

# **The Insider's Guide to Mississippi State University**

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*Note: This material is a DRAFT. We are still in the process of writing, adding, and editing chapters. Comments, reactions, and suggestions are welcome.*

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## Chapter 1: THE PEOPLE'S UNIVERSITY

Scholars, it's a long story, but I actually came to Mississippi State by accident—and I loved it so much I never left. Being a professor here is my first, last, and only full-time job. In fact, I was shocked to discover that in three years, I will have served here for fully one-third of the entire history of Mississippi State University. I guess that makes me a good choice to welcome you and tell you some things about the history and traditions of this great school.

I am Dr. Tom Carskadon, Professor of Psychology and Director of First-Year Experience Programs here at Mississippi State. To save time, everybody calls me "Dr. C." I will be your guide and author in these chapters. Over the past 45 years, I have taught over 40,000 of you Scholars—I call all my students Scholars—and my fondest wish is that you thrive here and come to love Mississippi State University as much as I do. In fact, I want to teach your children!

Now, let's begin our tour of this great university.

People often ask me how students have changed over my years here, and my answer usually surprises them: The students haven't changed very much at all. Sure, the styles and fads, the music and entertainment, and certainly the technology have changed; but the students themselves are still the same intelligent, enthusiastic, interesting people they have always been, here for a first-rate education and a great college experience. Really, it is not the students who have changed; but the *University* has changed dramatically.

A whole book could be written about our history, and in fact it has been: Most of what I will tell you comes from *Maroon and White*, written by University Archivist Michael Ballard, who extended two previous histories written by the legendary MSU teacher and administrator John K. Bettersworth. The beautifully restored, 1,000-seat Bettersworth Auditorium in Lee Hall, the original and current central administration building, is named after Dr. Bettersworth.

### Our Four Themes

#### Inclusion at MSU: The People's University

There are four overriding themes in the history of this great institution. The first is a warm, welcoming *inclusion* of all types of people, regardless of wealth, status, or social class, regardless of gender, regardless of race. We truly are "The People's University." Rich or

poor, male or female, urban or rural, sophisticated or simple, black or white or red or yellow or brown, all are welcomed and given opportunity here. There is no "one" way that students are supposed to be at Mississippi State. This is the friendliest campus I have ever set foot on, and that is nothing new. For decades, everyone who visits has said the same thing.

A very important point of pride is that Mississippi State University is one of the few remaining high-quality, comprehensive universities in the entire country where students can enter with nothing, work their way through with jobs, loans, and grants, and graduate with a university degree that will be the key to their future success.

#### Service at MSU

The second overriding theme is service. The people created this university, and a core part of the University mission is to serve the people in return: locally, statewide, nationwide, and worldwide.

#### Expansion of MSU

The third overriding theme is expansion. Over our history, we have added program after program, field after field, specialty after specialty to become a truly comprehensive university. And we have continually expanded the number of undergraduate and graduate students enrolled here.

#### Research at MSU

The fourth overriding theme is research. Without research, there is no knowledge to teach. Think of it this way: It is easy to make light bulbs, once you discover how; the true challenge is to invent the first one. Mississippi State University does cutting-edge research in far more fields than I could possibly include in this chapter—and the world is better for it.

Now, let's look at some of the history and traditions of "The People's University."

#### Early MSU History

Mississippi State University is a land-grant institution. In 1862, in the midst of the Civil War and ungodly strife and crisis, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Morrill Act, providing land in every state of the Union to provide higher education in agriculture, mechanical arts (what we now think of as engineering), military science, and associated academic subjects.

A little-known fact is that after the Civil War, it was the University of Mississippi that was designated as one of the state's two land-grant schools: Ole Miss for whites, and Alcorn for blacks. But when Ole Miss students showed no interest in agricultural programs, and faculty opposed to them left in droves, Ole Miss renounced its land-grant status. Therefore, in 1878, the Mississippi Legislature authorized creation of a new college for this purpose, and Starkville was subsequently chosen as the best location for what was named the Agricultural and Mechanical College of the State of Mississippi, affectionately known as "A&M."

Our first President was Stephen D. Lee, after whom Lee Hall is named. A well-to-do South Carolinian, Lee was a graduate of the famed United States Military Academy at West Point. He fought on the Southern side during the Civil War and rose to the rank of Lieutenant General in the Confederate Army, the youngest person to reach such a rank. He was only distantly related to General Robert E. Lee, the famous commander of the Confederate armed forces. After the war, Stephen D. Lee settled in Columbus, Mississippi, where his wife's family had major land holdings. Lee became a state senator, and with the support of the Grange, a powerful group representing common farmers, he was named our first President.

The first building was completed in late 1880, and the first students arrived on October 6<sup>th</sup> of that year. The intended dormitory was not yet completed, so until the Spring semester, President Lee allocated each student \$8 per month to rent rooms locally from the townspeople of Starkville. There were 13 faculty and 87 college students, plus another 267 students in a preparatory high school that was then part of the college, designed to prepare students who were not yet ready for college.

All students wore gray uniforms and participated in military training. Regardless of finances, all students were required to work, mostly farm work, and the wages they made were applied to their tuition. This was all part of the concept of "The People's College." There was even a rule against students' bringing or hiring personal servants.

Students had to buy and carry their own coal for heat. At first there were no bathing facilities. A bathhouse was soon constructed, but for over a decade it was unheated. Faculty were somehow expected to be sure students bathed once a week. Routine personal needs required the use of outhouses.

Various methods were tried to enforce discipline. If a student got in trouble and was to be expelled, the student could be spared if enough fellow students pledged to follow all rules. Students enforced many rules themselves, but cheating was a major problem even then. Gambling and drinking were forbidden. Even innocent games with playing cards were banned, and dances were soon abolished, as well. Any student who was unaccounted for longer than two hours could be expelled. Fraternities and "secret societies" were forbidden.

There weren't many sources of amusement, other than academic and religious groups, including the YMCA. Some students tried rabbit hunting, but they had to herd them and beat them to death with sticks—can you imagine—because guns were banned except for military training. Students often set off firecrackers for mischief, both indoors and out, and yelling out the windows at faculty was a strange but popular pastime.

Transportation to the College was via a rail line spur that went from the small town of Artesia straight into the middle of campus. In 1884, "women of disreputable reputation" got off the train with the thought of entertaining some of the student body, but they were literally beaten back by a vigilante group of 30 students who intercepted them and caned them with switches. Things looked up very slightly with the first admission of females in 1882, but it would be many years before women enrolled in significant numbers. The main source of more reputable women was the newly established college in Columbus we now call Mississippi University for Women, affectionately known as "The W." On special occasions, their entire student body would visit here. In fact, for many decades, even through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, "The W" was the chief way that men at Mississippi State met women.

### **Women at MSU**

The story of the early days of women at Mississippi State is well documented in a doctoral dissertation, *Steps Toward Redefinition: Coeducation at Mississippi State College 1930-1945*, by Cathryn T. Goree, an MSU graduate. (Like most of the knowledge in the world, her dissertation is available in the MSU Library.) At first, female students were enrolled in exceedingly small numbers, and most of them were either daughters of faculty and staff or local residents, as there was no housing for them. The only time many women were seen was during summer school, when schoolteachers, who were mainly women at the time,

came here temporarily to take education classes designed for teachers already working in the field.

In the beginning, women were carefully segregated from men, and social contact between the men and women outside of class was strictly prohibited, except on closely supervised special occasions. Functionally, the genders did not mix outside of the classroom. They were not even allowed to study together. In 1912, an innocent meeting between a cadet (all male MSU students back then were military cadets) and a female student in a study room in the library during the noon hour led to restrictions so harsh that they caused a major student rebellion and strike by fully 70% of the student body. It was so bad that the Governor of Mississippi came to campus to try to restore order and calm. In the wake of all this, a general policy was instituted banning all women from attending college here.

That ban remained in effect for almost two decades, until late 1930. Opinions vary on why the ban was lifted, but at least part of the reason was probably economic. It was during the worst of the Great Depression in this country, and school finances were in a dire state. Adding female students, even just a few, would bring in desperately needed money. As World War II unfolded in the early to mid 1940s, so many men went into the armed forces, that women began to represent a significant, though still minority, proportion of the student population here. To house them, Magruder Hall, then a nearly new men's residence hall built in 1938, became the first women's housing on campus. (It is now the home of the Psychology Department; I remember when I first came here, each office in Magruder had a sink, mirror, and closet, a remnant of those earlier days.)

Even when peace finally came to the nation at the conclusion of World War II, there were only a couple hundred women in our student body. However, by the end of the 1950s, women were here in much more significant numbers, and the trend accelerated in the 1960s until the proportion of women enrolled resembled those at similar universities around the country. Today, our gender split is about even, with women slightly outnumbering men.

### **Integration of MSU**

Integration was the next step in our becoming The People's University. For decades, higher education had been strictly segregated in the state of Mississippi, and the black colleges and universities were woefully underfunded in comparison to the white ones, even

though they did represent a significant educational opportunity for black citizens at the time.

An abortive series of attempts to integrate the University of Southern Mississippi, beginning in 1956, had led to the framing of the would-be applicant, Clyde Kennard, and he was sentenced to prison on false, trumped up charges of (so help me) stealing chicken feed. Public officials at the time were quite willing to play dirty to keep Mississippi's premier institutions all white.

The situation at Ole Miss was far worse. In 1962, James Meredith attempted to enroll at the state's "flagship" institution. Ross Barnett, the virulently racist Governor of the State of Mississippi and one of the most notorious segregationists in the nation, would have none of it, and he made political hay by stridently condemning integration and acting aggressively and maliciously against supporters of the ever-strengthening civil rights movement.

The Meredith case went all the way to the United States Supreme Court, which ruled in his favor. This led to the famous riot on the Ole Miss campus in October, 1962, when James Meredith was enrolled. United States President John F. Kennedy and his Attorney General (and brother) Robert F. Kennedy had to resort to sending in hundreds of U.S. Marshalls and actual military troops from several locations to try to protect James Meredith. In one terrible night of violence, two persons were murdered, including a French journalist, and hundreds were seriously injured on both sides. Calm was eventually restored, but passions remained high, and though some students were supportive, Meredith was harassed by many others. He did graduate, however, with a degree in Political Science.

Ole Miss is a much different place now, and they have gone to great lengths to learn from their history and inculcate values of inclusion throughout their community. *We do* make progress.

You probably have not heard about the violent riots when Mississippi State University was integrated: That is because there *weren't* any riots or violence when Mississippi State was integrated. Our MSU President, Dean Colvard, was determined that Mississippi State University was going to do it right. We did. The integration of our university has been described as "strikingly peaceful." You can read the entire, inspiring story where I did, at <http://www.msstate.edu/web/media/detail.php?id=2936>.

The first African-American student at Mississippi State University enrolled in July 1965. His name was Richard Holmes. Intelligent, hard working, quiet, and humble, he had been raised in his later childhood years by his godfather, the local black physician Dr. Douglas Conner, a beloved doctor and a highly influential and courageous civil rights leader. (I knew and admired Dr. Conner, as did almost everyone in Starkville, and I had the pleasure of teaching his daughter Divian when she was a freshman here.)

By Richard Holmes' own description, his coming to campus was "quiet and serene," and there were "no catcalls, no racial slurs." Hostility was minimal. In the fall, only a few local losers protested, nonviolently. "No one ever spit on me, no one hit me, no one pushed me, no one pulled a prank on me. No student ever closed a door in my face. Some befriended me and treated me with dignity and respect. Many just ignored me." Integration created no crisis here; it was accepted.

Richard Holmes did not come here for political reasons; he simply wanted a top-flight education. He completed his undergraduate degree, served a tour in the U.S. Army, returned to State and earned a master's degree in Microbiology, and then went to medical school at our "sister MSU," Michigan State University. Dr. Holmes spent most of his career saving lives as an emergency room physician in Birmingham, Alabama. He retired from there, and in his last years as a practicing physician, he returned to Mississippi State and worked in our own Longest Student Health Center. I used to tell my students that if they wanted to meet a genuine hero in the history of Mississippi State University, all they had to do was ask for Dr. Holmes the next time an illness took them to the Student Health Center. He no longer works on campus, but if you *ever* have the chance to hear Dr. Holmes speak, be *sure* to attend.

Dr. Holmes summed it up nicely when he addressed thousands of people at the 2003 Commencement (graduation) ceremony. "[The] most impressive and vivid memory of my time here as a student is the fact that the MSU student body, and the MSU family as a whole, treated me with dignity and respect."

I have said it before and I will say it again, Scholars: At Mississippi State University, we are a class act. Be proud, Scholars. Be very proud.

It is in honor of Dr. Holmes that the Holmes Cultural Diversity Center is named. MSU went on to admit a great many more African American students. In fact,

Mississippi State University has a higher proportion of African American students than any other school in the SEC; and every year, we graduate more African American students than some of the most famous historically black colleges and universities in the country. By the time I arrived on campus eight years after Dr. Holmes first attended MSU, nobody thought twice about the integration of Mississippi State—and that was a good thing.

We had truly become The People's University.

### **History, Kismet, and MSU**

History comes together at MSU so elegantly it might well be described as fate (kismet). You already know that Mississippi State's very existence traces back to federal legislation passed under President Abraham Lincoln, authorizing the establishment of land-grant colleges and universities in every state of the Union; and you already know that MSU's first President, Stephen D. Lee, fought as a Lieutenant General in the Confederate Army during the Civil War. Ulysses S. Grant<sup>1,2,3</sup> was a prominent Union general whose forces actually captured Stephen D. Lee following the siege of Vicksburg and held him prisoner. (He was, of course, released after the war.) It was Grant's remarkable military successes in Mississippi that caused President Lincoln to put him in command of the entire Union Army. Later, of course, Grant became the 18<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. MSU Distinguished Professor and Director of the Grant Presidential Library John Marszalek describes Grant as the first *modern* U.S. President.

Fast forward to today, where here in the deepest of the deep South, Mississippi State University houses the Grant Presidential Library. This is a stunning asset for our University: Only six other college or university libraries in the entire country (out of a total of well over 4,000) house a United States Presidential Library. MSU is honored to be one of that highly elite group. We have over 15,000 linear feet of research material, along with hundreds of very special artifacts. Not only do we have the Grant Presidential Library, but we also house the Williams Collection of Lincolniana. This collection of over 30,000 historic research and display items pertaining to President Abraham Lincoln had been the largest privately owned collection in the world, before it was donated and entrusted to Mississippi State University. I *urge* you to tour these unique facilities. Every class I have ever taken there has found them fascinating. You and your guests can drop in and view them anytime during normal business hours, or you can arrange a guided tour.

MSU President Mark Keenum, an amateur historian with an encyclopedic knowledge of the Civil War, calls that conflict “the most complex event in American history.” No other university has done more than Mississippi State to study the conditions leading up to the Civil War, the war itself, and its aftermath of Reconstruction, and we draw major researchers from all over the world. We study these historic times from neither the Northern nor the Southern perspective, but rather from the *American* perspective.

How fitting it is that on one side of the Drill Field we have a statue of our founding MSU President, Stephen D. Lee, a former Confederate general, and on an adjacent side of the Drill Field (in the Mitchell Memorial Library), we have the Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library and the Williams Collection of Lincolniana. Be proud, Scholars, be very proud, that Mississippi State University is in a unique position to celebrate and stand for the *United* States of America.

### **Traditional Campus Landmarks**

MSU landmarks are many, but I will highlight a few of them for you. The first building in which our college was housed has not survived. The oldest “structure” on campus is actually not a building, but rather Eckie’s Pond, a pleasant spot about midway between the Student Health Center and the President’s House. It was originally designed as an experiment to capture runoff water from rain for use in irrigation, but it is now enjoyed as a small relaxation and picnicking spot.

The oldest actual building to survive is the beautiful and distinctive twin-towered Industrial Education Building, located behind the modern Simrall Engineering Building. It was erected in 1900 and still stands tall and proud. Originally, it was the Textile Building.

An architectural masterpiece is Lee Hall, located at the north end of the Drill Field and built in 1909. It now houses the Departments of English and Foreign Languages, and its upper floors are devoted to the President’s Office, the Provost’s Office, and the Office of the Vice President for Research and Economic Development. These top administrative offices used to be located in Allen Hall, a less classic-looking building inaugurated in 1971 on the former site of the President’s House, and for years Allen Hall served as the central administration building, sometimes referred to as the “power tower.” I find it particularly cool and appropriate that President Keenum’s office now sits atop the magnificent building—freshly and

extensively renovated—that is named after our very first President, Stephen D. Lee.

If you go to the Drill Field and look south, you will find an exact architectural replica of Lee Hall anchoring the other end. That building was a very generous gift from MSU alumnus Dave C. Swalm, and it houses the School of Chemical Engineering that is named in his honor. The Swalm Building is a very recent (2000) and modern structure, but a condition of the gift was that the building had to be located exactly where it is, and it had to look exactly like Lee Hall. Mr. Swalm was a chemical engineer, but he could have been an architect: The visual effect is wonderful.

Naturally, the Drill Field is where cadets drilled in formation. Until the end of World War II, all male students at Mississippi State were military cadets, and for decades after that, students who were part of the ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) continued to drill there. (ROTC is well worth investigating if you are interested in serving in the military. The immediate educational support and benefits are significant, and your experience and leadership during military service can look very good to future employers even if you do not decide to make a whole career of the armed forces.)

The YMCA Building was originally built in 1914 for the local chapter of the Young Men’s Christian Association, a nationally powerful and beneficent organization that originated in Geneva, Switzerland and continues to this day, especially in our nation’s larger cities. Later, for many years the “Y Building,” as it is known, was the home of the MSU Post Office, one of the crossroads for students and faculty alike. The building has a distinctive, attractive design typical of its era. When the Post Office outgrew its quarters and moved to its present location, the Y Building enjoyed extensive renovations just completed in 2018. It now houses the offices of the Vice President for Student Affairs, the Dean of Students, the Vice President for Finance, and the General Counsel (University Attorney).

