

syllabus will contain some routine information about the course, meeting times and course description. More importantly, the syllabus will spell out the number of assignments and examinations and other specific requirements and how the instructor plans to achieve the student learning outcomes specified by the college for that course. Three other and important items are also mentioned in most syllabi: 1) office hours, 2) books, materials and equipment required and 3) a warning about plagiarism. College faculty are required to post "office hours." During these office hours you can expect to find the faculty member in his or her office and available to answer student's questions. Books listed on the syllabus can be purchased new or used in the campus bookstore. Today, enterprising students often purchase required books at bargain prices on-line. One caution here relative to the purchase of used workbooks; used workbooks may already have been written in which renders them virtually useless and typically unacceptable for use by the instructor. With the convenience on the internet and the "cut and paste" utility, the temptation to pass others work on as your own is difficult for many to resist. However, today's professors have sophisticated software at their disposal that will quickly identify phrases, sentences and paragraphs lifted from other sources. Using someone else's work or words without proper citation, quotation or formal acknowledgment is called plagiarism. The punishment for plagiarism can run the gamut from a failing assignment grade, to a failing course grade all the way to dismissal from college. Finally, a course outline may be a separate document or embedded in the syllabus and contains a calendar of sorts for the course specifying lecture and lab topics, readings, assignment due dates and other important dates.

#### **ACADEMIC ADVICE AND OTHER ASSISTANCE**

At any college there are a great many people who are interested in helping students achieve their educational goals. Many students know exactly what they want in a degree program and ultimately a career. Others, nearly a third of all college students, are undecided. For this group, colleges will typically have a career advisement center staffed with professionals that can help a student explore

various options. Through the interview process and the administering of various testing instruments (i.e., interest inventories) these career advisors can help the student focus in on one or more likely choices. It is important to explore options early to minimize the cost of a degree and time to graduation.

Once a major or program has been selected, the student will be assigned a faculty advisor who teaches in this area. Over time the student will likely have their faculty advisor for one or more courses and will come to rely on them for academic and further career advice. At some large colleges and universities, in addition to faculty advisors, departments will have one individual who specializes in academic advice for

all their majors. These department advisors are very knowledgeable about all aspects of the curriculum and courses contained therein. This is a valuable resource that students should take full advantage of.

Most colleges also have Licensed Professional Counselors available for students who may be suffering with any number of personal or psychological problems. These services are free and completely confidential.

#### **ACCREDITATION**

With so many postsecondary educational choices and institutions to choose from. Students will want to make sure that the institution they select to attend is accredited. Accreditation is granted to an institution after a rigorous review of dozens of quality related issues and capabilities by one to the nation's regional accrediting agencies. These accrediting agencies and their stamp of approval on an institution mean that courses offered and degrees granted by accredited colleges and universities will be recognized and accepted nationwide. This level of accreditation authorizes institutions to grant degrees.

For some program areas, colleges seek a second level of "discipline specific accreditation." Discipline specific accreditation is often sought by institutions to indicate an additional level of recognized quality in a specific program. In some cases where states require a license to practice in a given discipline (e.g., engineering, pharmacy, or medicine) students may need to be graduates of discipline specific accredited programs to be eligible to test for the required professional license. In short, entry into some professions in some states require the possession of an accredited degree from an accredited institution; when in doubt ask about accreditation and research the requirements in your state.

Hopefully the information contained in this column will get the new college student off to good running start as they pursue their educational and career goals.

For more information or assistance call Great Basin College's Admission, Advising and Career Center at 775.753.2168.

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**GBC  
College  
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**5**

**College Course  
Basics  
[Semesters, course  
construction, outlines,  
syllabi, and  
definitions]**

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This brochure describes the basics of college and several commonly used words and expressions. This brochure is the fifth in a series of eight that will provide readers information about many important aspects of college.

Like many adventures in life, the college experience can at the same time be both exciting and a bit frightening. One way to make anything that is new or unfamiliar less intimidating is to know and understand some of the most common terms used by those on the inside. Also, some of the terms that have a given meaning in one field will have a somewhat different meaning in another. This article will step through and discuss or define a variety of college terms that a new college student is likely to encounter.

## **WHERE TO START**

The best place to begin learning about any college is their "College Catalog." Often ranging from 150-300 pages in length, the typical college catalog is a comprehensive document that will contain the following important information: history of the college, its mission statement, admission criteria, rules of conduct, sources of help, scholarships available, plans of study, individual course descriptions, and a list of faculty and staff along with their academic credentials. In the days before the internet, web sites and digital documents, a bound copy of the college catalog was seen as essential and invaluable to any college student. Today, most colleges publish their entire catalog online. However, the convenience, portability and readability of a paper catalog is still hard to beat.

