



a podcast about how we learn, how we teach, and how they overlap

Episode 31: Kickstarting College - Non-Academic Norms for First Years and Transfer Students

Adam: Hi, I'm Adam Sanford. I'm an academic life coach and professor in Los Angeles.

Dinur: And I'm Dinur Blum. I'm a college professor in Los Angeles.

Adam: And this is Learning Made Easier, a podcast where we discuss how we learn and how we teach and how they overlap.

Welcome back to Learning Made Easier. This is Episode 31: Kickstarting College - Non-Academic Norms for First Years and Transfer Students.

So, remember that “you have freedom now” thing that we mentioned back in Episode 29? Well, it applies to both your academic work and your nonacademic work. Now that you are in college, you have the freedom to eat what you want and what you can afford. You have the freedom to stay up as late as you like, and hang out with your friends, and all kinds of other freedoms that you may not have had much of before. But with those freedoms comes a lot of responsibility.

Dinur: And one of the first things that Adam and I suggest you do is that you get to know your campus. Find out where the library is, figure out what resources it has in terms of being able to help you write papers. What days and what hours is it open? Can you go there on the weekends, or is it closed Saturdays or Sundays? Where the computer labs? Are they only in academic buildings? Are they in dorms? What are their hours and their days, in case your computer's on the fritz and you need to take care of some work?

You also want to figure out what your food options are on and off campus. They're a place that seems especially popular? Are they with the kind of food you like?

Are there laundromats? And this may seem really tangential, right? Who cares about doing your laundry or what kind of food there is? But a lot of your life in college, and a lot of your success, rather, it comes down to planning. It comes down to managing your time, and also it comes down to your self-discipline. Can you eat right? Can you manage your time, and get your work done, and still maintain a social life? You want to have an idea of what's available to you, because if you need to create a schedule, and you need to use these places, it helps to know when you can or cannot use them.

Adam: Right. If you're planning on doing your laundry at 11 o'clock at night, but the laundromat closed at nine, I guess you're going to wear dirty clothes to school the next day - and that's not ideal.

Also, get familiar with certain services on your campus that aren't academic, but really are necessary. Where do you go if you have a cut, or if you get sick, or if you have an accident? There are physical, mental and emotional health services on campus. You need to find out where they are, and you need to pay attention to all three of them. You know yourself better than anyone else would. And if you have professionals available to you who can help, use their services. Just like the tutoring center, just like the writing center that we talked about in episode 29, these are things that your tuition money is paying for. Your tuition money is paying for you to have health insurance, probably. Your tuition money is paying for you to have access to the student health center, to the student counseling center. These are things that you should use if you need them.

And don't be ashamed of needing them! If you are facing depression, if you are facing anxiety - these are very common problems for people when they are first away from home for a long period of time. If you are living on campus or living near campus and you're not living with your family, this is something you really need to make sure you have access to. It is not uncommon for someone to suddenly realize they've got an anxiety disorder, and they need a therapist, and they need medication to help them bring the anxiety back down to a manageable level.

When I was in undergrad, I used the campus health center every month; I used the campus counseling center every week, because that was part of what my tuition was paying for, and I needed those services. Don't feel ashamed of needing them. If you need a therapist, go find one at the campus mental health center.

Dinur: Now, some students may be thinking: "I'm really embarrassed. I don't want people to know I'm dealing with this. What if my boss in the future, or my boss now, finds out?" And, at least in the United States, there is no way they would know - because your health is protected legally through doctor-patient privilege. That means that, unless you were to divulge that you went and why you went, no one would know in either case. And so, the embarrassment you might feel does not translate into reality in most cases, because legally, the school cannot reveal who's - who's gone and for what reason. The most they can say is, if you're requesting a doctor's note to excuse you from classes - then a doctor can say, "I saw this person on such and such a date and I recommend that they return to classes on this date." But beyond that, they cannot legally offer information. If they do, they can be sued. They can be disqualified from the profession.

Adam: And I've had students say to me, "Yeah, but my parents are paying my tuition, so they'll know everything, right?" Only if you sign a release form that allows the school's health center to talk to your parents. I recommend not doing that. You're an adult. This is your business, not theirs.

I had a student once who desperately needed to get on antidepressants, and on birth control, because she had a horrible problem with her periods, where she was having a period that lasted seven or eight days, and then it would stop for about two weeks, and then she'd have another period. There was something wrong. She needed to regulate her periods. It had nothing to do with whether she was sexually active or not.

But she came from a very conservative ethnicity, and she said to me, outside of class, "My mom's going to be furious with me if I go on any medication. You don't do that in my culture."

And I said, "How would she know?"

And she says, "Well, the doctors will tell her, right?"

And I said, "No."