Next to the “Y” building is George Hall, built in 1902. George Hall now houses the Office of Public Affairs (headed by Mr. Sid Salter, a longstanding and highly respected Mississippi journalist and also a student of mine many years ago, not to mention my son James’s boss), but until the new Longest Student Health Center was built in 1965, George Hall was the campus Infirmary and hospital. Its darkest days were during the great Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918, the deadliest in world history and unusual in that it was especially likely to strike young adults. More of our men died of

Spanish Flu than died in World War I, and our campus was not spared. Our casualties were so bad that the basement of George Hall had to be converted into a temporary embalming facility.

The Perry Cafeteria is another landmark, built in 1921. It is a magnificent, cathedral-like structure inside, longer than a football field, with ceiling arches peaking 50 feet above the floor. At the time, it was the largest college or university cafeteria in the country. It is surely the most beautiful, and the food is very good!

The most famous landmark of all is the one you cannot see anymore: Old Main Dormitory. It was developed in various stages, beginning in 1880. The intent was to house the entire male student body there, and in fact it became the largest dormitory in the world under one roof. Ultimately, it was an enormous square structure encompassing the entire area where the student Union is now, plus half of where McCool Hall now sits, and it housed over 1,100 students. Stories about Old Main abound. It was grungy, it was wild, it was rowdy, and it holds special memories for several generations of Mississippi State graduates. If you are interested in this piece of our history, you can read all about it in the book *Old Main*, by former MSU professors Roy V. Scott and Charles D. Lowery.

Old Main burned in a huge, mysterious fire in 1959. It was the worst conflagration ever seen in these parts, but amazingly, only one student perished. (I have heard blood-curdling tales told by old-timers that the one student who died was the victim of a mentally unbalanced student who intentionally started the fire to kill him, but such stories are best left for Halloween and are probably apocryphal.) Regardless of how the fire started, it was a heartbreaking loss for Mississippi State, and the end of an era. In 1965, the Chapel of Memories, another famous campus landmark, was built with bricks from Old Main. (Odds are, some of you will get married in that chapel. I did.) Part of the Chapel is the Bell Tower, whose chimes you hear daily.

### **Nature of the Comprehensive University**

We have grown mightily as a University. You may think you are at college, but actually you are at university. A university is an institution of higher education that not only grants undergraduate degrees like the ones you are working toward, but beyond those degrees also grants a significant number of graduate degrees, mostly master's degrees, typically requiring 1-2 years of study after attaining your undergraduate college degree, and Ph.D. degrees ("Doctor of Philosophy, although these are granted in

dozens of different academic disciplines, not just Philosophy), typically requiring 4-5 years of study beyond the undergraduate college degree. The University is divided into Colleges, such as the College of Agriculture, the College of Business, etc. Some of our Colleges also have Schools, such as the School of Accountancy, for instance; these are smaller units. Mostly, though, the Colleges are divided into academic Departments, each with its own major (or sometimes more than one major). Thus if you were one of my students, you might be a Psychology major, under the advising and supervision of the Psychology Department, which is one of the Departments of the College of Arts and Sciences, which is one of the Colleges of Mississippi State University.

As we have expanded our role, our name has changed, from the original Agricultural and Mechanical College of Mississippi ("A&M") to Mississippi State College (when we had only a few graduate programs) to Mississippi State University. We are a *comprehensive* university: That means we have programs in a very wide range of traditional academic areas. In fact, you can choose from well over 100 majors. Once, we concentrated on agriculture and related "mechanics" (what we would now call engineering), with just a few other very basic, closely related disciplines (major areas of study) like Mathematics, English, etc. Now, we have whole Colleges of Agriculture and Life Science; Architecture, Art, and Design; Arts and Sciences; Business; Education; Engineering; Forestry; and Veterinary Medicine.

### **The Research University**

We are also a *research-intensive* university, among the coveted Top 100 research universities in the entire country. That means that we have numerous graduate programs that award master's and doctoral degrees, and that the University participates in an exceptionally high level of research, much of it funded by outside sources like government agencies, major corporations, philanthropic organizations, etc. This amounts to over *two hundred million dollars a year* coming into our University, *in addition* to the annual funding the State of Mississippi provides us. Our enviable research position draws top scientists and scholars from all over the world to our campus, creating a faculty of eminence and providing the highest level of educational opportunities for you and everyone here at Mississippi State.

### **Extension and Service**

We not only publish the results of this research, but we also use it in extension programs that reach out throughout our state, teaching citizens how to *apply* this knowledge in farming, business, education, etc. to better their work and lives. This is a key part of the mission of a land-grant university like our own, and we have been honored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching by receiving its special Community Engagement designation. Only 10-15% of the colleges and universities in the nation are so honored. Over the years, we have taken our original land-grant university mission to an entirely new level.

### Research Benefits for Students

Almost all of your professors are active researchers, and one of the best things you can possibly do during your undergraduate career is to participate in this research as an undergraduate assistant. Look on the websites of individual academic Departments, and you will find the research interests and projects of the various faculty there. Approach professors whose areas of interest match yours, and ask if you can join their research teams. This adds excitement and immediacy to your education, and it will serve you quite well down the road when you apply for jobs or for graduate training in your field.

Also, check out our Undergraduate Research and Creative Discovery website. This is a central website designed specifically for MSU undergraduates like yourselves, apprising you of new research developments, competitions, grants, and campus-wide opportunities. Find it at [www.urcd.msstate.edu](http://www.urcd.msstate.edu).

This leads, in a way, to one last point. Because we are a comprehensive, research-intensive university, you may find that some of your classes, especially those at the freshman level, are taught by graduate students. Teaching is one way that we can support our graduate students while they study here. Please do not feel cheated if you are taught by a graduate student. Most of them are very enthusiastic, and all of them are trained and evaluated by regular professors before they are allowed to teach. Be kind to your teachers who are graduate students, because *you* might be one of them in a few years. Furthermore, no matter where you go or what you do after you graduate, the value of *your* degree is greatly enhanced because we *are* a comprehensive, research-intensive university. Trust me: You will get plenty of “real” professors in your studies here, and because of the kind of university we are, they will be world experts in their fields. This is what a university is all about!

### A&M Forever and . . .

We have come a long way. You will learn in the Athletics chapter why the cowbell is the symbol of MSU sports. But why is it also the symbol of our University? Remember when Ole Miss spurned the chance to be the land-grant institution in the state? The effete looked down their snoots and derided us as a “cow college.” The cowbells were our way of turning that around and saying yes, we *are* the cow college, and we are *proud* of it. We are proud to be A&M, the Agricultural and Mechanical college—and now, of course, so much more.

How important is the “A” in “A&M”? These statistics are straight from President Keenum: Today, there are 7 billion people inhabiting our planet, and 1 billion of them are starving. By 2050, when some of *you* will be heading companies and government organizations that will be making life and death decisions about world resources like food and water and energy, there will be 9.5 billion inhabitants on earth—“another 2.5 billion at the global dinner table.” And how will these people be fed? Only if scientists discover how to greatly expand and protect our world food production. For decades, people have come from all over the world to study and participate in the globally renowned Agriculture programs at Mississippi State University, the former “A&M.”

And what about the “M”? We have world-class engineering programs, too. As worldwide population increases, and prosperity comes to formerly third-world countries, the demand for fuel for billions more cars and trucks is set to skyrocket. Our ECO CAR team is creating the ultra energy-efficient car of the future, right here at Mississippi State. Our students and engineers went head-to-head in competition with teams from 15 top research universities in the country—and won. And in an age when electronic warfare may refer as much to computer attacks as to “smart” bombs, we have one of the leading cybersecurity programs in the nation.

Now add in all our poets and historians and astronomers and psychologists and linguists and philosophers and *so many* more, and you see that we are no longer A&M, The People’s College; now we are Mississippi State, The People’s *University*, the greatest and brightest in the state.

Once again I say, Scholars: Be proud. Be proud of our history and traditions—*very* proud.

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Undergraduate Degrees

Graduate Degrees (Master's and Ph.D.)

Colleges

Schools

Departments

Majors

Our Different Names

Agricultural and Mechanical College of the State of Mississippi

Mississippi State College

Mississippi State University

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Research-Intensive University

\$200,000,000+ Per Year Non-State Research Funding

### **Extension and Service**

Carnegie Foundation Community Engagement Designation

### **Research Benefits for Students**

Research Opportunities with Professors

Undergraduate Research and Creative Discovery website

Graduate Student Teachers

Value of Your Degree

### **A&M Forever**

Modern Agricultural Challenges

Modern Engineering Challenges

And Everything Else!

*Pride* in Mississippi State University

\* \* \*

### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup>I cannot resist adding a few interesting footnotes about Ulysses S. Grant. A fun question to ask someone is “What was Ulysses S. Grant’s name?” It sounds like a play on the old trick question, “Who is buried in Grant’s Tomb,” but in truth, few people know Grant’s actual name. He was born Hiram Ulysses Grant, but he was mistakenly listed as Ulysses S. Grant when he was appointed to the famed United States Military Academy at West Point. The “S” stands for nothing, but it stuck with him.

<sup>2</sup>You will be happy to know that Grant was a Bulldog! Before MSU was ever established, cartoonists of his day portrayed Grant as a bulldog, and during the Civil War, President Lincoln instructed General Grant to “hold on with a bulldog grip.”

<sup>3</sup>On a personal note, I was delighted to verify a family connection to President Grant: My great-grandfather, Thomas R. Carskadon, was a Presidential Elector from the State of West Virginia, casting his vote for Grant in the Electoral College for the Presidential Election of 1872. Carskadon was a passionate opponent of slavery and the youngest member of the Constitutional Convention that created the free state of West Virginia that was carved out of the slave state of Virginia. For a while he had a price on his head, and later his house became known as Radical Hill because he and the other Carskadons were considered to be “radicals.” (That’s not necessarily an insult, as a radical is, literally, someone who seeks to get to the *root* of a problem [from the Latin word *radix/radicis*, or “root”].) It is amazing what you can learn in a modern research library!

## Chapter 2: SEVEN SECRETS TO STUDENT SUCCESS at Mississippi State University

### *The Future Is Now.*

Scholars, *right now*, you are writing the narrative that your future employers, professional schools, or graduate schools will read as they decide whether or not to accept you. I wish you could be laying down this record when you are a little more experienced and mature, but the fact is, to borrow a line from the old movie *Top Gun*<sup>1</sup>, “*The clock is ticking, and as of now we are keeping score.*”

Every year, I tell my General Psychology students that *the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior*. The people who will be judging you in four years know this. If you goof off or underperform when you start university, you are sending the message that you will goof off and underperform when you begin medical school or law school or graduate school or your first career employment. If you do the least you can get by with now, they will assume that is what you will do for them, too—only they will not give you the chance to find out. Put yourself in their place: Wouldn't *you* hire or admit the person who hit the ground running and put out a ten-tenths effort from day one? If you are smart and make the right moves, you are determining your future success right now; and if you are not, what you are doing right now is limiting your entire future.

### **The Seven Secrets to Student Success**

Scholars, I am going to show you seven simple steps to succeed and excel here at Mississippi State University *from day one*. This is the longest chapter, because there are so many things you need to know and practice from the very beginning.

#### **Secret to Student Success #1 WORK FULL TIME**

Scholars, if I could offer you an interesting, satisfying part-time job that would prepare you for your future career, give you course credit toward graduation, *and* pay you \$30 an hour as you go, would you be interested? Sure you would! Well here is a bulletin: You already *have* that job, only it is a *full-time* job, compliments of the taxpayers of Mississippi. It's called attending university.

I know almost all of you are paying a *lot* to attend Mississippi State University. But compare the cost of one year's in-state tuition at MSU to the tuition at our only private sister school in the SEC, Vanderbilt

University. The difference is a staggering \$36,000 a year. Vanderbilt is a fine school—and so are we. The people running Vanderbilt are not stupid or wasteful. They try just as hard as we do to keep costs down. Neither school makes a profit—all we do is break even. But because Mississippi State is a state-supported, publicly funded university, the hard-working taxpayers of the state of Mississippi are making up the difference between the true cost of your education and what you actually pay for it. You should be very thankful.

Take that \$36,000 a year difference, divide it by 2 semesters, then divide by 15 weeks per semester, and finally by 40 hours a week: *You* are being paid \$30 an hour to attend school. This is all the more remarkable because the median wage of adult workers in Mississippi is only about \$13.50 an hour. You are being paid over twice what the average Mississippi worker makes, to attend a fantastic university and prepare yourself for a career that will very probably pay you even more. That should tell you just how much the struggling citizens of Mississippi believe in higher education and are willing to invest in *you*.

And the deal gets even better. We also give you discounted rates for residence halls and meal plans. That brings in-state students up to nearly \$35 an hour in total support. And what about you out-of-state students? We do charge you more for tuition, but it is still far less than a private school like Vanderbilt. Specifically, you are getting a \$27 an hour subsidy from the taxpayers of Mississippi. Add in the room and board discounts, and your subsidy is nearly \$32 an hour. To you out-of-state Scholars I must say: “It ain't for nothin'” that Mississippi is called The Hospitality State. It is also no surprise that Mississippi State University is widely recognized as one of the best bargains in higher education anywhere in the country.

Bottom line #1: For over \$30 an hour, you jolly well *should* work full time.

Bottom line #2: To succeed and excel at university, you *must* work full time. That means at least 40 hours a week devoted to your studies. *Going to class and studying outside of class should total at least 40 hours a week*. Read that one more time: *Going to class and studying outside of class should total at least 40 hours a week*. Now *believe* it. Even more important, *practice* it.

That may sound like a lot of class and study hours, but let's put it in perspective: Forty hours a week is no more than the average meter reader, fire fighter, office worker, or postal employee works. The only difference

is that *you* are being paid far more for putting in your 40 hours, and by the end of four years, you've earned a university degree. Now *that* is a sweet deal.

### **Secret to Student Success #2 GO TO CLASS**

Secret to Student Success #2 is incredibly simple: *Go to class!* I know you have already been told this by everyone from President Keenum to your residence hall assistant. Why? Because it is *so* important. Go to class! *Every* class. Miss *only* if you really and truly cannot be there. "I don't want to" or "I don't need to" or "It's too boring" or "I'd rather sleep" or "I never understand anything in there anyway" or "I need to skip this class to study for the test in my other class" or "I can borrow someone else's notes" etc., etc. are *not* valid reasons to skip class.

For over \$30 an hour in state-provided support, you jolly well *should* go to class; but if your obligation to the people paying your bills doesn't sway you, self-interest probably will. I taught about 660 students last year, most of them freshmen, in my General Psychology class. Among those with 0 to 3 absences during the semester, 32% earned As and only 6% made Fs; but among those with 6 or more absences, only 5% earned As and fully 70% failed. Those statistics speak for themselves.

Even more startling is how *quickly* the effect of missing class shows up. Of my students who never missed a class, 40% earned As and only 3% made Fs. Compare that to students who missed 4 classes. Not 4 or more classes, but exactly 4: In other words, they attended class 90% of the time. The percentage of As dropped from 40% to 17%, and the percentage of Fs shot up from 3% to 22%. In other words, missing just 10% of your classes cuts your chances of making an A in half, and it makes it 7 times likelier that you will fail.

Now you understand why we say always *go to class*.

Most professors require class attendance. I certainly do. The reason is that we already know the connection between class attendance and learning. Students who attend more, learn more, and it is our job to get you to learn as much as possible. Some professors will tell you they don't care if you attend class or not—the choice is yours. *Go anyway!* The connection between class attendance and grades holds true for *all* classes, regardless of your professor's attendance policy.

If you think you can miss class and do just as well by borrowing notes from someone who was there and

takes good notes, think again. There is a reason why that strategy doesn't work: The actual taking of notes is the first step in your *learning* the material. If you skip that step, you are never going to learn as well. Even more important, you miss all the examples, stories, and illustrations your professor gives that will help you remember the important class material. My students have told me for decades that my stories—I'm kind of famous for my stories—and examples help them remember the material they will actually be tested on. Miss class, and you miss all of that.

Obviously, attending class means more than just dropping your body into a seat. Come rested, alert, and prepared. *Take notes*. Time and again, I have seen a few students sit there and never take a note. To them, I am like background music from a radio. They'll halfway listen, and they think they will remember. Maybe they plan to use someone else's notes. Trust me: *It doesn't work right*. Don't do it. Besides, it really irritates your professors, and it guarantees that they will think of you as a dummy and will not think of you kindly.

There are two more things you need to know about going to class:

#### **Sit In Front**

The "curse of the back row(s)" is insidious. It's not just that dummies tend to sit in the back rows; even worse, the back rows tend to make dummies out of whoever sits there. For real. This is based on actual research. If you have a choice, sit front and center. You will see better, hear better, and feel more connected with your professor. Sitting in front can make a large class *feel* much smaller. And if you sit in front, you will also *learn* better.

Some professors may assign you a seat, such as by alphabetical order, and you may be luckless enough to be stuck in the back of the room just because of your name. If you have a *medical need* to sit up front, your professor *must* put you there. But what if you don't have a medical need, but you simply want to sit in or near the front? If *on the first day of class* you say something like "Dr. C., I have never been able to do well if I am in the back of the room. Could you please put me down front? It would really help me, and I would greatly appreciate it," I do not know a single professor on this campus who would not do everything possible to accommodate your request.

Finally, and this is *very* important:

## Ditch Your Phone

There are two reasons why you should *never* use your cell phone in class. First, it is the #1 pet hate of professors. Nothing irritates your professors more than having you play with your cell phone during class. Nothing! Not only is it against University policy—you can actually get in trouble with the Dean of Students Office for doing it—but also professors never forget a texter. (I am reminded of an old advertising slogan: “The wine remembers.”) If you annoy your professors by texting or playing on your cell phone during class, they will be grouchy and fault-finding when they grade your tests and assign your final course grades, and they will *never* cut you a break if you ever need one. *Just don't do it! Period.* Phones off and away, every class, no exceptions.

The second reason not to use cell phones in class is that they are a very serious distraction for *you*. Studies show that people who use cell phones while driving have the same rate of accidents as people who drive drunk. You wouldn't learn much if you came to class drunk, would you? Well, cell phones disrupt your learning just as much as being drunk. Think about that.

I know that students of your generation think cell phones are the most natural thing in the world. What harm does a little texting do? It doesn't disturb anyone else, and you will still listen to a lot of the lecture. *Wrong.* As we have already said, it will anger your professors, to whom your behavior is very rude, and it will make them wonder if you have been raised by pigs and wolves. “But everyone does it” is no excuse. How would you feel if your professors stopped their lectures every few minutes to take calls or send or read texts? Or if you went to your professor's office to discuss a problem you were having in the course, and he or she wouldn't look up from the cell phone in their lap?

