

Al-Nasser University

Students Get to Know Their Community College Professor

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That last hectic year of high school is filled with stress, excitement and apprehension. Leaving all you have ever known in exchange for an entirely different lifestyle and location. College. That final year of high school has you prepping for finals at the same time you are prepping for your high school final exams, and scrambling to gain admittance into the university of your choice while simultaneously locking in your "safety" school.

That being said, any educational journey benefits from starting the first couple years gaining traction at a local community college. A host of advantages are afforded the beginning college student at a community college over a freshman placement at a four-year university. From open enrollment to lower tuition fees to convenient, flexible scheduling, a junior college presents the new student with a soft landing in this new alien landscape. Academically speaking, the teacher to student ratio allows for a much closer academic partnership between mentor and student than would ever be possible in a university setting.

As students cast about for the perfect educational institution to fulfill their academic dreams, one of the main draws is the prestige and name recognition of the school. It is oftentimes the exact same situation with professors. Big named schools draw big names talent, and the expectation is that the faculty will contribute to the school's reputation by conducting original research and disseminating that material to others within their field. This expectation has been termed, "Publish or Perish."

The "Publish or Perish" mentality translates into faculty members under heavy pressure to publish, which is oftentimes conducted at the expense of their teaching load. Courses,

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lectures, feedback, evaluation, and interaction are more often than not conducted with a teacher's assistant rather than the world-renowned scholar whose name is on the syllabus.

Teacher assistants are post-graduate students who are working towards their own advanced degrees in the field, and gain tremendous experience learning by the side of a seasoned academic who delegates a great deal of responsibility into their hands. While this partnership is mutually beneficial to the scholar and his assistant, the first year college student, sitting at the back of an auditorium filled with hundreds of students, is often left without the resources to excel during those first brutal semesters of transition as they get their academic legs beneath them.

Unlike university professors, community college instructors don't labor under the burdens of the "Publish or Perish" mentality. While many junior college teachers are dedicated scholars looking to make advancements in their field, their primary focus remains squarely in the classroom. As such, the level of interaction between the learners and the learned is heightened exponentially compared to that of a four-year university.

Additionally, there is no buffer between students and faculty in the form of a teaching assistant.

As mentioned, first year college students are in many ways cast adrift to sink or swim in the competitive academic world, and at the university level there are no lifeguards on duty when they start going under. Not so at the community college level. At the community college level, the student's academic lifeguard is their professor who is standing at the front of their class, and is delivering the information to them directly with the same passion that sustained them throughout years of their own academic study. Community college professors also maintain office hours and invite students to reach out to them via email, phone, or academic bulletin boards.

Community colleges foster a sense of community with small classes. Rarely will a

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community college class contain more than 35 students, which compares favorably to the hundreds of students typically enrolled in a public university survey course. As one might expect, the logistics of managing a class of 300 is far more onerous than one of 35 and university students suffer by the comparison. A small class reinforces the close relationships that can be forged between an instructor and student in a community college environment.

Feedback is instantaneous in a small class setting and near impossible in an auditorium crammed with hundreds of other people. Further, the small, relaxed environment encourages students to call out for a deeper explanation of a concept or clarification of a point of contention that they may have been hesitant to verbalize in the much more crowded setting.

Community colleges have numerous advantages for the first year college student, and the opportunity to build a productive, cooperative learning relationship with their professors is one of the biggest.