“What do you mean the doctors won't tell her?”

“The doctors won't tell her unless you sign a waiver letting them, and they have to let you know that's what you're doing.”

And she stared at me. And I said, “How old are you?”

She said, “I'm 21, but my mom's paying my tuition.”

I'm all, “Your mom has not had a right to your medical information since the day you turned 18!”

And that was a revelation for her, because the idea of her mother not knowing all of her business, in her culture, was really, really weird. And it took a while for me to get her to actually get this help.

In the same way, disability services are part of what you need to find. Now, this sort of drifts back over into the academic, but if you have to use a wheelchair, disability services will notify your professors or give you a letter to take to your professors to say, “I have this disability.” If you have a so-called “invisible disability” like autism, ADHD, OCD, anxiety, depression - these are all things you can get accommodations for under the law, at least in the United States. And Dinur and I are talking mainly about the United States, because that's where we live, and that's what we've worked.

I was a disabled student. I am a disabled teacher. I still get accommodations even today, because the law says you've got to give me accommodations. As a student, if you've got a disability that makes it very difficult to pay attention, like, say, ADD - the law says that you will get extra time on tests, extra time to get work done, extra help, and that is not cheating, folks, any more than wearing glasses is cheating. If you can't see without the glasses, it's not cheating to wear them. If you need the double time and a quiet room in order to get through the test, that's not cheating. Those are glasses for your mind.

Dinur: Yeah, and make sure you get that paperwork to your professors, because out of classes of, at the minimum, 40, if not into the hundreds - an invisible disability is, by definition, invisible. We cannot see, especially when we're looking into a sea of faces, who's going through what. That paperwork covers you, and it covers us as professors, because if we're ever asked, “Well, why does this student get one and a half times or double the time to take their tests?” we can say, “Well, they gave us the paperwork that suggested that this is something that they need.”

We are not given any sort of diagnosis. All we're told is “This person saw us. We're recommending that they get these accommodations,” and it's on us to make sure that we accommodate them. And that's as far as we look.

Adam: Right? I mean, now, granted, if a professor is knowledgeable about disability issues, they may be able to tell from the accommodations, “this kid's probably got ADHD,” or “this kid probably has an anxiety disorder,” but we're not going to broadcast that to the world. That is private.

Dinur: Yeah.

Adam: That is not our business, that it's not anybody else's business.

And Dinur, you said suggestions - it's actually requirements. You must give them time and a half or whatever.

Dinur: Absolutely.

Adam: And - I had a student once who was pretty severely disabled, but culturally, she wasn't allowed to admit it. And she came to my office hours - and this is back when I was a teaching assistant. I may have mentioned this in other episodes - where she had failed an exam, a multiple choice exam. And I took her exam sheet with her answers on it, and I gave her a copy of the exam with the questions and I said, "All right, tell me what the answer to question two is," 'cause she had missed two, and she just shook her head. She wouldn't even read it. And I said, "Okay, what about question five?" which she had also missed. She wouldn't read that either. I said, "What about question six?" which she had gotten right. She shook her head and she started to cry.

She was Asian and I said, you know, "Tran, what is going on?"

And she says, "The words won't stay put, and my parents think I'm fine."

So it turned out that she had a known problem, which has never been completely documented, but it's basically a weakness in the eyes where, after the eyes begin to get a little tired, the words begin to bounce on the page, but they don't stay put. She was tired when she took her exam. It was late in the day, and the words would not stay put. And so, even sometimes when she thought she was marking box C, she was actually marking box B on the answer sheet, on the Scantron.

It took me about six meetings to get her to understand that this is not something to be ashamed of. Her parents would never be told she'd accessed services. And I finally got her to walk with me over to the disability services center, which - I knew them pretty well. I had used them in my own undergrad and grad period - and I said, "Hey, this is Tran. Tran, this is Monica, and she's the one who runs this place. Monica, she's having some trouble with words that won't stay put on the page. Can you help her?" A couple of weeks later, suddenly, her grades skyrocketed out of the D range up into the A range in almost every class she had.

But if you have an - and we're going to have an episode about this, actually, our next episode is about disability - but don't be ashamed of accessing these services, whether it's mental help, emotional help, disability help. Get the help you need. Your tuition is paying for it, so find these places on campus. Go to them. If you've already got a documented disability, bring that paperwork to the disability services center. Make sure that the student health center has your medical records, so that they know what your already existing conditions are, and get help. There's no shame in getting help.

Dinur: Ultimately, our goal with these podcasts is to help you be the best version of you that you can be. And part of that means knowing that there are options to get help that are available, and should be accessible to you, and to - also telling you, "okay, you've got this new freedom, you're exploring your life, but you've also got to be aware of who you are and how you're feeling. And if you need help, you have the tools to be able to seek it."