That brings up one last point: “lapping.” You would be amazed how easily professors see your texting. In large classes, and even in small ones, students think their professors will never notice they are texting, as long as they are discreet about it and keep the phone out of the professor's direct line of sight. *Wrong again.* Scholars, when we see your eyes urgently turned downwards while you repeatedly poke at your lap, there are only two possible interpretations, and “ain't neither one of 'em good.”

Time is the great equalizer. Some of us are rich, and some are poor. Some of us are healthy, and some of us are not. Some of us are good looking, and some of us are plain. Nobody said life was fair. But all of us are given the same amount of time each day. No matter who you are, no matter where you are or what your station in life, you have no more and no less than 24 hours a day.

Yet time is also the great distinguisher. The president of the university, the CEO of the great corporation, and the general leading the troops all have one thing in common: outstanding time management skills. *The surest way to ace your competition is to learn and practice good time management skills.*

When it comes to university, experts are unanimous in saying that time management is, by far, *the* single most important factor in your success.

In high school, most of your time was managed for you. You were told when to go to class, when to go to study hall, when to go to practice, etc. At university, however, it is all up to you. The difference is dramatic. At first, you will be surprised and delighted at how much free time you have. Hit class for maybe three hours, and then you have the whole rest of the day to yourself, free to do whatever you want. But within a few weeks, all that free time will become an illusion. Within a month or two, it will become a mirage.

The greatest source of stress and anxiety at university is the feeling of being overwhelmed, the feeling of having far too much to do and an impossibly insufficient amount of time to do it in. You will swear that it can't be done.

The good news is that it *can* be done. Time management may seem unfamiliar, even uncomfortable at first. But once you master it, you will realize that time management is a university student's best friend. Trust me on this. And after you do it for a month or two, it will become natural and habitual, with no special effort required. You just have to *make* yourself do it for that first month or two. If you are intelligent enough to be at university, then you are intelligent enough to do this thing.

How much free time do you have? Well, there are 24 hours in a day and 7 days in a week, so for 168 hours a week, you are at least drawing breath. If you are a typical student, you sleep about 6, possibly 7 hours a night; let's call it 6.5 hours. That leaves you just over 122 waking hours. But remember: Work Full Time.

You need 40 hours a week for your studies. That leaves you 82 and a half hours *not* spent on studying. That is almost 12 waking hours a day, on average, that you can do whatever you want, if university is all you do.

But I can hear it now: “Dr. C., I have to work! I’m not one of those spoiled, privileged kids.” Okay, you’re right. A majority of you have part-time jobs to help pay the bills. But if you work 10 hours a week, you still have well over 10 hours a day free, on average. Even if you work 20 hours a week, you have nearly 9 hours a day to yourself. Yes, you need to grab a shower and get dressed each day, and you do need to eat, but eating is a pleasure, especially if you do it with friends. Bottom line: If you work the 40 hours a week it takes to succeed and excel at university, for every hour you work, you also have an hour to play. I don’t think any of us can ask for a better deal than that.

“I don’t have time” is nonsense. What you really mean is “I don’t manage my time.” We are about to change that.

Here are some things to remember:

**Yes You Do (have time)  
Have A Plan!  
Every Minute Counts, so  
Count Every Minute  
Get A Planner**

You are going to need a planner, and you must *use* it every day. There are two kinds of planners: electronic, and physical. Electronic has the advantage that you can’t lose it, and it can live happily in your cell phone without taking up any physical space. A physical, hard-copy planner has the advantage of ease of use, and its constant presence in your backpack will be a reminder to use it. If you are ambitious you can use both kinds of planners, but you will have to remember to update each of them. Personally, I prefer physical, but I am about 614 years old in “techno years.” You may prefer to have your planner online.

The one thing *not* to do is use a “neurocognitive planner”—i.e., try to keep your plans and projects and tests and deadlines all in your head. That approach will never work, and sooner or later, I guarantee it will bring you serious grief.

For an online planner, we specifically recommend Google Calendar, although there are a number of others you might use. Simply open a Google email account if you don’t already have one, and your

personal calendar will be there. For a hard copy planner, go to Barnes & Noble (I got mine there), The Book Mart, Amazon, any good office supply store, or even Wal-Mart. Get a large size planner that will show every day hour by hour, with plenty of space to write in. Your planner must cover the entire semester. *Getting your planner is just as important as getting your textbooks. Do it now.*

Immediately, write into your planner all your class hours and lab hours for the semester. Read the syllabus for each of your classes and labs and write in all test dates, due dates, etc. Now go to the MSU academic calendar and exam schedule—you get to them from the main MSU web page—and add important deadlines (like for dropping a class) and your exam dates. Once classes begin, as soon as you learn of an assignment or test, enter the test dates and due dates in your planner.

This is just step one. Step two is more complicated, but still not hard. You will need to write in exactly *when* you plan to do each thing: review lecture notes; do class readings; study for quizzes and tests; etc. *Mark down the specific hours you plan to do each thing.* Before you do, heed this:

**Allow Plenty of Time and  
Beware the Planning Fallacy**

The “planning fallacy” is a term from social psychology: The unhappy fact is that we usually underestimate the amount of time it will take us to complete a task. *So beware the planning fallacy and allow plenty of time.* It is much better to set aside *more* time than you may need, and convert it to free time later, than to underestimate the time you need and have to scramble for more when there is hardly any time left.

The next thing to do, of course, is to *carry out your plan*, and *record your progress*. As you complete each hour devoted to an item on your schedule, check it off in your planner. Try hard to follow your plan, but if you fail to do what you planned and are unable to check it off, then *reschedule* the hour or hours that you missed, and check them off when you do complete them.

All this may seem cumbersome at first, but remember, within a month or two it will become habitual and it will seem easy and natural to you. Always remember that TIME MANAGEMENT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU CAN DO to ensure your success at university.

A marvelous side benefit to time management is that once you make and carry out a plan for getting everything done, you will be able to enjoy your free time without guilt or anxiety. This will take a *huge* weight off your shoulders. Time management is not something that restricts you. Actually, it is something that *frees* you. I *promise* it will make you more confident and less stressed, and it will make your university experience *both* more successful *and* more enjoyable.

*Remember time management: Nothing to it but to do it!*

#### **Secret to Student Success #4 ALWAYS STUDY SMART**

Whole books can be written on study skills and test taking strategies<sup>2</sup>, but to get you off to a good start, we will give you the basics in this one chapter.

You already know to *go to class*. But don't just sit there. You must also:

#### **Take Good Notes**

Don't try to write down every word your professor says. Your notes should be a brief summary of key points: concepts, facts, evidence, etc. You will have to hurry to keep up with your professor, so use abbreviations, such as "w" for "with," "bc" for "because," etc.

Always ask permission first, but most professors will allow you to record their lectures. Should you? This can provide a backup, but it also kicks the can down the road. One way or another, you are going to have to convert lectures into notes, so try to do it as the lectures are being given. If you do record lectures, go back and re-listen to them *before* the next lecture. If you let them pile up, they will become worse than useless. You could find yourself having to listen to ten or fifteen hours of recordings before you are ready to study, and you won't have taken good notes, because you will have figured that you had the recordings, so you didn't need to take good notes in class. Don't fall into this trap.

Next is an extremely important step that most students fail to do. *You* need to be smart enough to do it:

#### **Review Notes Immediately**

Just as soon as humanly possible after your class ends, *review* your notes and fill in any gaps while the material is fresh in your memory. Also rewrite anything that is illegible, incomplete, or unclear. Do *not* put this off, as your memory for each class lecture is going to fade fast. Even one day later is too late. If possible, within the hour is best, but *always* review your notes the same day.

The other thing most students fail to do, but you must be smart enough to practice, is:

#### **Always Read Ahead**

Read the material in the textbook that goes with your professor's lectures *before* they are given in class. Make this an item in your planner. That way, the material will already be familiar to you when you hear it in class, and it will be much easier to follow the lecture and take good notes.

After you have gone to class, taken notes, and reviewed them, it is important to:

#### **Re-Read the Textbook**

By the time you do that, your understanding of that day's lesson should be locked in. But maybe it isn't. Maybe there are still things you don't understand. Because each lecture or lesson builds on previous ones, it is *essential* that you:

#### **Ask Questions Quickly and Ask Specific Questions**

If you have read ahead, attended class, taken good notes, and reviewed them, but you still don't understand the material, you must act right away. Bring your questions to the next class. If the professor is not open to your asking review questions at the start of class, then see if there is a TA (Teaching Assistant) for the class who can answer your questions. If Supplemental Instruction (SI) sessions are available for your class, go to them. If tutoring is available for your class, go to it. The Learning Center, 267 Allen Hall, provides free tutoring for almost all the basic freshman courses. (See the Learning Center chapter for more details.) If none of this works, then go to the professor's office hours. No matter whom you ask, be prepared with *specific* questions. If you simply tell your professor, TA, or tutor "I don't get it," that is high school stuff, and there is no way anyone can or will be much help to you. But if you have figured out exactly what you do understand and exactly what

you don't understand, then you can ask specific questions, and you can be helped effectively.

Most professors will give you detailed learning objectives. Pay attention to these. If you are not given any, then put yourself in your professor's shoes and write down questions you should know the answers to, once you have learned the material.

When a test is coming, don't hesitate to ask the professor what it is you need to know for the test. (You may or may not get a helpful answer to that question, but you should at least ask it.) Find out what kind of test it will be. Essay? Multiple choice? True-False? Short answer? Combination? Ask if any practice tests or previous tests are available. If not, get with some classmates and come up with questions to ask each other. Putting yourself in your professor's shoes and making up possible test questions on the material can be very helpful. But do this *after* you have already done your preliminary studying. Studying with friends can be a good idea, but only *after* you have already studied on your own.

One of the best ways of consolidating your knowledge once you have studied is to:

### **Tell Someone Else**

If you can put the material into words well enough to explain it to someone else, you will have a firm grasp of the material yourself. If you don't have a "someone else" handy, then pretend, and talk to the wall; but be sure to *say it out loud*. This approach may sound unusual, but it really works, because saying it out loud helps you learn and remember it.

The worst and commonest mistake new students at university make is to study all at once, the day and/or night before the test. The same thing is true with writing papers. If you never have to pull an "all-nighter" in your four years here, you are an unusually wise student; but most of you will ignore advice and make this mistake at least once. You will get about what you deserve, too: a miserable experience and a much lower grade than if you had done things right. Therefore always:

### **Space Out Studying**

The day/night before the big test or paper is due should be only for review. Plan it so you study (or write) over several different days. In the calculus of student success, 12 hours of studying the night before

does NOT = 4 days of studying 3 hours a day. This is critically important.

## **Secret to Student Success #5 BE TEST WISE**

Studying is what gets you to learn, but that alone is not enough: At university, you have to *prove* that you have learned. So what about the big day, the day of the test?

The night before your test, *get plenty of sleep*. It is a fact that sleep helps consolidate learning. Come to the test fully prepared with whatever materials you need. *Always arrive early* if you possible can. That way you have plenty of time to settle in, clear your mind, and relax. Don't use those few minutes between entering the room and beginning the test to study; if you haven't studied enough by then, then those last few minutes cannot save you. Instead, *stay calm and breathe*. Seriously. Nice, deep breaths. *Stay confident and alert*. You almost surely know *something*. If you have read this chapter, you know more about test taking than most of the other students in your class know. Don't get distracted by fear, worry, or gloom. Stay alert to the tasks at hand, and follow our advice. Concentrate. *You can do this thing*.

### **Scan The Test; and Always Pace Yourself**

When you first get your test, scan it to see how many questions there are, and where the test ends. Remember to check the back of the test sheet: There may be more questions there. (You'd be surprised how many students fail a test because they didn't check.) Calculate the amount of time you have for each question, pace yourself accordingly, and keep moving. A question you did not leave time to answer will get you no credit at all. Be sure that you are moving through the test quickly enough to get to all the questions *and* have time left over to go back and check your answers.

What to do next depends on what kind of test it is. Almost always, you will know this ahead of time; for sure, you should have asked your professor to tell you this well before the test day.

### **True-False and Multiple Choice Tests**

Many of the tests you will take in your first year at university will be true-false or multiple choice tests. Don't be lulled into a false sense of security by thinking that such tests are easy and you will

recognize the right answer when you see it. I give true-false tests myself, and I have a motto that I go by as a teacher: *I always try to trick you, but I never hope to succeed.* In other words, the task of the professor is to distinguish between your being vaguely familiar with something and sensing that you may have encountered it before, vs. recalling it accurately and understanding what it means. The key point here is:

### **Don't Be Fooled**

A question might include a definition or number or name you have seen before, but it might be connected to the wrong term or concept or work. Don't mark it true, just because part of it is familiar.

If a question is partly true and partly false, mark it false.

If you have attended class, taken good notes, done the reading, but find something in a question that you have never seen or heard of in your life, it is probably something the professor made up, so mark it false.

If a number is going to be wrong, it is going to be *significantly* wrong. Most professors don't split hairs on numerical questions, unless it is a math class.

Don't get caught in a "not." A "not" may have been slipped into a question to reverse its meaning. If you read the question too fast, you may skip over the "not."

Underline key words, numbers, names, and grammatical qualifiers in the question, as well as any "nots." Words like "always," "never," "generally," "significantly," "usually," etc. are important, so underline them. This will slow you down and make you read the question carefully, and it will make it more obvious to you what the answer should be.

Multiple choice questions are simply several true-false questions bolted together. Mark each individual answer choice as "true" or "false" (or "?" if you are unsure). This will make the overall choice much more obvious, and it will also alert you to situations where the correct answer is "all of the above" or "none of the above" or "two of the above," etc. Finally, it will aid you if you have to guess.

If you don't know the answer to one question, leave a mark by it and move on to the next question. You want to answer all the questions you are sure of, and then come back to the rest. Sometimes, later questions will contain a hint as to what the correct answer to a question you skipped is. And sometimes, you will

simply remember something later that you did not recall at first.

### **Go Ahead and Guess**

If you don't know the answer to a true-false or multiple choice question, should you guess? In a word: *Yes.*<sup>3</sup>

### **Check Your Answers**

Leave time to go back and check your answers. Unless it is just flat impossible, *always check your answers.*

If you are *sure* you made the wrong answer, then change it. If you are *pretty* sure you have it wrong, then change it. If you really do not know, and you find yourself going back and forth from one answer to another without a clear conclusion, different experts give different advice, but the conventional wisdom is to stick with your original answer. Once you let doubt creep in and you start imagining infrequent or unlikely scenarios or exceptions, you may be more likely to talk yourself out of a right answer and switch to a wrong answer, than you are to identify a wrong answer and change it into a right answer. But it is your grade at stake, so make the decision you are most comfortable with.

### **Essay Tests**

Essay tests are a whole 'nother ballgame. First, read all the questions. Be sure to pace yourself so that you will have enough time to answer each question, plus go back and read what you have written for all of them. If there is a question you feel weak on, jot down quick reminders of what you do know about it, if anything, and then move on. You may remember more later.

### **Make An Outline**

For each question, make a brief *outline* of your answer before you start to write out your actual answer. If you skip this step and begin by writing, by the time you finish you may have forgotten items that should have been in your outline and therefore in your answer.

### **Write Large and Clear**

After you have made your outline, start writing. *Write legibly.* Yes, you are in a hurry, but if your professor cannot read your answer, you will never get credit for it, and if your professor has to struggle to decipher your handwriting, it will be a very grouchy professor who is grading your test. The worst legibility mistake

students make is to write way too small. *Write large* so your professor can read your answer easily.

When your professors first announce an essay test, ask if you can use phrases and lists, or if the professors want everything written out in complete sentences. If you did not ask it when the test was announced, then ask at the beginning of the test. Many professors actually prefer phrases and lists, because often they have their own lists of key points they are looking for (“rubrics” is the trendy term for this), and many professors appreciate not having to wade through long sentences and introductory babble to find out what you actually know.

Now, remember those outlines you jotted down before you wrote out your answers to each essay question? After you finish the last question, go back and re-read those outlines. Sometimes you will think of something you should have said but didn’t, or notice that you failed to write something that was already in your outline. Add it into your answer now.

### **Don’t Bull Sling**

(Yes, we are phrasing that politely!)

What if you haven’t the foggiest idea about the answer to an essay question? Should you write down everything you can think of that could possibly relate to the answer, hoping you might pick up at least a few points? *No!*

Professors hate it when you throw the bull. The few points you might possibly gain by bull slinging will be more than offset by having an annoyed and grouchy professor grading all your other answers where you actually knew what you were talking about. Remember: *Don’t bull sling.*

### **Test Anxiety**

There is one last consideration about tests in general that may apply to a few of you. Most people feel a certain amount of stress and anxiety when taking tests. This is normal. If you have followed all our advice, your confidence should be reasonably high, and your stress and anxiety should be reasonably under control. But some students, perhaps as many as 2% to 4%, suffer from what we call test anxiety. They study carefully and know the material completely and confidently prior to the test. But once they get to the test, they experience *intense* anxiety. Typically they sweat profusely, feel their heart racing, their muscles painfully tense or even spasm, their breathing becomes labored, fast, shallow, and/or irregular, and

their fear factor shoots through the roof. Worst of all, their minds go nearly or totally blank, even though they knew everything perfectly before the test, and they fail miserably.

If *this* is you, you have a clinical level of test anxiety, and it must be treated. Go to the Counseling Center. They have dealt with hundreds of such cases, and they know exactly what to do. The good news is that treatment for severe test anxiety has a high probability of success. Just be sure to get treated *now*, before you rack up a string of failing test grades that you will never get out from under.

Finally, there is one last step to applying our advice to *always study smart* and to *be test wise*. This step comes *after* the test, not before it. And it is the step that more of my students skip than any other:

### **Discover Your Mistakes**

You don’t want to be a dim bulb, do you? Seriously, this last step is extremely important if you hope to improve your grades. If you got an A on your test, great! You must be doing something right. But most of you will *not* get an A, and you need to discover where you went wrong. Sadly, I gave up going over my tests in class years ago, because out of 300+ students, maybe 10 or 20 were paying the slightest attention. Once students knew their grades, they didn’t want to hear any more. That is shortsighted and foolish.

