

# Getting to Know and Instructor: One of the Most Important Jobs for a Student

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In his book, *Making the Most of College*, Richard Light writes that he advises his students to meet at least one professor each semester.<sup>1</sup> As an instructor, I believe that this is one of the most important pieces of advice that can be given to a high school student preparing to go to college. There are three reasons for this. First, by getting to know and instructor, it will be easier for the student to contact him/her in the future. Second, the instructor the student gets to know can become an important mentor. Third, the class will be more enjoyable if the student gets to know the instructor.



By getting to know an instructor, the student is able to have a person whom they can contact in the future. Future contacts might include advice on which classes to take, help on a project, or general advice about an issue. One student who got to know me during one of the classes I taught called me last semester although he had already transferred to another college. The student was a history student in one of my classes and was taking a history course at university. He was having difficulty with an assignment for his history class and just needed to talk the situation over with someone. Had he not taken some effort to get to know me a little bit, he would not have been comfortable making the call.

I would make a distinction between this student who called me for a piece of discrete advice and the students for whom I have served as a mentor. Those who get to know me well enough for me to be their mentor also allow me to get to know some personal information about their goals and interests. With this information, I am able to give the students better advice on their careers and goals.

The third reason that a student should get to know the instructor well is because it makes the class more enjoyable. Even a class that might not be your favorite topic will go smoother if you like your instructor. And one way to like your instructor is to get to know him/her better. Research has shown that if students like a class they tend to be more satisfied with the class and tend to get a better grade.

When I was first leaving for college, no one told me to get to know some professors well. Fortunately, I entered a program that was set up so that I could get to know people like Glen Wright, John Reid, W. Fred Graham, Milt Powell, and Howard Johnson. These professors helped shape my life as did Mary Schneider and Cathy Davidson in graduate school. However, even though my program facilitated this, unless I had taken the effort to get to know these instructors, I would not have benefited as much as I did from their classes and their direction after I got out of class.

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<sup>1</sup> Light, Richard J. *Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2004.



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