Adam: And speaking as someone who, personally, was in denial about several of his disabilities for years, all that did was waste my time. If I had been honest with myself, and upfront with everybody, and said, "These are the problems I have, they are not things I can change, so I need you to accommodate them," my life would've been a lot easier.

Now let's talk about some other non-academic things that are semi-hemi-demi academic. It's okay not to know what your major is on the first day of your first year of college. I promise you. It's okay not to know that you're going to be a music major, or you're going to be an arts major, or you're going to be a chemistry major. You probably are not aware of what you're interested in and what you're not interested in. And we talked about this in Episode 29 where we said, "Okay, take some electives. Figure out what you like. Figure out what's actually talking to you."

So it's totally okay not to know what you want your major to be yet, and it's totally okay to have several interests, and it's even okay to have those interests change over time. You might go in gung-ho about "I love biology!" and then at some point it's just, "okay, this is boring now; I want to do something else." That's okay. You might go in, like I did, and saying "I love music, so obviously that should be my profession and my major and everything," and then realize that when you have to do it for a grade or you have to do it for a paycheck, you don't enjoy doing it anymore. Well then, maybe, all right, that is something that's going to be a hobby, not your major, so you can change your major to math, or you can change your major to geology, or whatever it is that has grabbed your attention and grabbed your passions.

Dinur: And if you're worried that you can't make up your mind, know that, one, you're not alone. There are a lot of other students that change their major and don't know what they want to do. And two, you're in college in order to grow, and part of that growth is exploring what interests you and what doesn't.

If you start wondering who you are, if you start really doubting yourself because of this, you're taking it a little too far. You're in college to learn, figure out what interests you, and if your interests change over time, that just means that at different parts of your life and at different parts of your learning and your growth, you found different ideas and different material really interesting. Well, that probably means that you're going to have a really broad base of ideas and knowledge after you graduate, because you've been exposed to so many different ideas that you might be able to think of connections between them that other people never have.

Adam: And I suppose we should also say right here that, first of all, it's okay if you don't know what you're going to do for your major, but it's okay if you don't know just in general. It's okay if you don't know something when you start a class." A lot of students will look at the list of "these are the student learning objectives or these are the student learning goals, and this is what we are expecting you to know at the end of this class." And their brain goes to, "but I don't know those things yet. That means I'm stupid."

No, it doesn't. It means you haven't learned it yet. And it doesn't matter whether it's something academic or nonacademic, you are not expected to know these things before you learn them. That sort of defeats the purpose of college! So make sure that you understand, you know, write it - if you need, write it down someplace and stick it on a post-it note and put it on your wall, or make a poster and put it on your wall: **YOU DO NOT NEED TO KNOW EVERYTHING TODAY.**

It's okay. You don't have to know everything. You don't have to have all your decisions made. It doesn't matter if all your ducks are in a row. As long as they're in the same pond, you're probably doing pretty well.

Dinur: Like, one of the things that I do in my lectures is, I pepper my students with a lot of questions. And I do that, not because I want to put people on the spot, but I want to know where my students are in terms of their understanding. Is this background material that they know really, really well, and so I don't need to spend a lot of time on it? Or do I need to spend a few minutes and give everyone a refresher course, because this idea is going to lead into the main part of my lecture?

And so even if you don't know, that just lets me as an instructor know, "okay, I've got to make sure that I got to cover this because I'm seeing about a third or half of my students and they look really confused by this." So it's our way of knowing what we need to cover, because if we start launching into ideas and you don't know where we're coming from, then you're going to have no understanding of why the ideas make sense or why things are done.

Adam: Now, speaking of why things are done, one of the experiences that you may have now, especially if you are living on campus, or you were renting with roommates and living near campus, and you're not at home with your folks or not at home with your family anymore - if you are living alone on campus for the first time, it is now your job to pay for things.

So, do you have a checking account set up? Do you have a debit card set up with a checking account? Do you know where the ATM is on campus? Be aware, an ATM is not endless money. It's whatever's in your checking account. And if your parents have given you a debit card that is attached to their bank account, ask them "how much can I spend?" and keep track of that.

You're going to have to make a budget for the bills that you'll have to pay. If you're renting, then you're going to have to pay some electric bills and water bills, maybe a gas bill, depending on if you have gas there or not. Phone bills for your cell phone, Internet access and cable, and of course rent and groceries and things like that. You've got to have a budget, and this is one of the first big, big, big adulting lessons that students who live on or near campus and not with their families have to learn.

Don't let yourself get caught the way that my brother did when he was at UC Santa Cruz - called my parents late in the semester and said, "I've run out of money," and my parents said, "We gave you what we had. There's nothing left." Don't let yourself get into that situation.