If your professor does go over the answers to a test, pay close attention. If you don’t understand *why* your answer was wrong, *ask*. If your professor does not go over the test in class, make an appointment with your TA (if there is one) or with your professor to see your test during office hours and go over it. Almost all professors will grant this request. Again, if it is not clear to you *why* your answer was wrong or incomplete, *ask*. Your object here is *not* to try to argue additional points out of your professor—professors *hate* that—but rather to see what kind of mistakes you are making (usually, there is a pattern) and learn from them so you will do better next time.

Finally, there is one more thing you must do, each time you get a grade on a major test, paper, or assignment:

### **Evaluate Your Strategy**

If you are getting top grades, then no problem, you are doing great. I would still suggest that you *evaluate your strategy*, though, because the challenges and

expectations that will come your way are only going to increase in the future.

If you are *not* doing great, then you **MUST** *evaluate your strategy*. Go to the end of this chapter, and work your way down the summary of things to do. Be honest: Which ones are you failing to follow? Now come up with a plan to put *all* of them into effect. Then carry out that plan. If you do all this, you *will* improve.

It is true that “Rome was not built in a day;” but it is also true that “The race goes always to the swift.” Get it in gear and make the necessary changes *quickly*.

### **Secret to Student Success #6 GET HELP PROMPTLY**

*Most* students run into problems sooner or later at university; and most students run into them sooner rather than later. When it comes to problems at university, the worst problem isn’t the problem: The problem is what you do (or fail to do) about it, and how quickly you do it. This key to your success is: *Get help promptly*.

We have already covered how to do this with your coursework. Review the last section if you need to refresh your memory. *Ask questions quickly* and *ask specific questions*. After your tests, *discover your mistakes*. If you need extra help in your courses, seek it out immediately.

Sometimes your problems are more general. *Get help promptly* still applies:

Are you having problems with time management, study skills, note taking, or test taking? Are you putting study time in but not getting good grades out? Go to the Learning Center. There is a whole chapter on the Learning Center elsewhere in this *Insider’s Guide*.

Are compositions coming back to you looking like a red hash topped with a hideous grade, and this keeps happening again and again? Go to the Writing Center. (See the Writing Center chapter.)

Is Math driving you nuts? Do you look in the rear view mirror and see a great big “algebra truck” with a grill shaped like a giant F bearing down on you? Do you sit in your room at night crying “great big math tears”? Go to Math Tutoring.

Are you struggling in *any* of your courses, and you need a tutor? Go to the Learning Center.

Have you got the blues, a depression that won’t lift? Are you so stressed or anxious that you can’t study effectively? Are difficult, even painful personal dilemmas distracting you? Go to the Counseling Center. (Learn more in the Counseling Center chapter.)

Are you unsure what major you should be in? Have you no idea what you want to be when you grow up? Do you need to start making a resume so you can start looking for a job? Go to the Career Center. (See the Career Center chapter.)

Have you no idea what courses you should be taking or how to prepare for a career in your chosen major? Go to your Academic Advisor. (See the Advising chapter.)

This is only a partial list of some the most common problems. We will cover various helping resources in detail in later chapters of this book. But the common theme is this: If you have a problem, solve it while it is small.

*Get help promptly!*

### **Secret to Student Success #7 MAKE the DIFFERENCE of ONE**

The seventh and last Secret to Student Success may surprise you. But I can personally vouch for it.<sup>4</sup> At Mississippi State, we call it the Difference of One. Not only your enjoyment, but also your success at university can be greatly enhanced by your making connections and affiliations. Obviously, you want to make friends, and this is very important. But equally important is your connecting to groups and organizations on campus, being *part* of something. This is borne out by actual research.

Go to the MSU Student Association website, and you will learn all about the Difference of One:

**[www.one.msstate.edu](http://www.one.msstate.edu)**

Download the list of well over *three hundred* MSU organizations that you can be a part of. These include student government, residence hall organizations, religious groups, fraternities and sororities, club sports, the newspaper and yearbook, volunteer organizations, organizations for specific majors or careers, Toastmasters, Fashion Board, Music Makers, drama and comedy teams—if you can think of it, you can probably find it there, along with dozens upon

dozens of other cool organizations you probably would never have thought of.

Study the list. Go to the organization fairs, open houses, and information sessions that are put on early in the fall semester. Pick half a dozen organizations to check out in detail. Attend a meeting of each. Join and get active in two or three of them. Be sure to stick with at least one. You will never regret it. I promise it will enrich your university experience and significantly increase the probability of your success here.

### REVIEW

Scholars, let's review the Seven Secrets to Student Success:

#### **Secret to Student Success #1 Work Full Time**

Sit In Front

Ditch Your Phone

#### **Secret to Student Success #3 Remember Time Management**

Yes You Do (have time)

Have A Plan

Every Minute Counts, so

Count Every Minute

Get A Planner

Allow Plenty of Time

Beware the Planning Fallacy

#### **Secret to Student Success #4 Always Study Smart**

Take Good Notes

Review Notes Immediately

Always Read Ahead

Re-Read the Textbook

Ask Questions Quickly

Ask Specific Questions

Tell Someone Else

Space Out Studying

#### **Secret to Student Success #5**

### Be Test Wise

Get Plenty of Sleep

Always Arrive Early

Stay Calm and Breathe

Stay Confident and Alert

Scan The Test

Always Pace Yourself

Don't Be Fooled

Go Ahead and Guess

Check Your Answers

Make An Outline (on essay tests)

Write Large and Clear (on essay tests)

Don't Bull Sling (on essay tests)

Discover Your Mistakes (after tests)

Evaluate Your Strategy (after tests)

#### **Secret to Student Success #6 Get Help Promptly**

#### **Secret to Student Success #7 Make the Difference of One**

### The Dr. C. Guarantee

Scholars, I am going to wrap this up with one last thing: the Dr. C. Guarantee. Technically, I cannot guarantee this, 'cause technically, I cannot *guarantee* that the sun will rise tomorrow. But I can speak in terms of extremely high *probabilities*.

If you are here at Mississippi State University, you are smart enough to succeed. Some of you have better academic training than others, but *all* of you are smart enough to succeed here. It is not about how smart you are in Math or English or Science. The real question is, will you make the smart moves you need to make to succeed at university? I have called them the seven Secrets to Student Success, but they are not really secrets at all—we *want* you to know them—and they are all very simple. You just have to *do* them.

If *from day one* you will: *work full time; go to class; remember time management; always study smart; be test wise; get help promptly; and make a difference of one*, you will almost surely succeed, and you will very likely excel. What do I mean by "almost surely"? In my 45 years of teaching more than 30,000 new students at

Mississippi State University, I have never known *any* students to fail out if they did *all* those things. You can do it!

\* \* \*

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Top Gun (the United States Navy Fighter Weapons School) is not a fiction. In fact, the youngest son of a good friend of mine was a test pilot for the Marine Corps and a Top Gun graduate. Not long ago, he was assigned to ferry a full-combat FA-18 Hornet aircraft from the East Coast to the West. He hopped a flight back East, picked up the plane, and headed West.

He knew he'd have to refuel somewhere in between, so he called up his mom and asked if she'd like to go to lunch with him at the Golden Triangle Regional Airport, about ten miles from Starkville. He landed, and they had a quick lunch and a great visit while his fighter jet was being refueled. Then, after a hug and a kiss—hey, proud moms are the same everywhere—he climbed back in, roared into the sky, and made it the rest of the way West. How cool is that!

<sup>2</sup>If you are willing to read 80 engaging pages on how to take notes, study, and take tests, you could do no better than to read a very cool and useful little book called *The A Game*, by Dr. Kenneth Sufka, a professor of psychology at (gasp!) Ole Miss. Some folks think we are supposed to hate everything about Ole Miss, but that is silly. All of us educators are striving for the same goals, and I hope all the Ole Miss students learn as much as you do. Most experts and teachers will tell you pretty much the same things about how to do well at university, and a number of the suggestions I make to you in this chapter are also found in Dr. Sufka's book. If we are all telling you the same things, maybe they are true, huh!

<sup>3</sup>If you are totally in the dark and can only guess, Dr. Sufka suggests these strategies. If an answer choice is longer or more carefully worded than the others, it may be more likely to be true; short or strangely phrased answer choices may be more likely to be false. If the choices are in some kind of sequence or numerical order (for instance, Dr. C. is (a) 36 years old; (b) 47 years old; (c) 55 years old; or (d) 70 years old), the correct answer may be more likely to be in the middle than at either extreme. And in general, some professors may be more likely to put the correct answer to a multiple-choice question in the middle of the list of choices than at the beginning or end.

To this I would add that some professors put the correct answers at or near the end of the choices, because they are seeing if you will take the bait and choose an answer that is *almost* true before you get to the choice that is *really* true. Also, an answer choice that is longer than the others but has several different elements to it may be more likely to be false, even though it is longer, simply because (as you learned earlier), if part of a choice is false, then the whole thing is false, no matter how many other parts are true; and the more parts you have, the more chances there are for one of them to be false. I would also add that answer choices with “always” and “never” may be more likely to be false, whereas answer choices with “significantly,” “generally,” “usually,” “often,” “seldom,” “rarely,” “sometimes,” “often,” “most” or “a majority” may be more likely to be true.

I agree with Dr. Sufka that strategies like these are likely to work only if your professor isn't very skillful at writing test questions. Furthermore, I would much rather you focus on how to learn the material properly in the first place, than to rely on questionable strategies for trying to outfox the writer of the test questions. You can give it a shot; just remember that these strategies are *only* for when you are clueless and desperate. They may work more often than they don't; but they don't work very often. There is no substitute for actual knowledge gained through careful studying.

<sup>4</sup>Once upon a time, long, long ago (like 1965 to 1968) I remember getting up way before it was even light, trying not to waken my roomie, loading the baskets of my bicycle with old fashioned vinyl records, and skidding through the snow as I pedaled my way to the campus radio station. (“WOBC, AM and FM in Oberlin, Ohio, the station that serves you right,” I used to say at the beginning of my broadcast.) First I had to get the station on the air, and if there was a problem, I had to solve it or else work around it, 'cause there were precious few—as in no—engineers available at that hour. And then I would start my show. Yep, I was a Top 40 DJ, happily playing groups that were new back then, but I bet many of you recognize some of them and listen to them even today: the Beatles, the Beach Boys, the Rolling Stones, the Supremes, Simon and Garfunkel—ah, those were heady times in the history of rock and roll.

I have to tell you, my first efforts as a DJ were just plain terrible; I marvel that I was not fired the first week. But hey, it was a small college radio station, and none of us started out with any experience. By the time I made my last broadcast, three years later, no one would have mistaken me for a pro, but I could

actually put out a pretty decent show. I did it for the sheer fun and challenge of it. I figured I would never have that opportunity again. I made some of my very best friends there, and it was one of the most educational experiences of my entire college career.

\* \* \*

### **Chapter 3: PROFESSIONAL STUDENT BEHAVIOR Or, HOW TO ALIENATE YOUR PROFESSORS**

Scholars, as we demonstrated to you in the previous chapter, being a student is your full-time *job*, for which you are being subsidized a minimum of over \$30 an hour, and that doesn't even count financial aid. For that, we expect you to be a *professional* student. We expect you to interact with your professors with the same respect and professionalism as you would with your lifetime employer. This isn't high school anymore, Scholars, and you need to know how university student behavior differs from behavior you may have engaged in and gotten away with in high school.

#### **Teacher's Pet or Teacher's Pest: Avoiding Your Professor's Hit List**

Besides being a professional student, there is another, more self-serving reason to pay attention to what I will tell you in this chapter: If you annoy and alienate your professors, they are *never* going to give you a break or cut you any slack. And trust me, most of you *will* need that from one or more of your professors. Behave professionally at all times, and they will do everything they can for you; behave unprofessionally, and when you need something extra, they will not know you.

To gather material for this chapter, I asked all our True Maroon and First-Year Seminar professors to tell me what student behaviors seriously annoyed them. I put out the same invitation to my faculty friends on Facebook. (Yes, we oldsters still use Facebook.) The responses were numerous and passionate. One thing is sure: There are a *lot* of ways to get on the wrong side of your professors.

#### **Professional Communication with Professors**

*Email blunders* were on almost everyone's list. First, use your official University email address. If you use another address, your professor has no way of knowing it is really you; and if you have a quirky personal email address (I remember getting one from sugahlips@hotmail.com), your professor may never look at you quite the same way again. Always fill in the subject header; emails with blank subject headers are often discarded unread, as probable spam. Begin by saying who you are, and what class and section you are in. ("Dr. C., this is Susy Smithfield in your 10:00 General Psychology class, Section 2.") Use real, grown-

up sentences, *not* text talk. (Such as, "Hey, sorry missed class, anything u need me 2 do?") Just because you can send email instantly, does not mean that you can expect a response instantly; there may literally be 100 emails ahead of yours, and professors are only available in their offices during regular business hours—do *not* expect responses during evenings, weekends, etc. This also means you can't email your professor the day or night before a test or a paper due the next day, with a question you should have asked sooner.

Most professors prefer an email rather than a phone call; email is easier to answer, and a record is easily kept of it. If you do call when your professor is out of the office and you leave a voice mail, begin with your full name and return phone number, say exactly what class you are in (if you are in one), speak slowly, loudly, and clearly, and repeat your name and phone number at the end. If your professor does not know you well, spell your name. Whatever you do, unless your professor specifically allows it, *never* call a professor at home or text a professor. (The day I got an unlisted phone number was right after the night when three of my General Psychology students woke me up at 11:30 p.m. to ask "Dr. C., are we still having that test tomorrow?" Evidently, they thought I would say "Well, Scholars, we *were* going to have our big test tomorrow that I announced in class and on your syllabus, but gosh, if that is inconvenient for you, I can certainly change the date. Just let me make a few hundred phone calls . . .")

If you make an appointment with your professor, be sure to show up, and when you first make it, be sure to tell your professor what it is you want to discuss. That allows your professor to set aside the right amount of time for you, and also to let you know if the visit will likely be disappointing for you—as when you are hoping to get your professor to bend the course rules for you; I can sniff out these cases immediately, and I do not want to waste your time and mine by arranging a meeting, when I am simply going to tell you "no."

Just as in class, if you are meeting with your professor, do *not* be checking texts or incoming calls on your cell phone. That is rude, and you are being inattentive to the professional time your professor is spending with you. This next one may surprise you, but if you visit with your professor in or out of class, don't chew gum. Some professors consider this rude, and it tends to shave about 20 points off your perceived IQ. You are uncommonly smart, or you would not be at university, so don't do something that makes you look dumb in your professors' eyes.

Both in email and in person, be sure you know what to call your professor. Do not call a “Dr.” “Mr.” or “Ms.” or “Mrs.” As one young faculty member put it, “If students knew the pain we went through to get that title, they would not neglect to use it.” Most professors will tell you on the first day of class or on their syllabus what to call them (“I am Dr. Tom Carskadon, and everyone calls me Dr. C.”), but if they don’t, it is fine to ask “What do you prefer that we call you?” You can also check the campus faculty-staff directory on the main page of the MSU website; if a person is a “Dr.,” it will say so. A few professors, usually the younger, trendier ones, may invite you to call them by their first names, but do so *only* if they tell you it is okay. Finally, I hate to say it, but female faculty I polled were especially likely to complain about students who failed to address them by their correct title. In fact, for several years I was married to a fellow faculty member who had a doctoral degree, just as I did; yet I could not count the number of times students who knew both of us referred to us as “Dr. C. and Nancy.” Those students didn’t mean to be disrespectful or sexist; but they were.

### Professional Classroom Behavior

The most universally and angrily denounced classroom behavior of all, the one that will instantly put you on your professor’s hit list forever, is texting in class. Remember *Ditch Your Phone* from the first chapter? Do it! Turn that baby *off*, and *leave it off*. Pull headphones out of your ears—you are being paid to be in class to listen to your professor, not music. Arrive early if you possibly can and get your phones put away and your needed materials out *before* class begins. At least arrive on time; habitually coming in late disturbs your classmates and thoroughly annoys your professors. If you do come in late, don’t walk between your professor and the class; this is very rude, and it just calls more attention to your being late. Don’t get up and leave during class, unless it is a genuine emergency, and if it is, be sure to get back to your professor later and explain. Leaving class to answer your phone is *double* points off. Don’t eat and drink during class. (One of my colleagues reported a student who actually ordered pizza delivered to class!) *Don’t talk* to your classmates while your professor is lecturing. It distracts the students around you, and it distracts and eventually infuriates your professor. One very fine colleague of mine told two chronic talkers to get up and leave class and not return. When they hesitated, she told them she would call the Campus Police and have them escorted to the Dean of Students

Office if they did not obey immediately. Personally, I don’t blame her.

*Take notes.* You will need them come test time, and if you stare blankly into space during class, your professor will consider you useless. If you are alert and taking notes, you will avoid another pet peeve of professors: asking a question they already just answered while your mind was elsewhere. Class is over when your professor says it’s over; *don’t* start packing up early. Do not use class time for homework or studying or pleasure reading; it is obvious and annoying. (I remember one student who would open her General Psychology workbook but then fold out a fashion magazine over it, and spend the class reading up on how to be stylish. Of course I noticed this, and I did not think of her kindly.) *Never sleep in class.* Some professors will give you a very rude awakening, and all of them will hate it. If you are sick, go to the Student Health Center. (You have a chapter about that.) Do *not* come to class coughing and hacking and spewing germs everywhere. You may think you are being brave, but actually you are as welcome as the plague.

Dress appropriately. You can be informal—Sunday attire is not required—but for heaven’s sake, be tasteful. You are in class, doing your job as a student. T-shirts and jeans or shorts of a reasonable length are fine, but please do not dress as if you are on the prowl in a singles bar. (I could tell you stories, but I doubt they’d let me print them. I am reminded of the grandmother who said, “Sweetie, if you dress like a \_\_\_\_, then you’ll attract people who are looking for a \_\_\_\_.” Grandmas can tell it like it is, huh!) Never come on to your professors, either; they are *off limits*. That includes Teaching Assistants, too. And *you* are *off limits* for *them*.

