducted in-depth interviews with more than 1600 undergraduates over a ten year period. What he learned is detailed in his book “Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds”. Bringing together people from different backgrounds, whether ethnic, geographic, political, religious, or economic, stimulates introspection, questioning and exploration of what a student believes in.

Here are a few of his findings:

- **Students who did well realized that they had to think about how to spend their time.** Poor management of study time (short bursts rather than sustained periods of study, or always studying alone) were linked with academic problems. Studying outside of class in small groups of four to six, even just once a week, benefited students enormously-- they were more engaged, better prepared and learned significantly more. It works best to do homework before meeting and then to discuss the homework as a group.

- Roosevelt students will be happy to know that small class size was linked to satisfaction.

- **Making connections between what goes on inside and outside the classroom results in greater satisfaction.** For example, if a student is interested in music, to connect that interest with their coursework, or with extracurricular volunteer work, or with an internship, leads to a more satisfying experience.

- **More involvement in out-of-class activities is related to higher satisfaction with college life.** When students thought of specific moments that had changed them profoundly, four-fifths of them chose a situation or event outside of the classroom.

- If students struggling academically were able to share their problems and seek help, campus resources were able to help them develop strategies to improve their academic performance. **Students’ unwillingness to seek help was linked with continued academic problems.**

- A sense of isolation from the rest of the college community is also linked with academic problems. A large fraction of students who under-performed could be characterized as having left behind a critical support group—without finding a new, similar group at college. **Joining a campus organization or group is vital.**
Learning flows from diversity. As Light stated, “It is natural on a college campus to discuss and examine ideas. And who better to do it with than people who are different from you in some way?”

What does this mean for you? On Graduation Day, how can you feel that you got what you came here for?

Here are some more tips:

- Each semester, get to know one faculty member reasonably well, and have that faculty member get to know you reasonably well.

- Make connections between the curriculum and your personal life, values and experiences.

- Join a campus organization or group. Find out-of-class activities that you would enjoy, ideally ones that would help you get to know other students.

- Talk to your advisor. Have a discussion on what you’re studying, why you’re studying it, how that fits into the bigger picture of your life, and what new ideas might be worth considering.

- Don’t take being at college for granted. See these few precious years as a special chance to meet, work with, and get to know others who are unlike you, and who have new ideas that may challenge your own.

- Take full advantage of the university community. If you are having any type of difficulty, ask for help. There are multiple sources of support in addition to the Counseling Center. Refer to the student handbook or RU web page.