Remember that when your student loans disburse, you will get some of it probably back to you, because there's usually enough to pay your tuition and then give you a little bit of money. Remember that that's not money. That is borrowed money. That means you're going to have to pay it back someday. If you are able to put some of that away in a savings account, hold onto that. Don't spend it, okay?

But make sure that you know about budgeting and bills and how to pay for things and if you don't, there are online classes. I'm sure that there are classes on Teachable and Coursera. There are online courses that will teach you basic budgeting. This is something that you need, now that you're on campus and living alone.

Dinur: Something that Adam and I brought up in Episode 29, though we also want to reiterate it now, is get to know your instructors. Get to know your teachers. Because just like you, we're people too, right? Just as you're a person before you're a student, we're people before we're teachers or professors, and if you want to get to know us, talk to us about things that are interesting to you from class or things that confuse you from class. Because at the end of the semester we can go, "Oh, I remember Dave, he was the one I talked to about this from criminology," or "That's Maria, and she had this question about her paper and I really saw her work on it a lot over the term."

If you don't want to talk about stuff from class, it's not up your alley, your teachers will occasionally give you little clues as to who they are, what, what their interests are. So for example, I told my students that I do sports photography in my spare time, and I tell them the sports that I shoot, and sometimes I'll have students come up and talk to me about a game that they are at or that they saw. Or if I bump into them at a game, I go, "oh, that's right. They're not just this person, one out of like 200 from my intro to crim class, this is Sam, and I remember

we were chatting at the Dodgers game because they are also a really big fan, and we were taking pictures, and they introduced me to such and such.”

It lets us know who you are, and that goes a really long way down the road. Not only in terms of grades, but if you're thinking about graduate school or law school or medical school - something where you'll need letters of recommendation from your instructors, the better we get to know you, the better our letters can be for you.

Adam: I've had students where, after class I might have a short break, where I can grab my lunch, and I'll tell them, you know, if they need to talk to me and they can't come to office hours, come have lunch with me. I don't mind. And we sit in the student center, and I have my lunch and they have their lunch, and they tell me “I'm worried about this test. I don't know what I'm doing,” or, “I'm scared of tests.” You know? I've actually coached students in informal ways to say, “Okay, look, what is the thing that's scaring you? Let's talk about this.” I tell them stories of my own experiences, like we've been telling on every episode we've had here, you've learned to know me and Dinur. If you became our students now, you'd know a lot about us and that's stuff that we've talked about with our students: Dinur's sports photography, my interest in the Renaissance Faire, these are things that we've brought up, and our students now know that we're not just “that person at the front of the room who grades things.” We're also a person outside of this. We're a person off-campus too.

So that when they do run into us in the local grocery store, they don't look at us like, “Why are you here? Don't you live on campus? Don't you live in your office?” No, I don't have a cot in my office. I actually am a fully rounded human being.

Now, another thing to let you know about is imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome is that feeling that everyone's going to figure out that you don't belong there. If you were a gifted and talented kid, you were probably one of two or three in your whole high school class who was that smart, and now you're at Princeton and everybody is as smart, or smarter, than you. And this is a new experience and this may make you feel like “I'm a fraud.”

If you are the first person in your family to go to college, you may feel like “I'm a fraud.”

If you have never been confident in your ability to learn, you may feel like “I'm a fraud.”

I've got to tell you, imposter syndrome is not only for students. I knew a professor once who had been tenured for something like 35 or 40 years. He had a publication list as long as his door and he was still convinced that, at some point, people would figure out he didn't deserve his PhD; he didn't deserve all the honors and accolades he'd gotten; he didn't deserve to be treated like he knew anything, because inside he knew he was a fraud. He knew that he was an impostor.

If this sounds familiar, and for a lot of you that probably does whether you're at Princeton or your local college, you are not alone.

But your job, as we've already said, is not to know everything. It's to learn, it's to grow. It's to develop your skills, it's to develop your knowledge. So when that part of your brain that says, “everybody here knows that you're just faking it,” when it says that, tell it to take a long walk off a short pier with a dictionary tied to its ankles. 'Cause it's really not that big. The dictionary will drag it down.

You are not an imposter. You may think you are. You may have been told to believe you are. But I want you to remember, when you feel that imposter syndrome coming on: there are professors who have enormous lists of

publications who have been tenured for 30, 40 years, who are still worried that someone will figure out that they don't belong in academia.

They're wrong. And your impostor syndrome is wrong too. And I speak as someone who's had it. I know Dinur has told me that he's had it, especially since he started teaching, and you know what? Imposter syndrome is just a roadblock that you can move past.