Do not talk or behave rudely or disrespectfully to your fellow students, even if you think one of them deserves it. You will look bad, and your professor will be annoyed. If a student is saying or doing stupid things, let your professor deal with it. Be on your best behavior and be appropriately responsive when you have a guest lecturer. It is highly embarrassing to your professor if a guest speaker is not treated well, and your professor will definitely hold a grudge if you are rude to a guest speaker.

As a teacher of very large classes—probably, some of you reading this are in one of mine—I can tell you that the size of the class may lead you to believe your misbehavior won’t be noticed. Trust me, it will: You are *far* more visible to your professor than you think.

And with so many people in one room, it is *more* important, not less, that you behave professionally.

An obvious part of professional class behavior is to be there! (Remember Go To Class, from the last chapter?) Missing class is a terrible idea as far as your grades go (again, review the previous chapter), and it also makes a terrible impression on your professor. Sometimes, you really have no choice but to miss class, but handle it professionally. Be sure that you *notify professors ahead of time* for any excused absences if it is humanly possible, and document them *immediately* upon your return to class. Do *not* wait weeks or months! Also, don't say "I forgot my excuse," and expect to be treated as if you had one. Occasionally, some students have really good reasons for having to miss class, but they don't explain them to their professors. This just gets you penalized unnecessarily. If you let your professors know what is going on, they do care and they will be sympathetic; but if you just don't show up, they assume the worst about you.

There is one circumstance, however, where you should *not* be in class: when you are sick and contagious! If you are sick, go to the Student Health Center (we have a whole chapter on that resource later in this Guide), not to class. If you sit in class sneezing, hacking, and coughing, your fellow students are going to hate you, and your professor is going to blame you if he or she later becomes sick. If you are in class and have to cough, *cover your mouth completely*. A hand or forearm or even a tissue will not do the trick; use a full-sized *cloth* handkerchief. But it's much better not to be there at all. If you tell your professor that you were sick and contagious and didn't want to infect anyone else, and you show documentation that you went to the Student Health Center, your absence will almost surely be excused.

Finally, our Campus Safety Officer, who is a wonderful person, gave me this one that is pretty much in a category of its own: If an alarm goes off in class, *leave the building*. Same thing for an alarm in your residence hall. And if during class there is a Maroon Alert to shelter in place, *stay calm* and *do it*.

### **Avoid Annoying Questions**

Scholars, your professors welcome your questions when they indicate that you are thinking about the course material and are sincerely trying to learn. But we get way, way too many annoying questions. The #1 annoying question to ask, cited by more professors than any other, is "Did I miss anything important?" when you return to class after being absent. ("Why no,

Scholar, you didn't miss a thing. Class is not important—I was just wasting everyone's time.") The correct way to phrase the question is something like this: "Dr. C., you may remember that I had to miss our last class when I was on a field trip for Architecture. What's the best way for me to get caught up?"

*Check your syllabus before you ask a question that is already answered on your syllabus.* Other bad questions: "What do I have to do to get a C (or B or A)?" This implies that you only want to learn enough to get a grade you can live with; you should be learning as much as you possibly can, period. Don't ask "Is this going to be on the test?" As one of my favorite colleagues put it, "If I talk about it, it's important." Many professors do, however, give you detailed learning objectives; heed them. Don't just read the syllabus; believe it: Asking if you have to read a book that is already listed as "required" is a stupid and annoying question.

Don't *announce* to your professor that you are going to miss class, and *then* ask if it is okay. ("Dr. C., I am leaving for my best friend's wedding in Georgia on Friday. That's okay, right?") The correct question is, "Dr. C., what would be the consequences if I miss class Friday to leave for my best friend's wedding in Georgia?" (My response, by the way, would be "It had better be *your* wedding, Scholar. If not, it would be an unexcused absence, and the policy for those is spelled out in your syllabus.) Also, don't ask if you may miss class in order to work on something for another course; this implies that you think your professor's class is not important, but some other professor's is. *All* your classes and *all* your courses are important.

### **Avoid Attitudes of Entitlement**

One of the things my fellow professors complained about most often and with the greatest frustration was student attitudes of "entitlement." When you have an attitude of entitlement, you are asserting that something is due you, when in fact it is not. Basically, you are expecting something for nothing, or a lot for a little (such as making excessive and inappropriate demands on your professors, when you have done very little to fulfill your obligations as a student). This takes many forms.

"I got As in high school." Scholars, just about *all* of you got As in high school. The implication is that since you got As in high school but now you are doing poorly, it must be our fault. Wrong, Scholar. If you got As in high school but now are in trouble, you are doing something wrong. We will be happy to help you figure

out what you may be doing wrong, and we will steer you to campus resources that can help you, but you must take responsibility for your own performance.

“You expect us to do *all that work?*” Scholars, remember Work Full Time from the previous chapter? Very few of you are spending 40 hours a week on your studies. Until you are, you have no basis for complaint. The average professor spends 60-70 hours a week on work. I do not exaggerate. You are not at summer camp. Until you work full time on your studies, you will get no sympathy from us. I know the transition can be a real jolt compared to high school, but *remember time management*. Once you master time management—you are fully capable of doing this, and the previous chapter told you exactly how to do it—you will have plenty of time for your studies and plenty of time left over to relax, even if you are working a 10-20 hour a week job in addition to your studies.

“This is busy work.” Scholars, there is no “busy work” at university. Complaining about “busy work” is a sure way to annoy your professors. We have to spend valuable time grading that work. Trust our intentions: All of us have been students, but none of you have been teachers. I promise you, there is a sound educational reason for any work we give you.

“No fair!” This is exactly what my son James used to say when he was five years old. What he really meant was, “I don’t like it.” To paraphrase Dr. Roy Ruby, our very wise and long-serving former Vice President of Student Affairs, after whom Ruby Hall is named, “Don’t assert a groundless claim of unfairness or injustice when what you really seek is mercy.” Your professors are fair. They have to be. Most of them are *more* than fair. Do your part, seek guidance humbly, and you will learn just how far we are willing to go to help you. But don’t act like a five year old hollering “No fair!”

“I’ll sue!” Oh, brother. Fortunately, this does not happen often, but when it does, it is the dark twin of “No fair!” Anyone who encourages this kind of thinking has either been watching too many unrealistic TV shows or has a starving lawyer in the family. The University has been sued many times. Our legal team rarely loses. Your professor is *not* going to say “Oh, no, please, not that. Wait, I’ll give you whatever you want.” If you are actually rash enough to sink tens of thousands of dollars into suing your professor, the University will almost surely defeat you, but your professor may turn around and sue *you* for defamation, making your life a living hell for years. Believe me, you don’t want any of this.

“I’m telling!” (The President, the Provost, the Dean, the Department Head, whatever.) The President is not there to listen to you complain that my test was too hard. One of my colleagues actually had a student complain to President Keenum that she sent him an email, and 20 minutes later that professor still hadn’t responded. So, naturally, she went straight to the top. You can imagine how much this alienated her professor, and no, the President most certainly did not take any action against the professor.

“Mommy! Daddy!” Scholars, this is university, not high school. Do *not* have your parents call up your professors on your behalf. (Or, worse yet, call your professors and pretend to be you; one parent actually tried this on me once, and she was very embarrassed when I saw right through it. Your parents do not know how to sound like an 18 year old, and that is probably a good thing.)

If you think something is wrong, the first step is almost *always* to talk to your professor, candidly and humbly. That is when your professor is most likely to be helpful. Threats and formal complaints just get people’s backs up, make them inflexible, and/or turn them against you.

Honestly, it does not happen often at all, but if you sincerely believe that your professor has mistreated you, and a serious conversation with him or her has not been helpful, then your next step is to talk to the Department Head in your professor’s academic department, and listen carefully to the feedback he or she gives you. It is possible to file grade appeals, but never, ever do this frivolously, just to see if it might get you a better grade. An unnecessary grade appeal makes *you* look bad, and you will not win unless your case is strong and convincing. I have been part of panels that judge such appeals in the past, and I can assure you that your case will be fairly heard and fairly judged; but way too many grade appeals boil down to a student who feels “entitled” and is saying “No fair!”

“I pay your salary!” Lord help you if you are foolish enough to say something like this to me, ‘cause I will look you straight in the eye and say “Wrong, Scholar, I pay *your* tuition, and for what I am paying, I expect a whole lot better than I am getting from you right now.” (Review the previous chapter if you don’t recognize that I am paying your tuition.) What you really are saying is “If you are a public employee, then I am entitled to be happy with what you do, and I am not happy with the grades I am getting.” Scholars, it is not

your professors' job to make you happy. It is our job to educate you, and we are professionals at that.

"You didn't tell us that would be on the test." (Another variation: "It wasn't on the handout (or PowerPoint slides or whatever).") Scholars, we do tell you what to study; we don't tell you what the test questions will be. If it was in our lectures, in our handouts, or in the readings we assigned you, then knowing it was *your* responsibility.

"I'm not good at true-false (or multiple choice) tests" or "I would have done way better on an essay test" or "I'm too smart for your tests" or "I knew the important things; I just didn't know the specific things you asked" or "I deserved partial credit" or "I deserved more credit" or "That was an unfair question" or, or, or . . . . At this point, any professor reading this chapter is groaning ruefully, because we hear some variation of this nonsense so often. Scholars, like most professors, I have experimented with many different test formats, and I can tell you this based on actual data from many years: The smartest students who prepare the best get the best test grades, and the least talented students who study the least get the worst grades, *regardless of what kind of test it is*. Stop kidding yourself, and start studying effectively. The previous chapter told you how.

It is a good idea to go over your test with your professor or Teaching Assistant if you really studied hard and do not understand how you failed to make a higher grade. But do *not* go into it with the attitude of trying to argue your professor into a higher grade; go into it with the attitude of learning how to get that higher grade *next* time. Occasionally, a test question really may have been worded in an unclear or even misleading way. Simply explain how you misinterpreted the question, and then *leave it to your professor* to decide if it was a bad test question.

"No fair, last time you \_\_\_\_\_ and this time you didn't." Scholars, just because we do a little something to be helpful to the class *one* time does *not* entitle you to expect it *every* time.

"I'm always late." Then you have a habit to change. "I'm always late" is neither an explanation nor an excuse for missing class time.

"Can I take the test a different day?" or "Can I have a special make-up test?" *No*, Scholars. These are *not* appropriate things to expect. Course policies have to apply to everyone, and professors do not have time to

write and administer additional tests for your convenience.

"I was sick this semester." Vague, undocumented excuses for which you expect sweeping forgiveness for absences, tests missed or failed, etc. are another assertion of entitlement that typically comes near the end of the course, when students who did not act responsibly all semester realize they are about to fail. For instance, I had a student tell me in November that she was pregnant that semester and was having morning sickness. She'd never said a word previously, but now this was supposed to cover 18 absences and two missed tests. If for whatever reason—medical, child care, transportation issues, etc.—you cannot meet your obligations in the course, *don't take the course*. Instead of asking your professor to totally rewrite the rules of the course just for you, meet with your advisor (see the Advising chapter) and plot your best course of action under the circumstances. Withdrawing from the course or the University may be the appropriate move, if it is possible.

A variation of this, one that sometimes breaks my heart, is students who come to me late in the semester with huge numbers of absences and missed tests and explain that they have been struggling with depression. I understand that inaction is one of the symptoms of that disease, but when you start suffering from this, you *must* get yourself to the Counseling Center for help. (See the Counseling Center chapter.) Sometimes a withdrawal from school is possible; unfortunately, massive waiving of the requirements of the course is not. Your professors cannot rewrite the rules of their courses for you, but I promise we *do* care about you and the problems you have been having.

In general, professors tend to be inundated with students who have screwed up most of the semester, but with just a week or three remaining, they expect their professor to somehow rescue them from failure. Professors hate this, and when you wait that long, there is very little we can do to help you. Never blame your professor for your absences, poor study habits, etc. Instead, take it as a learning experience (albeit a costly and even painful one) and resolve to do better next time. And here is a related professor frustration: You come to us in trouble, and we tell you what you need to do to improve your situation; but you don't *do* it, and then you come back again with the same problem, asking us to help you. If you ask for our advice, and we give you our advice, then *follow* our advice!

“Can I get extra credit?” Scholars, that is high school stuff, and I can tell you that professors get sick and tired of hearing that question. I realize that your high school may have led you to feel entitled to extra credit opportunities for courses you were performing badly in, but university does not operate this way, and this is no substitute for actually learning the material. Many professors do offer extra credit opportunities as a built-in part of their courses, and you are foolish if you fail to take advantage of the opportunity at the time; but never ask for *extra* extra credit. As one of my colleagues told me (to tell you), “Sorry, but I have done my job all semester, and if you have not done yours, I am not willing to take on the extra work of grading a crappy extra credit paper.”

“If I don’t get a decent grade in here, I will lose my scholarship (or my parents will pull me out of school or I can’t join my fraternity or sorority, etc. etc. etc.)” Scholars, save your breath. No professor is going to respond favorably to this, and we get some variation of this way too often. Our job is to give you the opportunity to learn, and then evaluate the extent to which you have done so. Everything else is between you and the Financial Aid Office, your parents, your fraternity or sorority, etc. Again, you are not *entitled* to these things independent of your academic performance, nor are you entitled to a good grade from us professors simply because you need it.

“I’m only one point short of a better grade! *Please!!*” Scholars, most of your professors give you multiple, ample opportunities to get the grade you want. If you still didn’t earn it, we are not going to give it to you. When final grades are posted, that’s it. The course is over.

Not to sound like a broken record, Scholars, but to paraphrase a famous movie from long before your time, “We aren’t in high school anymore, Toto.” You are *not* “entitled.”

### **Practice Professional Integrity**

Scholars, nothing angers and alienates your professors more swiftly, surely, and permanently than academic dishonesty, and you *must* beware of this. Your professors work 60-70 hours a week, and a great deal of this time is spent laboring over the lectures, materials, and tests we create for you. When you try to game the system by cheating, try to get a grade you did not do the work to earn, and try to put yourself ahead of honest students who played by the rules, your professors take very personal offense. The fact that cheating may have been common in your high school

or you may even know other students who are reckless enough to cheat at university, is totally irrelevant. Professors are remarkably unforgiving of any form of academic dishonesty. To quote from an old Bill Cosby comedy routine where he describes his mother after the children have badly misbehaved, “There’s Going To Be A Beating.”

Penalties range from severe to dire. Get caught cheating—and professors do know most of the tricks—and you can kiss goodbye not only your course grade, but also your chances for medical school, law school, professional school, and maybe even MSU, and no professor will write you the recommendation letters you are going to need for potential employers down the road. Engaging in any form of academic dishonesty can wreck your academic career and a whole lot of the rest of your life in a heartbeat. No matter how tempted or desperate you may feel, *don’t cheat*. Please, Scholars, heed this warning.

The MSU Honor Code can be found at [www.honorcode.msstate.edu](http://www.honorcode.msstate.edu). It is so simple that I can quote it right here in its entirety: *As a Mississippi State student I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do.* Note that the Honor Code not only requires you not to cheat, but it also *requires* you to report promptly any cheating by *other* students that you are aware of or suspect. Instructions for how to report cheating are on the website.

I am not going to list every possible way you might cheat; if I did, not only would this chapter go on forever, but you might claim that anything *not* on the list would be okay. Basically, you know when you are cheating.

*Plagiarism*, however, is trickier, because it is possible for you to commit plagiarism unintentionally. Unfortunately, you are subject to the same, severe penalties for plagiarism even if you did not mean to commit it and did not know you were doing so. Plagiarism basically means presenting someone else’s words *or ideas* as your own, without clearly citing where they came from, leaving the impression that they came from you. If you type “plagiarism” into the search box on the main MSU web page, you will find many good links. This one is unofficial, but one of my favorites, even though it is a little bit old: <http://www.ece.msstate.edu/~fowler/Classes/plagiarism.pdf> And here is a newer, shorter one from the English Department, which deals with this issue often: [http://www.english.msstate.edu/misc/PLAGIARISM\\_STATEMENT\\_WITH\\_HONOR\\_CODE.pdf](http://www.english.msstate.edu/misc/PLAGIARISM_STATEMENT_WITH_HONOR_CODE.pdf)

Coming to class in place of another student, so the professor will not mark that student absent, is cheating, and now that we have attendance scanners in many classrooms, swiping in for students who are not actually there, or swiping in yourself and then leaving, are considered serious breaches of academic honesty. Realize that phony excuses are a form of academic dishonesty, too. All will be prosecuted. And let me add just plain lying. I remember one Summer School student who missed every Friday, a total of eight class hours, without notification or excuse. When I asked him about it, he said that his stomach hurt. Had he been to the Student Health Center? Oh no, it wasn't that serious. Now I am not a "real" doctor—i.e., a physician like Dr. Story who runs the Student Health Center, covered in another chapter—but even I can diagnose the mysterious Friday bug when I see it. What that student should have said was, "I am sorry, Dr. C., I kept taking long weekends, and now I wish I hadn't." He still would have failed, but at least he would have kept his integrity.

#### **"The Wine Remembers" and Why We Care**

Scholars, once you alienate your professors, it is very difficult to get back in their good graces. An old advertising tag line from long before your time comes to mind: "The Wine Remembers." We are not talking about the sunshine of the vineyards reflected in the taste of fine wine; we are talking about the "grapes of wrath" (ooh, I kill me), when you needlessly annoy your professors. Impressions matter, Scholars. Make yours positive and professional. I promise it will pay dividends, bigtime.

Finally, if this chapter seems like a collection of bitching and nagging to you, full of restrictive, uptight, unreasonable demands and proscriptions, that actually tells me that this is an especially important chapter for you to read and heed. I will close it with a quote from Ms. Sandi Sadler Whiton, one of the wisest and finest educators I have ever known, speaking to us professors in response to my invitation to contribute to this chapter: "I guarantee that once they [students] understand the expectation and that you [professors] won't settle for less, they'll rise. Our silence is our consent to the things that are impeding their learning." I could say it no better than that. Scholars, professors who would not care about your behavior would not care about you. Professional student behavior is necessary not only out of respect for your professors and fellow students, but also in service to your own self-respect and your success at university.

