

Navigating the Research University: A Guide for First-Year Students

By Britt Andreatta

Published by Thomson Wadsworth 2005, 363 pages

Reviewed by

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The transition from high school to college can be a perplexing journey for many students. The adjustment to a new academic way of life and overcoming personal and social struggles are paramount during this period. For those newly enrolled students at a research university, there may be additional complexities in their unique educational environment.

In *Navigating the Research University: A Guide for First-Year Students*, Britt Andreatta guides students in acquiring an understanding of the nature of a research university and how it may affect their day-to-day collegiate experiences. Andreatta notes that the justification for a book specifically focusing on the transition of students at research universities is the result of years of work with students from first-year students through graduating seniors who commonly did not grasp the distinctiveness of their educational environment.

Andreatta's target audience is both first-year and transfer students, and she suggests the book is appropriate for a variety of settings including orientation programs, summer reading programs, introductory writing courses, freshman experience courses or seminars, freshman interest groups, and transfer preparation courses. The book is organized into three sections: academic development, personal development, and community development.

Andreatta has included features in each chapter that effectively illustrate her points and enhance a new student's understanding of the content: 1) narrative—includes definitions and explanations of the content; 2) “What this means to you,”—explains how topics translate to the daily experiences of students; 3) “Might I suggest...”—advises students how they can most effectively apply the specific content; 4) student stories—includes perspectives and advice shared by current students; 5) “Reflections for Writing”—prompts students to respond to questions regarding their institution to enhance their reflection and critical thinking; and 6) written or experimental exercises—engage students in critical thinking and enhanced learning about their own institution. A “Quick Start Guide” is also included to assist new students successfully through the first few days on their campus—a reference to topics such as finding classes, adding and dropping courses, paying tuition, living with roommates, campus parking, and attending campus events.

A thorough explanation of a research university—its purpose, mission, procedures for conducting research, and an overview of the various academic disciplines—is the introductory section of Chapter 1. An overview of Bloom's Hierarchy of Knowledge is provided with a clarification of the expectation for critical thinking skills which students will be expected to demonstrate in the quest to discover new knowledge. The importance of academic integrity is emphasized early in the book; this topic is made “real” for new students through the account of an actual experience of a current student. Chapter 1 concludes with clarification of the roles of teaching assistants and the various levels of faculty, an explanation of office hours, and an overview of staff and administrators and their roles on campus.

The development of skills for academic success is the primary focus of Chapter 2. New students are introduced to the concept of assignment management. Andreatta effectively illustrates the increased reading time and additional workload per class that is required of students. The suggestion is made that students develop their own “workload grid” by pulling from each syllabus the individual assignments for each week and organizing them together on one grid, allowing students to quickly visualize their commitments for each week of the term. This naturally leads to the topic of time

management and the development of a daily schedule for the budgeting of time. Since new students encounter many social opportunities, the importance of assertive communication and the ability to say “no” to friends is highlighted. Academic success strategies featured also include reading skills, taking lecture notes, study styles, preparing for and taking exams, writing and research skills, and analytical argument formation.

The next section explores various degrees, classes, and majors. An understanding of a bachelor’s degree and a liberal arts education introduces the concepts of course workload, credit units and estimated hours of work outside the classroom per credit hour, course levels, and teaching and learning styles. Especially beneficial to new students (and their families) is information about the connection between majors and careers. With increasing parental pressure on students about selecting a major, this portion of the chapter is timely as well as informative. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the organization of a university from the various colleges to academic departments and Student Affairs.

Independence, separation from family, and value development is the topic of the next chapter, and is the beginning of Section 2, personal development. Andreatta begins by addressing homesickness and the concept of “friendsickness”—missing those friends left behind when going away to college. Practical suggestions, as well as exercises, are offered to assist students in working through these issues. An excellent summary of the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is offered, which includes its impact on a student’s independence and responsibility. Students are provided a presentation of both the advantages and disadvantages of their newfound freedom and suggestions on how to manage it. Also of particular relevance to both students and parents is an explanation of Bloom’s Stages of Parent/Adolescent Separation, which provides a clear overview of changing family dynamics. The chapter ends with information about the development of values and some of the common issues that can cause conflict between students and their families.

Chapter 5 addresses the theme of increased freedom, specifically discussing the impact of alcohol, drugs, and sexual activity. Current data on alcohol-use trends of college students is examined, and a presentation of the negative consequences of alcohol use for college students is included. Student stories and advice that are part of this chapter, as well as the useful tips regarding alcohol use, should be especially effective in getting students’ attention about this very important topic. Suggestions for helping a friend who has been sexually assaulted, what to do if you have been sexually assaulted, and resources for healthy relationships are emphasized. An impressive amount of information is presented to assist students in dealing with these issues.

Chapter 6 focuses on the first-year student experience and begins with an introduction to student development theory. A list of common first-year experience themes is presented and grouped into five categories (academic issues, social issues, general campus environment, personal issues, and issues unique to transfer students) with student development theory relevant to each item. This is one chapter where completing the initial reflections and exercises will be important for the average student to fully

understand and utilize the chapter's content.

The final section of the book begins with the diverse campus community. Students are encouraged to develop cultural competence because many employers seek applicants with this skill. The various dimensions of identity are examined to assist students in developing their cultural competence. It is pointed out to students that an important component of their education is community building, and that they should actively engage in this process. The chapter is concluded with a review of the dynamics of oppression, and like many of the preceding chapters, the "Might I Suggest..." section and student stories are helpful in reinforcing the central messages of the chapter.

Leadership development and involvement opportunities are the themes of Chapter 8. New students are assisted in understanding the importance of campus involvement and are encouraged to seek out leadership opportunities as a way to affect community change and personal development. Students are then presented with many of the common types of involvement opportunities found on a college campus, both academic and cocurricular, and they are encouraged to identify those with which they have an interest. The chapter wraps up with a list of important leadership skills that students should develop while in college.

The final chapter is about planning for the future. Andreatta presents a list of appropriate goals by class level in four categories: academic, personal, social, and career. The freshman year is identified with a goal for "exploring," the sophomore year with "defining," the junior year with "researching," and the senior year with "implementing." Students are helped to understand SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based goals) to allow them to begin establishing a plan of action to accomplish the goals by class level. The chapter ends with encouraging students to utilize campus resources and to identify personal mentors and allies.

Navigating the Research University: A Guide for First-Year Students is an excellent resource for all first-year students. Andreatta does an effective job in capturing the important topics of the typical first-year. The "Might I Suggest..." and "What This Means To You" are extremely effective segments for expanding upon and reinforcing the main points of each chapter. New students will also appreciate the inclusion of advice and real-life stories from current students, which help to drive home the message. This book is straightforward and easy to understand, while also providing ample challenges for students through exercises and reflections. Although the target audience for this book is new students at research universities, it is applicable to all new students and also to their parents to help them understand FERPA, the transition of their son or daughter, and how they can best assist in that transition.