Dinur: And honestly, there's a pretty good chance that at least some of your classmates also deal with imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome is a feeling where you feel like all of your weaknesses are highlighted and no one sees the good parts of who you are. And in reality, most people just have a pretty - I'll say, basic "front stage" or facade. Like, we see you as students. We see our peers as our colleagues. We don't see the fears, we don't see what they think they're weak on. We don't see what students think they're weak on, unless obviously they tell us and they say, "Hey, I'm a little unsure about something."

Adam: And I'll also share something that I just saw the other day on social media: A lot of people, at this point, know that courage isn't not being scared. It's being scared and doing it anyway. Well, if that's true, then confidence is not having confidence. It's feeling insecure and doing it anyway. So when you feel that imposter syndrome coming up, do something to show yourself that you can do it anyway, and that will build confidence over time. But at first you've got to learn how to say, "All right, I'm insecure, I'm still gonna do this."

Dinur: And one tip is, you can always ask yourself, "Okay, I'm not brave enough to give this presentation, but what would someone who is brave enough to give a presentation do?" Try and mimic that. Try and follow your roadmap. And look, early on it might be impossible. It might be tough, but you keep chipping away at it time and time and time again, and before you know it, you'll - I'm not going to say you'll love public speaking, but it may not inspire the fear and the dread that it did the first time.

Adam: We also recommend that you find a work-life balance for you. Not your mom's work-life balance, not your professor's work-life balance - your work-life balance. And the key word is balance. Make sure that you are getting your homework done, that you're getting your studying done, and that you're doing it at a high quality level, but also make time to be yourself outside of classes. A lot of students forget to do this. They become a grind, and all they do is classes, classes, classes, homework, homework, homework, readings, readings, readings, papers, papers, papers - and at some point, the person they are that isn't a student disappears. They realize they haven't spent any time with their friends in four months. They realize that the last time that they heard from their boyfriend was two weeks ago.

Make sure that you get a balance. Do not load yourself down with extra classes just to rush through college faster. Allow yourself the time to be you. Allow yourself the time to do what you like to do, even if it has nothing to do with school, all right?. Dinur's a sports photographer. He's been doing that since he was in school. He was a student, and then on the weekends he went to games and he took photos and now he's getting a following.

For me, I made weekends were my time off, I went to Renaissance Faires. I went out to Disneyland. I did not sit at home with my books 24/7/365. It wasn't sustainable to do that, and I needed to know who I was. So make sure that you find a work-life balance. Don't go too far over into school. Don't go too far over into avoiding it. Give yourself some time in each place.

Dinur: And keep in mind you're coming into college with a different set of skills and a different knowledge base than your peers, because not everyone at your college went to your high school. They didn't have that same

learning experience. They may have had some better teachers; they may have had some awful teachers. But what that means is, everyone is in the same classroom, but they're at different stages in their learning curve. Some are just beginning, some are in the middle. Some have been at school for a while. They've got this studying thing down, and they're further along in their development.

But also keep in mind that your teachers are in there and they're at different stages of their development. Sometimes you're getting a teacher who's still in graduate school, and this is the first time they've taught a class this big, and it's the first time they've taught a class of their own, rather than being a teaching assistant. Maybe you're getting someone who's in the middle of their dissertation, and they're so focused on their deadlines that they come off as being really aggressive or annoyed in class, and it's not that, it's the lack of sleep, because dissertations can be stressful. Maybe you're getting someone who's taught for 20 years, and they haven't changed their syllabus at all in the last 17, right?

So just as you and your peers are at different stages, your teachers are at different stages, not only of their careers, but also their learning-and-development curve. You know, I mentioned some of the downsides, but maybe sometimes you have a teacher who's trying out new methods. They're trying to flip the classroom more. They're trying to go away from lecturing for the full hour, hour and a half, and they're trying to incorporate more group work, because we want to try and develop ourselves as teachers, in order to help our students grow and develop.

And the reason Adam and I are talking about this is, sometimes a bad lecture or a bad class just comes as the result of trying something new, and it just didn't take, because not everything that's new works smoothly, right out of the box. Sometimes if your teachers\ seems annoyed and you go, "Oh my God, did I piss them off?" well, maybe they're exhausted because something came up in their lives. Maybe there's no hostility. Maybe they didn't realize how they came off and something's going on and they weren't able to articulate, or be especially friendly in the moment. It doesn't necessarily mean any long-term hostility or general incompetence. It could just be a bad day, and everyone has those.

Adam: And I want to give examples of both the teacher and the student from my own experience. When I was in undergrad, I had come back to school, and I was in my early thirties, and I took a class with Steve Brint, who Dinur and I have both interacted with. He was teaching a class on the city. And it was a class that I should have probably taken in my lower division, but it wasn't available at the community college that I had gone to before I went on to the four-year.