## **REVIEW**

### **Professional Student Behavior**

#### **Avoid The List**

### **Professional Communication with Professors**

#### **Professional Classroom Behavior**

#### **Avoid Annoying Questions**

#### **Avoid Attitudes of Entitlement**

#### **Practice Professional Integrity**

#### **The Wine Remembers**

#### **Why We Care**

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## Chapter 4: MSU ATHLETICS

Scholars, I went to the same small college where in 1892 John Heisman—yes, *the* Heisman, as in Trophy—first coached football. (If you want to know where that was, look it up; Heisman’s is a fascinating story.) His team went undefeated in his first season those many years ago, but by the time I arrived at the same school 63 years later, any form of athletics was a total afterthought, and few students showed up to watch the perpetual losses our teams suffered.

Imagine the difference when I arrived at Mississippi State! I remember seeing a sign that said “Go State Dogs.” Really? They call themselves dogs? Then as I was leaving the office on one of my first afternoons on campus, I saw a wild-eyed student racing toward the drill field, furiously clanging a cowbell from a hundred yards away. Deciding to investigate, I crossed the street to join the biggest pep rally I had ever witnessed. Nowadays, we call it The Drill. It was *loud*, it was fun, and it was M-S-U. From then on, I was hooked. Yep, I became a Bulldog that day.

I’m sure I don’t have to tell you that sports are an important part of the MSU experience. And unless you are newly arrived from a foreign land, you probably know that Mississippi State University is a charter member of the Southeastern Conference (SEC), the best and strongest athletic conference in the land. Not only does being in the SEC provide an incredible amount of revenue and prestige, but also it means that week after week, no matter what the sport, you can watch some of the finest athletes in the entire nation perform. Don’t miss out on the fun and excitement!

### Athletic Department Leadership

For this chapter I interviewed Mr. John Cohen, Director of Athletics at Mississippi State University. Everything having to do with MSU Athletics is under the Athletic Director, and he reports directly to President Keenum.

John Cohen’s story is an interesting one. He grew up in Tuscaloosa, Alabama (home, of course, of the University of Alabama). He spent his first year of college at Birmingham Southern University, where he played baseball. That year, Birmingham Southern played a double header against Mississippi State, here at Dudy Noble Field. Nothing against Birmingham Southern, but once John Cohen saw our Bulldawg Baseball way of life here at State, he knew where he wanted to be! Taking a leap of faith, he transferred to

MSU and tried out as a walk-on, and he made the team under our legendary coach Ron Polk.

To say that Mr. Cohen has had a successful career would be an understatement. Bill Martin, a stalwart of MSU Athletics, states that John Cohen is the only person to have been an SEC champion, to have been an SEC Tournament champion, *and* to have gone to the College World Series, *both* as a player *and* as a coach. His coaching record at MSU was enviable, and four of his former assistant baseball coaches are now head coaches in the SEC. Of all the coaches in all the sports in the SEC, only Nick Saban, the legendary Head Football Coach at Alabama, has the same number of former assistant coaches who have become head coaches in the SEC. That is mighty impressive for Coach Cohen.

Mr. Cohen graduated from MSU in 1990 with a degree in English, and then earned a Master of Sport Management degree from the University of Missouri. Ten years ago, Mr. Cohen became our Head Baseball Coach at MSU, and two years ago President Keenum, who is known for his wise hires, named Mr. Cohen as our new Athletic Director.

When I asked Mr. Cohen what a typical day in the life of an SEC Athletic Director was like, he replied that no two days are the same. One constant, though, is his intense focus on the student athlete experience and the fan experience. His leadership philosophy is to demand accountability but not micromanage; he identifies where his people can excel, then puts them in a position to best serve the University. He is meticulous when evaluating coaching hires, and he has already scored some great ones.

Mr. Cohen is a Bulldog through and through, and he channels his remarkable passion and enthusiasm with great effectiveness. He was mentored by three former MSU Athletic Directors, Larry Templeton, Greg Byrne, and Scott Stricklin (an old student of mine). Mr. Templeton has retired (the Templeton Athletic Academic Center is named for him), but Mr. Byrne is now Athletic Director at the University of Alabama, and Mr. Stricklin is now Athletic Director at the University of Florida. Clearly, Mississippi State University produces top-notch, top-level professionals in the most prestigious intercollegiate athletic conference in the country.

My son Bob is a sports journalist who covered Mr. Cohen when he was a coach and worked for him when he became Athletic Director, and Bob had nothing but great things to say about the man. I left our interview

with the exact same conclusion: The MSU Athletic Department is in outstanding hands.

### **Pride, Involvement, and Excellence and Revenue, Entertainment, and Marketing**

What is the role of athletics at Mississippi State? Contrary to popular belief, athletics does not play a *central* role; *no* modern university revolves around its athletic program. Athletics does, however, play a highly important *support* role in a number of ways. I can sum up this role in two phrases: *pride, involvement, and excellence;* and *revenue, entertainment, and marketing.*

We take *pride* in our school, and our varsity athletes represent all of us in a highly visible way. We take pride in our success. More subtly, we take pride in being good fans and good hosts. We convey the hospitality and values of Mississippi State University. We make friends, not enemies. (Even when Ole Miss is in town!) We are not like that SEC school that shall remain nameless (but usually goes by its three letters), whose fans are notoriously rude and obnoxious. We strive to practice good sportsmanship always—on the field, in the stands, and in the campus and community. We will do our best to beat our opponents, but we will always welcome them and their fans. We are a class act.

Part of being a class act, Scholars, is to *never boo the Bulldogs!* This hurts *their* pride. It plays right into the hands of our opponents, and it makes a terrible impression on a national TV or statewide radio audience: If we do not respect our own team, why should they? Plus it hurts our recruiting. Don't boo the Bulldogs, even when you are frustrated. Your teachers and fellow students don't boo *you* when you miss a test question you should have known, do they?

Next is *involvement*. Our alumni and friends, donors and fans generally cannot sit in on our classes and educational programs or attend, as you can, the many presentations given on campus by visiting experts and dignitaries. My Psychology lectures are not (thank heaven) broadcast on television or carried by a radio network; but MSU athletic events *are*. Athletics is the principal way that those of us in the Bulldog Nation who are not on campus can still relate to the University. This is a *good* thing, Scholars.

Athletics stresses *excellence*. We can admire and learn from excellence in any of its many forms at this University. To compete and excel is what *all* of you need to do; it's just that our athletes' striving for

excellence is so visible. Also, there is the factor of *education*. Teamwork and communication, leadership and followership, character and heart, resiliency and adaptability, time management and stress control—these are lessons *all* of you must learn and practice at university. For our scholar athletes, athletics is a powerful teacher of these lessons.

SEC sports generates an astonishing amount of *revenue* for the University. Our annual Athletic budget is approximately *one hundred million dollars*.<sup>1</sup> With very lucrative TV deals—such as with the SEC Network and ESPN—our budget is booming. This creates good jobs for hundreds of people, and it allows the Athletic Department to operate in the black. *We* do this routinely, but at least 95% of the intercollegiate athletic programs in this country do *not*.

Athletics does not siphon away money from Academics. Quite the contrary, the Athletic Department donates \$1 million every year to the academic side of the University. It goes into the State Pride program, which supplements faculty salaries and helps us keep top faculty—*your* professors—at Mississippi State.

Finally, there is another key way that the Athletic Department generates revenue, both for itself (so we don't have to pay for it) *and* for the rest of the University. When our teams win big (go to the World Series in baseball, the Final Four in basketball, a major bowl in football, etc.), donations to both the Athletic Department *and* to the University's academic programs increase markedly. Literally, when it comes to MSU Athletics, we get *more* than we pay for.

Obviously athletics provides *entertainment*. We all need our leisure, and MSU Athletics delivers wonderful experiences. Entire families, my own included, bond over them. See for yourself, if MSU sports are new to you. Enjoy the electric atmosphere on campus and stand up and cheer as over 60,000 people pack the stands for a nationally televised SEC football game. (No one knows where the tradition of students' standing throughout each football game came from, by the way; but it is a cool one, as long as you wear comfortable shoes.) Feel Humphrey Coliseum *rock* during a big SEC basketball game. Enjoy the unique atmosphere at Dudy Noble Field as a record crowd packs the stands during the big baseball games that are a highlight of Super Bulldog Weekend every spring. If you are not a fan of Bulldog athletics already, you soon will be.

Finally, there is the matter of *marketing*. This is a prime purpose of MSU Athletics, and it helps the University expand and excel. When our teams get national exposure and do well, applications to the University increase significantly, just as donations to the University do. The Athletic Department, of course, is able to recruit more and better players, who bring our teams more success, which brings in more money. . . but also, thousands of future university students decide to check out Mississippi State when our athletic teams win big, and they almost always like what they find; thus our general student body gets larger and more talented as well.

It is so often said and so very true that Mississippi State University is one of the best kept secrets in higher education. MSU Athletics does a splendid job of marketing all of us and getting the entire Mississippi State University story out there.

### **Athletics' Finest Hour: The 1963 Basketball Team**

Hundreds of books and thousands of articles have been written about Mississippi State University Athletics, and the scope of our history is rich and storied. There is great consensus, however, on what was MSU Athletics' Finest Hour: the 1963 basketball team. It has been much written about. You would probably enjoy Kyle Veazey's recent book, *Champions for Change: How the Mississippi State Bulldogs and Their Bold Coach Defied Segregation*. Kyle spent years as a "beat reporter" covering MSU Athletics for the Jackson *Clarion Ledger* newspaper, the largest in the state. The account I will share with you, however, comes from the general University history book *Maroon and White*, by retired MSU Archivist (library historian) Michael Ballard. (Our Library does a great many things; preserving our history is one of them.) Here is the story.

Under the beloved and legendary men's basketball coach Babe McCarthy, Mississippi State was a powerhouse in the SEC, the "Kentucky" of its day. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, we won the SEC championship four times in five seasons, a phenomenal achievement. Despite this brilliant success, before 1963 we had never gone to the NCAA Tournament to compete for a national championship. The reason was that even though our team—can you imagine—was all white, we would have to play *other* teams that were integrated.

Technically, there was no law on the books specifically forbidding participation of a white Mississippi team in

an integrated tournament. It was, however, an unstated and long honored custom, and it was specifically endorsed by the staunchly segregationist Governor of Mississippi at the time, Ross Barnett. Coach McCarthy and his team wanted to play. Political allies of the Governor were determined to prevent it. Caught in the middle was Mississippi State University President Dean Colvard, a man of exemplary courage and principle. It is for him that our beautiful Union building is named the Colvard Student Union.

In an unfolding drama worthy of a movie—only this was *not* fiction—President Colvard, supported by his immediate staff and a petition signed by 3,000 students (a substantial portion of the entire student body at the time), announced that he was in favor of sending the Mississippi State University basketball team to the Tournament, and that he fully intended to do so unless specifically prevented by legal authority.

To put President Colvard's courage in perspective, you must realize that 1963 came just one year after the bloody and literally murderous race riots over the integration of Ole Miss in 1962, and just one year before the atrocious execution of three civil rights workers in Philadelphia, Mississippi in 1964. It was a vicious and dangerous world that President Colvard was defying.

The state's largest newspaper, the Jackson *Clarion Ledger*, condemned President Colvard's decision. One state senator demanded a special session of the state legislature to prevent our participation, and several attempts were made to get President Colvard fired. Fortunately, none of these attempted actions were successful.

In a new wrinkle, a segregationist state senator colluded with a nearby judge to obtain an injunction barring the Mississippi State basketball team from leaving Mississippi. But to be effective, the injunction would have to be served. Learning of this plot, President Colvard sent Coach McCarthy and his staff out of the state. President Colvard and Vice President John Bettersworth then left for Alabama, where the President was scheduled to give a speech. Thus there was no one left in authority who could be served with the injunction. When officers arrived to try to serve the injunction, they were given a run-around by our local Sheriff, and they never did succeed in serving it. They returned home.

Meanwhile, the second-team basketball players were sent to the airport as a decoy, in case something should go wrong. When they saw it was safe, the rest

of the team joined them and boarded a chartered airplane, and all of them left the state. They rendezvoused with their coaches in Nashville, Tennessee, and then flew on to East Lansing, Michigan, home of Michigan State University, the tournament host.

By now the national media were all over the story. We might look like heroes, or we might look like scum. Our first game was against Loyola University of Chicago, a team with four black players. In a moment worthy of history, our players shook hands with theirs, and our sincerity and sportsmanship were obvious for all the world to see. Our players did not invent segregation and did not want it, and they took a bold and public stand against it.

We played hard, but we lost to Loyola by 10 points. Loyola proved that they were the best team in the country by going on to win the NCAA championship. We played a consolation game against Bowling Green, won it, and came home. Two years later, Mississippi State University was integrated, and once black students started arriving in significant numbers, our athletic teams were integrated, too.

The point is this: Then, as now, MSU Athletics was instrumental in projecting the values and presence of Mississippi State University. Be proud, Scholars. Be very proud.

### **Don't Believe the Myths**

There are so many myths surrounding varsity athletes that I could easily fill a chapter on that topic alone. Suffice it to say that varsity athletes are too often a negatively stereotyped group. The myth is that a bunch of lazy, "dumb jocks" sleep in, skip classes, strut around campus showing off, get free passes from their professors, get fed all the steak and cheerleaders they want, receive cushy jobs or outright payoffs, cruise around in fancy cars, do some practices and play some games, and don't even worry about graduating, because they are going to the pros anyway to get rich while the rest of us actually work for a living. That's the myth, anyway. That being said, ***nothing could be further from the truth!***

Varsity athletes graduate from Mississippi State University at a *higher* rate than the student body at large, and with *higher* grade point averages. This is probably because varsity athletes are *required* to do the very things that *you should* be doing: practice meticulous time management, always attend class, get help when they need it, etc. Yes, they have tutors

available, but so do you! If an athlete (or anyone else) in my General Psych class has four absences, I give them no penalty—but the Athletic Department *does*. Miss four classes, and you will sit out a game. That is a serious penalty, and it leaves an athlete at the mercy of an angry coach. If absences continue, the penalties escalate. Persist in this folly, and you are *gone*, even if you are a star. The Athletic Department puts a strong emphasis on responsibility, accountability, and structure—and it works. The price for this is that scholar athletes have a lot fewer choices in their daily lives than you do.

Payoffs for athletes are a total myth. Some varsity athletes are dirt poor, but unlike you, they cannot remedy the situation by getting a job. I literally could not even buy an athlete lunch. NCAA rules are so numerous and complicated that we have to staff an entire Compliance Office just to be sure we don't run afoul of any, 'cause the penalties for even innocent-seeming infractions can be dire for the Athletic Department and the entire University.

If an athlete drives a cool car or truck, he or she got it the same way some of you did—from prior savings, or from mom or dad. Not only do most varsity athletes graduate with their university degrees, but only a few of them, maybe 5%, go on to the pros, and only a small percentage of those achieve any notable (or lucrative) success there. Most athletes graduate in their majors and go on to the same kinds of jobs that you will. I have taught any number of varsity athletes who were Honors students<sup>2</sup>. Rarely, there may be a few athletes who act dumb as posts and don't seem to give a damn, but they do not last long. I have seen a few of *you* act that way, too, and any of *you* who do that don't last long, either. By far the majority of my scholar athletes have my deep admiration and respect.

### **Athletes Work Hard**

Here we are at the beginning of the Fall semester, and football is in the air. While a lot of you freshlings are working maybe 20 hours a week on your studies and unwisely acting as if university is some kind of summer camp, here is what the football players are doing: getting up no later than 5:30 a.m. in order to make 6:00 a.m. meetings; going to classes usually beginning at 8:00 a.m.; after classes grabbing a quick lunch before various pre-practice meetings; engaging in long, grueling practices that would about kill most of us; then enduring intense workouts and strength training in the weight room; finally getting supper; and then reporting to study hall, plus tutoring if needed,

until 9:00 or 10:00 at night. Scholars, do *you* want to trade places with these people?

### **MSU Athletic Traditions**

Again, a whole book could be written on this topic alone, but I can sample a few high points for you. I'm sure most of you already know the biggest of 'em all:

#### **MSU Cowbells: Always Ring Responsibly**

Cowbells are not only our tradition, but our symbol. Their precise origin is veiled in decades of history. We know that cowbells started to appear at athletic events about 75 years ago. Legend has it that in the middle of a hotly contested football game against our archrival Ole Miss, a cow wandered onto the field. We subsequently trounced the Rebels, and the cow was considered a good luck charm. At first, students started bringing whole cows to games to assure victory, but this quickly proved impractical, so the bell was substituted for the whole cow—that way, every student could bring one! Soon handles were welded onto cowbells, to make them easier and louder to ring. The rest is history, and cowbells have become our proudest, loudest symbol.

In fact, our cowbells became so loud that they disrupted opposing teams and made it difficult for their players to hear the signals. (I can certainly attest to that. I came to Mississippi State right at the end of the first cowbell era, and they were deafening.) Other teams—especially, it seemed, after they lost to us—started complaining loudly, and in 1974 the SEC banned “artificial noisemakers” (read: cowbells) at all Conference games. It took us an agonizing *thirty-six years* to get our cowbells back. To a large degree, you have President Keenum, an MSU graduate himself, to thank for this, as he worked tirelessly and skillfully to win approval to bring our beloved cowbells back to the games. In 2010, the SEC allowed us to re-introduce the cowbells on a provisional basis for a trial period, subject to strict rules. Our fans complied, and recognizing the strength of our tradition and the responsibility of our fans, and responding to our very serious *promise* to “ring responsibly,” the SEC voted to allow the cowbells back. We are *the only* team in the whole country to have such a privilege. *Don't blow it, Scholars!*

The principle is this: We can ring our cowbells all we want to cheer on our Bulldogs, but we *cannot* ring them to disrupt the opposing team. Knowing when to ring at football games is simple: From the time the center is over the ball until the time the play is blown

dead, cowbells *must* be silent. (You can, however, *yell* just as loud as you like.) All other times, ring away! Just *always ring responsibly*. In all seriousness, Scholars, Mississippi State tradition and honor are at stake here, and the outcome is literally in your hands.

### **Maroon and White**

The origin of our school colors, Maroon and White, is certain. On November 15, 1895, our first football team was preparing to journey to Jackson, Tennessee, to play Southern Baptist (now Union) University. The MSU student body felt that we should have school colors. Choosing them was considered an honor, and that honor fell to team captain W. M. Matthews. Without hesitation or explanation, he chose maroon and white, and they have been our school colors ever since.