Once the catalog is in hand, most students will go directly to the program they are interested in, for example an Associate of Applied Science degree in Nursing. There the student will find a list of all the courses required to earn that specific degree. Those courses, when thought about as a whole, are referred to as a curriculum, program, or plan of study. The courses are then organized into groups of four to six courses that are recommended to be taken by full time students in a single semester.

In college, a semester will last 15 or 16 weeks depending on the institution. Those with 16 week long semesters will often have the sixteenth week designated as an exam week where final exams or some other meaningful education activity takes place. Credits earned in the semester system are counted in "semester hours." A semester hour is defined as a course meeting for one lecture hour per week for 15 weeks and for each hour of meeting time there will be a minimum of two hours of outside work. It takes two to three hours of meeting time per week for 15 weeks when a science laboratory or activity course like welding is converted to credit hours. A standard academic year will contain two full semesters.

Some institutions organize their academic year into quarters as opposed to semesters. College quarters will run from 10 to 12 weeks depending on the institution and may also

contain an exam week. In this organizational scheme, the standard academic year contains three quarters. As such, when converting quarter hours to semester hours, the quarter hour equals .66 semester hours; when converting semester hours to quarter hours, the semester hour equals 1.5 quarter hours. Because of the confusion surrounding these conversions and the difficulty in making direct course comparisons when transferring between quarter hours and semester hours, most institutions have moved away from quarter hours.

## **NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION**

As one begins college he/she will receive several communications from the institution they have been accepted to and will be attending. Among those communications will typically be an invitation to an orientation session which must be registered for. At the orientation session, a great deal of important information will be presented and discussed. Among the general items covered will be campus rules and regulations, mission, campus/building tours, parking, important dates, costs, payment policies, cancellations, academic advising and placement and what to bring etc. Some colleges require attendance at their orientation; regardless, it is important to attend.

In addition to the general new student orientation, there will often be a program specific orientation that must be attended. Programs in the health sciences, music, engineering and many others have degree specific information that provides information far too detailed for the general orientation. Be sure to attend this orientation as well, because in highly competitive entry programs like nursing, failure to attend orientation may mean giving up your slot in the program to an alternate.

If a student plans to live in campus housing or in a residence hall there will also be an orientation session devoted to residence life. Still more rules and regulations will be covered as they relate to living on campus. Here students will meet the Dean of Students, residence hall directors and their assistants called resident assistants or RAs.

## **THE COLLEGE TEACHER**

To begin with, it is safe to assume that all college teachers have a command of the subject or subjects they are hired to teach. But, as the new college student will soon discover, college teachers come with a variety of experiences, educations and are teaching for a variety of reasons. Their titles and how they introduce themselves will provide clues about them and their backgrounds. Several of the most common college teacher types are described below.

On some level all college teachers are instructors. However, if a college teacher's title is Instructor, it means that either they work for an institution that does not have professorial ranks or they were hired for their specific background (for

example a Journeyman Tool and Die Maker) as opposed to the academic degrees they possess.

A Lecturer is a faculty member at a college or university who teaches without rank or tenure. This title is also given to those faculty members who are one rank below that of Assistant Professor.

The rank and title of Assistant Professor is given to a beginning faculty member who is on a tenure track (i.e., a position potentially leading to tenure). College teachers will remain Assistant Professors for five to six years during an extensive probationary period as they fulfill the academic, research, and publishing requirements of the college or university where they are employed.

The title of Associate Professor is given to those individuals who have fulfilled all of the requirements for that rank and are in their sixth or seventh year of full time teaching and have been given tenure. Tenure is the status given, in this case, to a college teacher who has successfully worked through an extended period of probation. Tenure is often thought of as a guarantee of lifetime employment; it is not. Tenure does however protect the college teacher from unwarranted or arbitrary discipline or dismissal and is designed to protect the academic freedom of professors.

Professor is the title given to senior or distinguished faculty members and at most colleges and universities, is the highest rank that a college teacher can earn. The rank usually indicates that a faculty member is an expert in his or her field of study. Again, referring back to the college catalog, all full time faculty, along with their academic rank and degrees earned, will be listed alphabetically toward the back of the catalog. All students should make a point to review the rank and background of the teachers they have.

Graduate Teaching Assistants or TA's are typically found at large universities and they are working toward a masters or doctorate degree in their respective area. To offset the tuition waiver and other pay and benefits they receive, they are asked to teach introductory college courses in their area of expertise. TA's are overseen by senior faculty.

An Adjunct Instructor is a part time college teacher typically hired to teach one or two courses per semester in their area of expertise. For instance, a local Certified Public Accountant might be hired to teach an accounting class or an elected official might be asked to teach a political science class and so on. Most adjuncts have other full time employment and teach part time because they love the discipline they are working in and the students they are helping.

## **COURSE INFORMATION**

At the first formal meeting of any college course, the teacher will make a few introductory remarks, introduce themselves and then pass out a course syllabus. The