So here I am, sitting in my wheelchair - because I was in a wheelchair at the time - at the front of the class. And the thing is, because I was at the front of the class, and because Steve Brint knew that I knew what I was talking about, he called on me a lot. I had some of my classmates come up to me as I was waiting for the final class, and they tried to hand their papers in to me, because they thought I was the teaching assistant. And I considered throwing their papers away, just so that I could get a better grade. And then I didn't.

But I handed them back. I'm all, "I'm not the TA."

They're all, "Yes you are. You're just not my section."

I'm, "Okay. Do you have a section for this class?"

"Well, no."

“Well, then why would he have a TA? I'm a student just like you.”

“But you're old!”

“Yeah, I'm in my thirties, but that doesn't make me not a student, okay?”

So be aware that just because there are older folks in the class, that doesn't make them any less of a student, and older folks, yeah, sometimes the younger students will think that you are one of the teachers. Enjoy that. Revel in that. Take it as a compliment, okay.

The other thing is that -

Dinur: Wield your power responsibly.

Adam: Exactly. Wield that power very responsibly, you know? Run a study group and make them all listen to you.

And then the thing about being the first time that you ever taught - the first class I ever taught, as a teacher, was a summer class when I was a graduate student. Now: summer class; I had not been taught anything about how to teach, so I was kind of flying by the seat of my pants hoping that I could figure this stuff out; and the students had some very good compliments and some very good complaints at the end of the class. And one of the main ones was “he teaches from the book. I could've just read the book,” which taught me: don't prep from the book that you are teaching from. Use a different book to prep, so that it doesn't look like you've just gone straight through the book and just repeated everything the book said. And that was a revelation for me, because I always had thought that professors prepped from the same book that they use with the students. I have since learned that's not the case.

But the other thing is, I thought I had to stand there and lecture the whole time, and this was a once a week, three hours a week class. By the time I'd been talking for an hour and a half, I had no voice left, but I didn't know enough techniques yet to give students other things to do.

So have some compassion for your professors. Some of them may have only just started doing this. Even if they're a tenured or tenure-track professor, they may not have learned how to teach until they came to this school. They may still not really have learned how to teach. They're just kind of flying by the seat of their pants and hoping that it works. And you've probably been there with your own stuff. So try to understand that everyone is coming in with a different skill set, a different knowledge set, and at a different place, as Dinur said, in their development.

Dinur: One of the things we've talked about a little bit is your goals. And if your goal is to go to law school or grad school or medical school, well, developing your rapport, getting to know your professors, that is absolutely crucial. Because, yeah, these schools are going to look at your grades and they're going to look at your test scores, but they're also going to want to know from the people who know your work best what they think of you. And for me, the more growth I see from my students, the more praise I can heap on them, and praise them to the sky.

Look, I've had students who just aced my classes, and I tried to write them letters as glowing as they deserved because they did excellent work. And that's easy. But if you start a class and you get a D on the test, or a C-minus, but then you work, and over time the work you do for your tests and for your papers and your

participation and that gets you up to like a B-plus or a B, well, that is damn respectable progress. And I am very happy to write letters for students who show that progress, even if they didn't get an A. So just because you didn't earn an A doesn't mean that you won't get a good letter of recommendation.

But we want to see, one, stuff in the classroom in terms of your growth and your development. But we also want to get to know who you are. You know, let us know why you're thinking about medical school. Do you want to work specifically in poor communities, or are you trying to provide a service that may not be accessible to a lot of people? If you're interested in law, what pushes you that way? The more that we know about you, the more we can tailor our letters to the kind of school and say, "yes, such and such really wants to go to law school. They want to make a difference in their community."

So this rapport, us getting to know you and vice versa, that helps you not only in the short term - in terms of, you know, your professor's going to remember you when it comes time for grades - but it also helps you down the road, because if you have this as a goal, one step you'll need is having good letters of recommendation.

Adam: Now, if more school's not your thing, remember: the skills you develop in college are also designed to help you in the work world. Things like: turning in work on time; turning in quality work, not half-assed work; working individually and with a group, and being effective in both ways; writing well, writing clearly, writing effectively. These are all things that a lot of professions demand, so focus on developing these skills. If you know that you tend to be late to class, start setting your watch 15 minutes earlier, or your phone - set an alarm, so that you get up off your ass and go to class instead of just sitting there going, "oh yeah, class is in 15 minutes, la, la, la," when it's all the way across campus. Maybe you should be walking by that point.

These are things that employers are going to expect. So even if your goal is to finish and never come back to school, remember that you've got to take something away from school besides the piece of paper, or what did you do it for?