### **Bully**

We have had a couple of other nicknames in the past: Originally we were called the “Aggies” and then in the early 1930s the “Maroons,” before we officially settled on the “Bulldogs” in 1961. However, we have only had one school mascot, and that is Bully. The story is complicated but interesting. My source is Mr. Jim Woodrick's account available online at <http://andspeakingofwhich.blogspot.com/2012/04/bully.html>. In 1905, we beat our archrival Ole Miss in an 11-0 football game played in Jackson. State fans celebrated by staging a mock funeral for the “dead spirit of Ole Miss,” complete with a brigade of MSU cadets marching down Capitol Street carrying a coffin draped in maroon and white with a live bulldog placed on top of it. No one knows why the bulldog was there.

Fast forward two decades to 1935, when the legendary MSU football coach Ralph Sasse *rented* a bulldog named Ptolemy, nicknamed Tol, to inspire our team. It must have worked, for the (then) MSU Maroons had a great season that year, defeating both Army (a powerhouse team back then) and Alabama. The next year saw another great season, culminating in a trip to the Orange Bowl, our first-ever bowl game. Bully was here to stay!

A faithful Mississippi State alumnus was embarrassed that our team was making do with a rented mascot, so he invested what was then a considerable sum of \$150—that would be closer to \$2,000 today—to *buy* a fine bulldog for the team. The dog was named Bully, and subsequently became known as Bully I. He roamed the campus freely, and that was his demise: He was run over by a truck. The solemn funeral that

was held for him was photographed and published in *Life* magazine, the foremost national magazine of its day.

The story goes that Bully I was then buried under the MSU bench at the 50 yard line of Scott Field. Some believe his remains are still at rest there, although that story is probably apocryphal. There is, however, to this day a statue of Bully behind the MSU bench at the 50 yard line, and on its base are engraved the names of the 19 or so other Bullies who followed, some of whose ashes were indeed scattered over the grass of Scott Field.

Eventually, in 1961, the Bulldog became the *official* mascot of Mississippi State University, and Bulldog slogans, images, and products proliferated, as you can plainly see by visiting any bookstore or gift shop around these parts.

As for the “human” Bully, the one you see running around the field in the big dog suit, there have been many, but none buried at Scott Field. The job could darn near kill you, though. In early fall it is blazing hot under that heavy fur suit, and the students inside have literally lost five or more pounds of body weight during a single game. Dehydration is the problem, as there is no good way to drink water while on the job—you can’t take off your head to drink out of a cup, but you also can’t lap up water from a dog dish like the canine Bully. Serving as a Bully is highly competitive, and it is quite an honor to win the job.

### **The Junction**

The last MSU Athletics tradition we will mention is the Junction, our large, primo tailgating area that begins just south of Davis Wade stadium. This beautiful grassy area, packed and vibrant with southern hospitality and barbeque smoke before every home football game, was once known as Five Points, because five different roads converged there. No matter what schemes our civil engineers tried, the traffic snarls were so bad that it was widely (and at least somewhat affectionately) known as Malfunction Junction. I remember it well, and it could definitely lengthen your commute. For a period of years, there was a sign high above one traffic point that read “Don’t Never Ever Enter.” A photograph of it was published in *Life* Magazine, with the implication that we were mighty ignorant folks down here. The English Department pleaded for the sign to come down, and eventually it did. Its current whereabouts, if any, are unknown.

### **What’s In a Name?**

Scott Field was created a century ago, and it is named after MSU’s first Olympic athlete, Don Scott. (For almost a century, he was MSU’s only Olympian ever, but in 2016 MSU added two more: Brandon McBride and Marta Freitas, both runners; there definitely seems to be some magic in MSU Track and Field.) Scott, nicknamed “Scoot,” was one of the most gifted athletes in MSU history. He played some football and basketball, but his forte was track, and he competed in both the 1920 and 1924 International Olympics. In intercollegiate competition, his performances for MSU were stellar. Originally our football field was simply called the New Athletic Field, but in 1915 the *Reflector* student newspaper successfully lobbied to have it named Scott Field. My son Bob used to write the official blog of MSU Athletics, and you can read all about this story at <http://hailstatebeat.wordpress.com/2014/06/10/re-membering-don-scott-on-the-100th-anniversary-scott-field/> (Note there is no “www” in the address.)

A relatively recent nationwide trend has been to take already named fields and separately name the stadiums around them. It recognizes more people, and it also raises more money. Davis Wade Stadium is named after Mr. Davis Wade, an MSU alumnus and patriarch whose family has been exceedingly generous to Mississippi State University and our Athletic Department.

Similarly, Dudy Noble Field, our beautiful and unique baseball park, often referred to as “Dudy Noble” or “the Dude,” is named after a great MSU athlete who was a contemporary and teammate of Don Scott. Dudy Noble was the first, last, and only man to be Head Coach of the football teams of both Ole Miss and Mississippi State. He coached at Ole Miss first, but happily returned to Mississippi State, which he clearly favored. Rick Cleveland, retired Director of the Mississippi Sports Hall of Fame and Museum and the unquestioned dean of Mississippi sports writers, related that Dudy Noble had a hopelessly inept dog whom he eventually named “Ole Miss.”

Dudy Noble moved up to become Athletic Director here, and during his brilliant tenure he hired both the legendary and very long-serving sports announcer Jack Cristil, “the Voice of the MSU Bulldogs,” and the legendary basketball coach Babe McCarthy, whom you have already learned about. I regret that you will not get to hear Jack Cristil call a game if you have not already done so, as he died a few years ago, but if you hear the phrase “you can wrap this game in Maroon and White” (another MSU sports tradition) at the end

of an MSU victory, that was Jack Cristil's original, signature line. His story is well worth reading in *Jack Cristil: Voice of the MSU Bulldogs*, by Sid Salter, a highly regarded statewide political columnist and MSU graduate (and also one of my Scholars long ago) who is Chief Communications Officer and Director of the Office of Public Affairs here at Mississippi State.

As for Polk-Dement Stadium, Ron Polk was our legendary and long-serving baseball coach, an old fashioned "student of the game" known for his exceptional success here and also for his fiery passion (and, at times, temper; he got thrown out of a lot of games by a lot of umpires whose calls he questioned). The Dement family was another very generous donor to Mississippi State. The whole facility was already considered to be one of the two or three finest in the entire country, but it has been completely demolished to make way for a new facility that will be *the* finest in America, the *ne plus ultra* (look it up, Scholars!) of collegiate baseball stadiums.

A unique, longstanding attraction of the previous stadium was the so-called Left Field Lounge. Professional scouts I talked to at some of the games told me that there was nothing else like it, anywhere. What began with people backing up their trucks to the outfield fence and dropping the tailgate to enjoy the game, evolved over the years into an astonishing array of jerry-rigged "vehicles"—most of them could not possibly move under their own power—that were towed in and out each season and had simple to elaborate seating areas atop them. You could just about cut the hospitality and barbeque smoke out there with a knife, and many a visiting player or fan was fed there by longtime Bulldawgs of the Left Field Lounge. As I said earlier, we are a class act. (Happily, the spirit of the old Left Field Lounge has been reimaged in the architecture of our new facility, and the barbeque smoke shall rise again.)

Finally, Humphrey Coliseum, affectionately known as "the Hump," is a proud structure that comfortably seats 10,000. It is used not only for MSU basketball, but also for graduation ceremonies, big-name speakers, concerts, and our Fall Convocation. (You will end your career here the same place you began it: on the floor of the Hump!) It is named after MSU President George Duke Humphrey, who served admirably during the difficult and pivotal years of 1934-1953, spanning both the Great Depression and World War II, on into the dawning of the post-war era. Humphrey Coliseum was completed in 1975 and will probably see significant renovation in the not-too-distant future; but every visiting consultant has said

that the bowl itself (the interior seating and playing area) is "perfect." That is certainly a testament to its original designers.

### **Coaching's Killer Stressful and Coaches Teach Too**

Coaches of the marquee sports at SEC schools (baseball, men's basketball, and especially football) get a lot of attention and a lot of money—remember, though, that it is an investment that ultimately *makes* the school money—but they also work under an extreme, even lethal level of stress. (Check out the story of national champion football coach Urban Meyer, for instance, who's coached at Utah, Florida, and Ohio State.) Once you leave the marquee sports, the salaries drop like a rock, but the stress levels emphatically do not, and job security for all coaches is essentially zilch.

To give you a glimpse of the life of a coach, I interviewed Ms. Vann Stuedeman, Head Coach of MSU Women's Softball. My son Bob the sportswriter used to refer to her as VannTastic, and she certainly lives up to her billing. Her energy and enthusiasm are boundless, and these are matched by her competitive toughness, character, and heart. She revitalized our Softball program and took our team to three consecutive NCAA Tournaments in her first three years as Head Coach; only five active coaches anywhere in the country have done that.

Coach Vann was an Accounting major at Huntington College, but an internship in her father's accounting office made her realize that this was not the career for her. (Remember this story when you read the Career Center chapter, Scholars, and I tell you to *get practical experience*.) While earning her Master's Degree in Elementary Education at the University of West Alabama, Ms. Stuedeman was a Graduate Assistant to the softball team. The rest is history. She served as an Assistant Coach at the University of Alabama for eleven years, and as Pitching Coach she coached two First Team All Americans. She came to Mississippi State in 2011, her first job as a Head Coach.

It is a 14-hour-a-day job. As an Assistant Coach at Alabama, Vann Stuedeman saw many assistant coaches leave to take head coaching jobs; a couple of years later, when they returned to visit, they looked *ten* years older. Head coaching is one of the most stressful non-life-threatening jobs there is. The only way for a head coach to deal with the stress, and the only way to "have a life" in what little time remains, Coach Vann explained, is to prioritize, delegate, and

practice meticulous time management. (*Remember time management, Scholars?*) Whatever she is doing, she is *all* in it; and when she leaves it, she leaves that set of worries behind, knowing that if she follows her plan, it will work. (Does this sound like my advice to *you* in the Secrets to Student Success chapter?)

When asked how she deals with the lack of job security, she said a good coach deals with it by *winning*. You are not drawn to a job like this for security or money; you have to *love* it and thrive on it, and you are drawn to it for *success*. No losing coach would *want* to be retained; to remain would be an injustice to the players.

Coach Stuedeman considers herself a teacher—and Scholars, she definitely is one—and half of what she teaches is not softball, but life. The first team meeting of the season is about being a winner in *all* facets of life: player, student, friend, daughter, partner, mother, whatever. Her mantra is to be *selfless, excellent, and competitive*. “When you realize the world does not revolve around you, your world becomes easier, lighter, and happier, and you can be gracious and have a grateful heart.” Her other prime message to her players is to *always embrace differences*. No matter what the task, in sports or on the job, this is essential to be effective. (Remember this one when we get to the Diversity chapter, Scholars.) Finally, she expects her players to be “Girl Scouts off the field, but rabid dogs on it.” Amen, Coach.

### Sample Other Sports

Scholars, if you only go to the Big Games in the Big Three (football, baseball, men’s basketball), you are missing half the fun. Enjoy the more intimate atmosphere of the other sports. You can easily get *great seats* at Women’s Basketball, for instance, and it is bigtime fun. You have probably heard about our record-breaking 2016-2017 women’s basketball team, who snapped UConn’s (the University of Connecticut’s) *one hundred and eleven game* winning streak in the semifinal game of the NCAA national tournament. They were followed by the winningest MSU Women’s Basketball team ever, the 2017-2018 team that was one buzzer beater away from winning MSU’s first national championship. My Sweetie (Meredith) and I were thrilled to attend all the home games both seasons and cheer on our amazing Lady Bulldogs and their superb coach, Mr. Vic Schaefer. Join us this year—it is a great time.

Volleyball and soccer are exciting, too. Tennis is wild. Take in Track and Field or Golf or any sport you like,

maybe a sport you played or watched in high school. Women’s softball is a blast, and again you can get *great seats*. Find Coach Vann after the game, introduce yourself, and tell her Dr. C. sent you—I promise she will smile, shake your hand, and welcome you. Football is great, but there is so much more, Scholars. Sample all the sports!

### SUMMARY: MSU ATHLETICS

**Athletic Department Leadership**

**Pride, Involvement, and Excellence**

**Revenue, Entertainment, and Marketing**

**Never Boo the Bulldogs**

**Athletics’ Finest Hour:  
The 1963 Basketball Team**

**Don’t Believe the Myths**

**Athletes Work Hard**

**Our Athletic Traditions**

**MSU Cowbells:  
Always Ring Responsibly**

**Our School Colors:  
Maroon and White**

**Bully**

**The Junction**

**What’s In a Name?**

**Scott Field**

**Davis Wade Stadium**

**Dudy Noble Field**

**Polk-Dement Stadium**

**Left Field Lounge**

**The Hump: Humphrey Coliseum**

**Coaching’s Killer Stressful**

**Coaches Teach Too**

**Selfless, Excellent, and Competitive**

**Always Embrace Differences**

**Sample Other Sports**

\* \* \*

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Believe it or not, even at \$100,000,000 a year, at last report our Athletic budget was the lowest in the SEC.

That makes our many athletic successes even more impressive. We may be last in money spent, but we come out *far* higher in performance achieved.

<sup>2</sup>Not long ago, I ran into one of my favorite scholar-athletes in the campus Subway shop. (No, no one was feeding him steaks.) I asked him what he was taking this semester. Try: Calculus IV; Differential Equations; Physics II with lab; Engineering Mechanics I; Intro to Computer Programming with lab; and Intro to Aircraft and Spacecraft Performance. "Dumb jocks"? I think *not!* That is as rigorous an academic schedule as any on campus, don't you think?

## Chapter 5: THE MSU LEARNING CENTER

### It's Not the Dummy Center

The Learning Center: It's not the dummy center anymore. Scholars, it never *was* the dummy center! That is the vexing, totally inaccurate misperception about the Learning Center: that it exists for dumb students who never should have escaped high school, let alone come to MSU. Let's clear this up right now. When students come to the Learning Center for tutoring in courses like Calculus III, Spanish IV, Physics III, Cell Biology, Micro-economics, Philosophy, or Mathematical Statistics, do you seriously believe these are the campus dummies? How many of *you* are going to take those courses? Trust me, many of my Honors students have used the Learning Center. *You* should use it, too!

### Dumb Versus Unwise

There are no unintelligent ("dumb") students at Mississippi State University. If you think there are, then you are confusing university with high school. Students are not allowed to enroll here unless they have the native intellectual ability to succeed here. What is true—and it pains me to say it—is that a number of you have come here from high schools that did not do a sufficient job of preparing you for university. Students from these high schools have the intelligence to succeed here, but they don't always have the preparation they need. Remember, we are the People's University: We give the widest possible range of students the chance to earn a university degree from this prestigious, first-rate institution. I never blame students for not knowing what nobody ever taught them in high school. If you are behind, the Learning Center will bring you up to speed. And if you were fortunate enough to have had excellent preparation before you got here, The Learning Center will help you build on it and excel.

While there is not a single dumb student at Mississippi State University, a number of you, especially during your first semester, will be tempted to make decisions that are *unwise*. The wise students are the ones who *recognize* when they need *help*, and *get* it.

### It's For Everyone

If you are going to class and putting in plenty of study time (remember *go to class* and *work full time* from a previous chapter), but you are not getting grades that reflect your efforts, then: You are not taking notes effectively in class; you are not reading assignments

effectively; you are not studying effectively; and/or you are not taking tests effectively. *The Learning Center is designed to help you with any and all of these things.*

What if you know how to study pretty well, but you keep procrastinating and just can't seem to get it together and get organized, when there are so many different things competing for what seems like your very limited time? Then you need to learn effective time management. The Learning Center has helped *thousands* of students master this crucial skill.

In the Seven Secrets to Success chapter, we gave you the nuts and bolts of various study skills and time management techniques you will need to use here at university. For many of you, reading those methods in the *Insider's Guide* and putting them into practice is all you need to do. But for many more of you, the Learning Center stands ready to help you learn what to do and how to do it consistently in order to achieve academic success here.

The Learning Center is as much for "B" students who should be making "A"s, as it is for students who are at the brink of failing and losing the biggest opportunity of their lives. Know this about the Learning Center: *It's for everyone*. When you get right down to it, the Learning Center is really the "Success Center," and *all* of you are striving for success. Remember: Four years from now, the best jobs, as well as the admissions to medical school or law school or graduate school, are going to go to those of you who will do what it takes to succeed and excel here, right from the start. And for that, the Learning Center is your best friend.

### Learning Center Staff

The MSU Learning Center has a very young and enthusiastic staff, along with seasoned pros who have been part of the Learning Center for decades. I thoroughly enjoyed meeting with them, and they gave freely of their time. I talked the most to three of them, but there are many more people there who are ready and eager to help you. Dr. Clay Armstrong is the Director of The Learning Center, and he totally embraces its mission and potential. We work together on various committees dedicated to student success, and I have great respect for Dr. Armstrong's sincerity and dedication. Dr. Armstrong earned his Ph.D. right here at Mississippi State, and he knows this place well.

Ms. Chelsea Vincent runs the Supplemental Instruction (SI) program that we have recently added to increase student success in key courses. She, too, is a

Mississippi State graduate and is up on “all things maroon.” My General Psychology course is one of many courses that are part of the SI program, and I can personally attest to how kind, sincere, and dedicated Ms. Vincent is.

Ms. Rita McReynolds was also gracious enough to talk to me at length, and with remarkable enthusiasm. Talk about energy! I have never seen a teacher with more of it. She, too, has a master’s degree in Education, and she has worked in The Learning Center for decades. Her particular passion, besides helping all students who need assistance, is the Speed Reading course she teaches. Students *love* her course.

All told, the Learning Center is staffed by four full-time staff, including the Director, four more adjunct faculty, and three half-time Graduate Assistants. The last year they counted, the Learning Center staff taught almost a thousand students in 43 classes, 23 graduate students in three more classes, and tutored almost 800 students in almost 2,400 tutoring sessions they provided. Wow. About 40% of the Learning Center’s “customers” are first-year students like yourselves. Be one of them!