Dinur: Adam talked about having compassion for your teachers and for your professors. And part of the reason Adam and I are bringing this up again is that, as teachers, we have a lot of different obligations. So as students you see us in the classroom hour to hour and a half twice a week, or those three hours once a week. But on top of that we have to write our lectures, we have to write the exams, we have to grade exams and assignments. If you're dealing with a professor, especially at either a research-intensive, or research-and-teaching balanced institution, well, your professor's probably also working on some research.

Some of your professors, like Adam and I said earlier, are new to teaching. They're very early in their development curve. Maybe it's your teaching assistant's first time running any sort of discussion section, and they're nervous because being in front of 30 people at once, especially the first time you do it, it's nerve wracking.

In addition to that, some people are working on their own classes, specifically graduate students who are working towards their master's degree or towards their doctorate. Some have to serve on different committees or have other on-campus obligations. And so you do see us at the front of the room, but that doesn't mean that we only exist at the front of the room just as you might have family obligations or you've got work off campus that takes up a certain amount of your time and energy that as an instructor I might not see. Well, just because it's not seen by this audience doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

And so we share acknowledgement of one another's humanity, in terms of knowing that, hey, we're sharing this time and this place, but we have things going on outside of it. Well, having that shared understanding, along

with a clear expectation of effort in the classroom from both ends, and then understanding that life sometimes throws us curveballs - that goes such a long way to making classes not only be productive and effective, it makes them hopefully more pleasant in terms of both being learning environments and teaching environments.

Adam: Now, remember too: you outnumber us by a lot. All right? There are a lot more students than there are teachers. You have to write one paper for this class. Your teacher has to grade 40 papers for this class. Well, think of how much time you spent writing one paper or one assignment, and then don't ask us for a grade on papers for at least a week to two weeks after they're turned in, because we're not just grading your class. We have other classes, and they probably have papers too. Just as we would not want you to turn in rushed, low quality work, you really don't want us to rush our grading, because that's when we are more prone to making mistakes and many of those mistakes do not help students.

I know, for me, when I've got a pile of grading sitting in front of me, it tends to stress me out. The more stressed out I am, the pickier I get. If I'm in a bad mood, I will not grade. I tell my students this, "I'm in a bad mood today because of something completely unrelated to school, and I am not able to focus on grading in a way that will be kind and fair. So I'm not grading today. I'll be grading tomorrow."

And I've had students say, "What? You really - you, you don't grade when you're mad?"

I'm all, "No, because there are professors who, when they grade when they're stressed, they do it slapdash and half-ass and they don't notice your mistakes, and there's no learning going on. It's just 'get out of my face.' And then there are professors like me, who, when we get stressed out, we get really, really nitpicky. We find every missing comma and every extra comma and every time that you used 'their' instead of 'there.' We find all the misspelled words. We find every awkward sentence. And we get really, really, really jerkheaded about it."

So remember, you outnumber us, and what you turn in buries us. And be kind while we're digging ourselves out from underneath the pile, because we've got five classes and each one has 40 students. That's, what, 200 papers that we've got to grade. That's a lot of papers.

Dinur: And just as you spent time, so do we. You want to have honest, quality, constructive feedback, and if you make us rush, then you might see a bunch of weird markings and not understand why we marked a paper down for what we did, or what these squiggles mean.

Adam: I had a student come to me once, back before I realized that my handwriting would never improve, and they said - and this is when I was a graduate student - and they said, "Adam, what did you write here?"

And I said, "I have no idea. I think I said this, but I'm not actually sure. You can ignore that, because I have no idea what I wrote."

Why? Because I was trying to grade 180 papers in the course of a weekend. I gotta tell you, my qualifying exams were not as hard as that weekend. And that's really saying something.

Dinur: One thing to keep in mind, we've talked about this shared humanity. Well, part of that humanity is being honest and showing respect for both your classmates and your teachers. And I know Adam and I mentioned this in Episode 29, but we're bringing it back up. We will always reciprocate the honesty and the respect that we are shown.

And one thing that I tell my students, at the beginning of every class, is that I expect them to respect one another. I ask for it in return. I don't demand it. The reason I do that is, it puts respect and it puts honesty squarely in your, the student's, corner. It means if I'm honest and upfront, then this person's going to be honest and upfront back with me, and that leads to a good environment.

Adam: And this applies to your non-academic experience as much your academic one. Remember we talked about how this is practice for when you get out of school and you get a job? This is something you need to do in your workplace too.

Also, your non-academic experience on campus. You're not just going to be interacting with teachers. You're going to interact with the financial aid officer. You are going to talk to the person in the health center. You are going to have to deal with your academic advisor. There's a lot of people that you will have to talk to and interact with, over the course of your college career. Remember, the financial aid officer who can't give you that extra loan money, they're not your enemy. They just have to follow the rules. It's not personal. Respect the people who you are working with, so that they can help you and respect you.

And one of the best pieces of advice that Dinur and I can give you on this is, assume positive intent until you have proof that the other person is not acting with positive intent. So if you see someone and you are already suspicious of them because they're a financial aid officer, you are going to react to them like they're the enemy. But if you look at them and say, "Okay, this person's job is to try to help me pay for my education, and they may not be able to do everything I want them to do, but that's not their fault." It's like getting mad at someone at the DMV. They don't have any control over the laws. Their job is to enforce them.

So assume good intent from the people that you are talking with. Assume good intent from your classmates. Assume good intent from your teachers, until and unless you get proof that they actually do have it in for you. And most of the time, they don't. That's gonna go a long way toward making your life less stressful.

Dinur: And the last piece of advice that Adam and I have for this episode is: be careful with what you post online, because you really don't want potential employers or clients to turn you down from a job because you put a rant about a job or a class that you posted maybe after a few drinks.

Cardale Jones, who was a backup quarterback at Ohio State, in his first year he tweeted, "we came here to play football, not to play school. Why should we go to classes?" Well, that tweet became the basis of my dissertation. And so while I don't think Cardale Jones intended for that to happen, because he and I have never met, not everyone is going to take that tweet and say, "you know what? I want to figure out why things like this are said." A lot of people are going to get really defensive.

But there's another practical angle to this. I had a friend a few years back who loved to post on this app called Foursquare, and it was an app where people would check in at different locations and become, I think, "The Mayor Of..." So it was like, "You are the mayor of Starbucks. You are the mayor of Target."

Well, what you're also telling people is, "I'm not home. Please come and take my stuff."

No one, no one needs to know where you are 24/7. I promise you, no one's life is so interesting that everyone is clamoring and going, "Man, it's 4:37 PM on a Wednesday. I wonder what they're up to."

So, one, that allows you to save a little privacy for yourself. Two, you're not broadcasting to people with bad intentions, "I'm not home. Please feel free to take my things." And three, you're also protecting yourself by not posting rants, because you never know who's going to see them and how they're going to be interpreted.

Adam: Yeah, too many of us, especially us older folks - I'm going to talk about Generation X for sure, and older Millennials - we really, still, don't have as strong an understanding of "if you put it online, it's there forever." Twitter is forever. You can delete your tweets, but I guarantee you there is someone who has already copied every single tweet every person has posted, and they've got it somewhere. Maybe it's blackmail fodder, maybe it's just, "Ha ha, this is funny."

Imagine if you were Cardale Jones. Now, Cardale Jones - my understanding is that he is currently working towards his master's degree, so he changed his attitude. But if I were an employer and all I knew about Cardale Jones was that he had posted, "why should I go to class? I came here to play football." - am I going to want to hire him? Probably not. Not even for my football team.

Why? Because he's shown that he's not willing to live up to his responsibilities with that tweet. Now he was what, 21, I think, when he tweeted that?

Dinur: No, I think probably 18 - I think he was 19.

Adam: Do you want your 27-year-old self to be judged by what you tweeted when you were 18? And so a rule of thumb: if you wouldn't say it in class, if you wouldn't say it to your parents, tell it to your friends in private, but don't post it online. That includes tweets, Instagram, Snapchat, even though I know that that's supposed to disappear, it doesn't. Facebook, for those of you who are older and use Facebook, you know. Any of the LiveJournal clones. Do not post it online unless you don't care who sees it - and "you don't care who sees it" isn't just the people you know right now. It's also potential employers. It's potential graduate schools. It's potential places where you don't know you're going to be in five years, but five years from now you'll look back at yourself and say, "Oh God, I can't believe I posted that. Can I get rid of it?"

It's already been there for five years, dude, it's never going away.

Dinur: So that's what we have for you for Episode 31! If you're finding this podcast helpful, please share it with your friends. We are always hoping to get new subscribers, so we can help more people. You can find us on Apple Podcasts, Spotify and Android. We're hosted on blubrry.com. Also, we'd really appreciate it if you wrote a review of this podcast on Apple Podcasts.

Adam: And be sure to join us next week for Episode 32, when we'll talk about what it's like to be a disabled student, and how to manage your academic life when you have a disability.

Adam: You've been listening to Learning Made Easier, a podcast about how we learn, how we teach, and how they overlap.

Dinur: We want to say thank you to all of our supporters on Patreon, who make this podcast possible.

Adam: If you want to support us, please go to www.patreon.com/learningmadeeasier.

Dinur: And we look forward to seeing you next week!