### **Get Free Tutoring**

Scholars, the Learning Center offers tutoring in over *one hundred* different courses. In all probability, they offer tutoring in most or all of the courses you are taking during your first semester here at Mississippi State. These include English Composition, Literature, Algebra, Trigonometry, Statistics, Calculus, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Economics, Spanish, Geography, Philosophy, and, yes, General Psychology—my own course that I teach to so many of you. The complete list can be found on The Learning Center’s excellent website at [www.tlc.msstate.edu](http://www.tlc.msstate.edu), or you can go straight to [www.tlc.msstate.edu/files/Tutoring\\_Course.pdf](http://www.tlc.msstate.edu/files/Tutoring_Course.pdf). And if the existing tutoring in 100 different courses isn’t enough, it just gets better: If you are struggling in a course The Learning Center doesn’t already have tutors for, if you tell them the course you need tutoring in, and give them a little time arrange it, they will do their level best to provide you with a tutor for that course, too.

Tutoring is typically done in very small groups of just a few students at a time. You schedule your tutoring through a link on your myState portal. If for some reason that does not work for you, call the Learning Center for assistance at 662-325-8613 or (if you don’t get an answer at that number) 662-325-2957. All tutors have already taken the courses they will tutor you in, and all of them have earned “A”s in those

courses themselves—they know the courses well and they know exactly what you have to know and do to succeed in them.

Want more good news? Standard tutoring at the Learning Center is *free*. (If you demand a one-on-one individual tutor, the Learning Center will try to find one for you, but you would have to pay a significant amount of money for each session. The standard tutoring groups are so small that they are just about like having a private tutor, anyway, so the standard, free tutoring is almost always your best, go-to option.)

When you come for tutoring, you should bring your textbooks, notebooks, class notes, class handouts and syllabi—everything you have from the course you will be tutored in. Please realize that *tutoring is not a substitute for going to class*. Study and review all your materials *before* you come to tutoring. You want your questions to be as *specific* as possible. You *don’t* want to simply arrive and say “I don’t get it.” If, for instance, you say “I don’t get the Conditioning and Learning chapter in General Psych,” the tutor will not know how to help you, nor will your tutor be able or willing to give you your class lectures all over again. But if instead you say, “In Pavlov’s classical conditioning experiment with the dogs, I don’t understand how the musical tone (it was a musical tone, Scholars, not a bell) can be *both* a conditioned stimulus *and* a neutral stimulus—how can one thing be two things?” then you will be asking a question specific enough that your tutor can easily help you answer it.

### **Learning Center Courses**

The Learning Center offers a number of regularly scheduled courses designed to sharpen your success skills at university. I won’t cover all of their courses here, but I can at least mention some of the ones you are most likely to take. If you are told to take LSK 0103, Intermediate Reading, then do as you are told! Obviously, everyone coming here can read and write; but some of you were not taught in high school how to read quickly and effectively enough to succeed at university. This course will remedy that.

LSK 1001, Freshman Seminar, is an optional seminar that meets once a week, open to any interested first-year student. The subject is study skills, time management, campus resources, and MSU culture and traditions.

LSK 1023, College Reading and Study Skills, is an intensive course meeting a full three hours a week to teach you textbook reading skills, note-taking skills,

study skills, test-taking skills, and time management skills. I recommend this course to many of my own students, and in many majors it is an elective course that can count toward your graduation.

The last course I will cover here is LSK 2013, Speed Reading. Your instructor, Ms. Rita McReynolds, is absolutely passionate about getting you to read books. If you think reading is a chore, you will no longer think so after you take her course. Furthermore, if you work really hard at this course and apply yourself diligently, you should leave it with an effective reading speed *two to four times* what it was before you took Speed Reading. In the next four years, you will have thousands upon thousands of pages of reading to do. If you go on to graduate school, medical school, law school, etc., you will have *tens* of thousands of pages of reading to do. If you double or quadruple your *effective* reading speed, you will actually *save* more time in the years ahead than you spent taking the Speed Reading course itself! I recommend this course to just about all of my own students.

If you wanted to take a speed reading course outside the University, you would have to pay thousands of dollars for it, and many people do; but if you take it here at Mississippi State, not only will you get more expert instruction, but also it will not add a cent to your existing tuition bill. Once again, many majors will accept this course as an elective toward graduation. The Speed Reading course is a wonderful opportunity for you.

Go to the Learning Center website to learn about a number of other LSK courses that are offered. And if you need or want an LSK course and all the sections are full, try contacting the instructor of the course or Dr. Armstrong, the Director of the Learning Center. Tell them you really wanted to be in the course, but you could find no spaces available. Maybe, sometimes, they can squeeze you in. It never hurts to ask, and even if they can't get you in, they can probably guide you to similar services provided by the Learning Center outside of class. Don't hesitate to get on their radar.

### **Use Supplemental Instruction**

The Learning Center also delivers the valuable and effective Supplemental Instruction program. In the Fall semester, typically at least 20 sections of courses in which students have historically had difficulty, and/or "must pass" courses that students *must* master if they are to proceed further in their majors, have been designated for Supplemental Instruction (SI). SI

Leaders are successful students who have previously excelled in the courses for which they now provide Supplemental Instruction. They return to those courses and attend every class, just as you do. Your Supplemental Instruction leaders are not tutors, however (we have already covered how you can get tutoring through the Learning Center), nor do they re-deliver your professors' lectures. What SI leaders typically do is offer two out-of-class sessions per week where groups of students can work with the class material together and get their questions answered.

*This greatly improves learning.* Last year, students who never went to Supplemental Instruction sessions had an average GPA (grade point average) of 2.4 (out of a possible 4.0) in their SI courses. Students who went to at least 4 Supplemental Instruction sessions had an average GPA of 3.0. That is a major difference, almost two-thirds of a letter grade. Two-thirds of a letter grade could easily be the difference between passing your courses or failing out of university, between keeping your financial aid or losing it, or between being a B student or an Honors student. Bottom line: If it's available, *use Supplemental Instruction*. It's easy, it's fun, it's free, and it pays off.

### **Copying, Printing, and Computers**

Most students have no idea that the Learning Center also offers low-cost copying and printing, as well as preparation of various class materials. The Learning Center even has a computer lab that is open to anyone. Make use of these conveniences.

### **Avoiding the Two Fatal Mistakes: Get Help Promptly; and Remember Time Management**

This is review from an earlier chapter, but it is just as true here as there: For the Learning Center, as for any campus resource, to do you the most good, it will only work right if you *get help promptly*. As soon as you realize that some of your skills need to be strengthened—and if you are putting your full time into your studies but your grades are disappointing, you *are* lacking fully developed skills in some area—then go to the Learning Center *right away*. If you wait until November to go to the Learning Center, long after two miserable sets of progress report grades and after blowing test after test or paper after paper, you may very well have dug yourself into a hole that nobody can help you out of. Be wise, and get help promptly.

The fatal mistake I observe most frequently of all in my students is a failure to *remember time*

*management*. Time management has more to do with the successful outcome of your first semester at university than any other single factor. If you feel overwhelmed, if you feel that there literally are not enough hours in the day to do everything you must do here, you are not alone—*many* first-year students feel this way. But you *do* have enough time: What you lack is not time, but *time management* skills. We already covered this in an earlier chapter, so go back and review the particulars.

Unfortunately, is easy to agree with the principles of time management, but it is significantly more difficult to *practice* them. If you just cannot seem to get it together and have enough time to do everything, if you are always feeling as if you are “one step ahead of the steamroller,” if worries about unfinished work hang over you even during your time off from your studies, then *you* need *professional* help with time management. The folks at the Learning Center are experts at this. They have helped *thousands* of students who felt overwhelmed by all the demands on their time. They taught them time management, and they taught them how to succeed. They can teach *you*, too. All you have to do is make that visit to 267 Allen Hall, the location of the Learning Center, and tell them what you need. I promise they will be happy to help you.

### **The Best-Kept Secret at Mississippi State**

Scholars, as I was researching and writing this chapter, person after person told me the same thing: The Learning Center is the best-kept secret on this campus. I agree. I promise you that the Learning Center can make a *great* difference in your success here. You just have to use it!

## **REVIEW**

**The Learning Center**

**Not the Dummy Center**

**Dumb Versus Unwise**

**It's For Everyone**

**Learning Center Staff**

**Get Free Tutoring**

**Learning Center Courses**

**Use Supplemental Instruction**

**Copying, Printing, and Computers**

**Two Fatal Mistakes**

**Get Help Promptly**

**Remember Time Management**

**Best-Kept Secret at Mississippi State**

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## Chapter 6: THE MSU WRITING CENTER

Many students do not even realize we have a Writing Center on campus, especially if they placed out of English Composition. But we do have a wonderful Writing Center, directed by one of my favorite, most energetic and enthusiastic colleagues, Ms. Kayleigh Few. Ms. Few earned her Master of Arts degree in English right here at Mississippi State, and since then she has been teaching English Composition and serving as Director of the Writing Center. I was astonished to learn that the Writing Center has a staff of 30 people, and each year they serve approximately 1,100 students for two or three hours apiece, on average.

### It's for Everyone

The Writing Center is *not* just for students taking English Composition; in fact, about half their "customers" come from other courses. The Writing Center is used by freshmen for sure, but also by seniors and sophomores, juniors and graduate students, basic skills students and Honors students, and even some faculty. The Writing Center provides help with *any* kind of writing: most commonly for class assignments, but also for application essays, personal statements, and even just writing for fun.

### Consulting, Not Editing

The Writing Center is *not* in the business of writing your papers *for* you, nor do their staff serve as editors who spot your mistakes and fix them for you. They are *consultants*, "coaches," if you will; their goal is to get you to the point where you can *self*-edit what you write. This is exactly the goal you should want: When you leave campus to start your professional career, you can't very well come running back to get your writing fixed. The time to perfect your writing skills is *now*; you will take those skills with you and literally employ them for the rest of your life.

### Using the Writing Center: Where, When, and How

The Writing Center has several physical locations, and one virtual one. The main office is at "The House" at 94 President's Circle. (President's Circle is actually a semicircular street going from one side of Allen Hall, around the back of the building, to the other side.) The Writing Center is across the street from the west side of Allen Hall, and there is a sign for it outside the house, by the street. Hours there are 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and 10:00 a.m. to 1:00

p.m. on Friday. Besides having a staff of writing consultants on hand to help you, they have computers, printers, English Composition textbooks, style manuals, dictionaries, and various handouts to aid you with particular points of writing.

Another location is at the Templeton Athletic Center, out past the Coliseum. Go to the lower level of Templeton, and the Writing Center folks will be across from the elevator. Hours there are 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday.

A third, uniquely useful location is in our beautiful Mitchell Memorial Library, on the Drill Field. Go in the main entrance, and then head for the Research Services area. This is a great place to work on major papers, especially research papers, because all the resources of the library are right there in the same building. Hours for the Writing Center experts based in the Library are 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday, as well as Sunday during those hours.

Finally, if none of those physical locations are good for you, you can interact with a writing consultant online, 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday, as well as Sunday during the same hours. (In case you are wondering, the hours of each unit are determined by the actual usage patterns of students; we know from experience when you are likeliest to want to use the services.)

Online help is available only by appointment. You can drop in at the other locations, and if consultants are available, they will be happy to help you. It is better, however, to make an appointment ahead of time if possible. That way, the folks at the Writing Center will know when you are coming, and you will know there will be a consultant available specifically to see you. You can schedule your appointment online at [www.msstate.mywconline.com](http://www.msstate.mywconline.com). If you encounter difficulty, you can call 662-325-1045 during business hours at The House, or come there in person when it is open, and the Writing Center folks will walk you through the online appointment scheduling process. Almost everyone finds it quite easy to schedule an appointment online, however, so try it yourself first.

Be sure to provide as much specific information as you can when you schedule your appointment. Indicate what course the assignment you are working on is for, as different writing consultants specialize in different courses. If you have a draft of your paper, attach it. Writing consultants prepare for your session before you arrive, so the more they know about your needs,

the better they can help you. Appointments are scheduled for 30-minute or 60-minute time slots, depending on your needs and goals and what stage of writing you are at.

### **More Than Once**

Often, you may find yourself getting help at more than one stage of an assignment. You might need help with brainstorming and general planning at one stage, with organizing and outlining at another, and with writing, editing, and rewriting at another. Think of the Writing Center as a resource you can use throughout the process of writing. You can even get back to work writing your paper immediately following a session, while you are still at the Writing Center.

### **One Way or the Other**

Many times, if your professors spot some problems with your writing, they will refer you to the Writing Center. Your professors do not have time to take you through the various points of grammar, punctuation, etc., but your consultant at the Writing Center will have time for exactly that. If your professor suggests that you go to the Writing Center, *go*. That is a clear sign that your writing needs attention. Not all professors suggest the Writing Center, however—in fact, I regret to say that not all of them know about it. If you are trying hard but are not getting top grades on your papers, *go to the Writing Center yourself*; don't wait for someone to *tell* you to go.

### **Writing: Your Future Is Now**

I cannot emphasize enough how important it is that you develop excellent writing skills as soon as possible. Even if you are doing well in your courses overall, you should go to the Writing Center if you are getting anything less than high "A"s on your papers. Most of you will never again have the chance to develop your writing skills under expert guidance. What you take to the workplace or to graduate school will be the writing skills you develop *here, now*.

While I was writing this chapter of the *Insider's Guide*, I was asked by one of my favorite, most talented students to write a letter of recommendation to accompany her application to a highly selective professional school. I taught this student twice, and her powers of observation and description were stellar. I absolutely loved reading her papers. Yet she got "B"s in both her English Composition courses. Why? She simply would not take the time to complete

her mastery of the finer points of grammar. I practically begged her to go to the Writing Center, but she would not do it. I even tried to teach her grammar myself, but when I saw that she wasn't taking my efforts seriously, I stopped. Will that highly selective professional school listen to my glowing description of this student's powers of observation and description, or will the Admissions Committee take a look at her transcript and say "But we can take another excellent writer who got straight "A"s in composition," and reject that wonderful student of mine? I hope she makes it, but I fear she won't.

Don't let this happen to you, Scholars. No matter what career path you are headed for, even if it is in science or technology or business, writing is critically important. (See the Career Center chapter to learn what your future employers say about the *necessity* of first-rate writing skills.) I promise you that the folks at the Writing Center are not just ready, but *eager* to help you. By their own description, they consider helping you develop the best possible writing skills "a labor of love." The Writing Center staff are very supportive. As Ms. Few put it, "Let your mistakes be your friends. Don't be afraid of making mistakes; instead, let them be learning experiences." I happen to know that on careful surveys, nearly every single student who has used the Writing Center has said they would do it again. And the price is right: It's free. Go for it!

## **REVIEW**

### **The Writing Center**

### **It's for Everyone**

### **Consulting, Not Editing**

### **Where, When, How**

### **More Than Once**

### **The Future Is Now**

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## Chapter 7: THE MSU CAREER CENTER

Scholars, when I started college, I was clueless about a major. I tried English, but when my papers came back in a hash of red ink, criticisms, and mediocre grades, I switched to Biology, with the thought of becoming a physician. Chem II scuttled that plan. I took General Psychology one summer to learn all about ESP, “parapsychology,” etc. (Rude awakening: “There ain’t no such of a thing.” Long story, but that’s the bottom line.) My first Psych professor wasn’t actually very good, but the material was fascinating, so I dove in and took several more Psych courses. I was blessed with excellent teaching and advising, and the rest is history. But honestly, I wasted a lot of time before I identified the best major and career for me, and I made some less than excellent grades while getting to that point.

My story isn’t unusual. Most students at Mississippi State go through several majors before they find the right one for them, so don’t feel bad if it takes you a while to find the major and career that are just right for you. However, there is an immensely valuable shortcut that may spare you the frustration, misspent time, and often lower grades that a wrong choice of major can cause. That shortcut is the MSU Career Center. The Career Center will also be immensely valuable as you seek and prepare for your professional employment.

My daughter Marcie was undecided about her major and career plans, but she was smart enough to go to the MSU Career Center. After going through the same career search program that is available to you, she identified deaf education as her goal. It really fit! She went on an exchange program to Gallaudet, the national university for the deaf, in Washington D.C. She learned American Sign Language and took courses in the culture and challenges of the deaf. She loved it.

Over the past few years I have visited with a number of key Career Center staff about this chapter. For the sake of brevity, I will not try to name them all here, as the staff members you will be working with will depend on your specific major, but let me assure you that you are in *excellent* hands, and the MSU Career Center is one of *the* most valuable resources on this campus, one that *every* student should be using, starting *right now*.

### A Four-Year Plan

The MSU Career Center is unusual in that it is a campus resource you should use for *all four years* at

university, with specific and different tasks for each year. Part of why you came to Mississippi State was to land a great job, right? Just as you must have a four-year plan to get your degree, and you will work at that degree all four years, you *also* need to have a four-year plan to position yourself for a great job, and work all four years on that career plan. You can see the four-year plan in detail at: <https://www.career.msstate.edu/students/career/plan/> Any year you are *not* working on your career plan as well as your studies, you are screwing up and diminishing the career opportunities available to you after you graduate.

### Read the Handbook

So where to start, right now: First, read the 42-page handbook, entitled *The Career Center*. It is printed in an attractive, engaging magazine format, and it is absolutely brimming with valuable information and excellent advice. This handbook is so good that it has been nationally recognized, and I can definitely see why.

You can get your handbook by stopping by the Career Center main office, Room 300 in the beautifully restored and historic Montgomery Hall. The architecture alone is worth the trip—it is a knockout! One recruiter noted that we have one of the two best recruiting facilities in the nation. The other is Harvard University—pretty lofty company, eh? You can also go to the website [www.career.msstate.edu](http://www.career.msstate.edu) or straight to [http://issuu.com/msucoop/docs/career\\_center\\_handbook\\_website](http://issuu.com/msucoop/docs/career_center_handbook_website) to download a copy of the handbook. The Career Center website is super—richly informative and very well organized.

### Write Your Résumé and See Your Career Center Ambassador

The first step in using the Career Center is to create a good résumé. (That’s pronounced “REZ-uh-may.” You may also hear it referred to as a “vita.”) This is a critically important task that you should be tackling *right now*. Your résumé summarizes your education, goals, work experience, skills, interests, etc. Just about every prospective employer or graduate or professional school is going to want to see your résumé. A good one will catch their attention in a positive way and up the odds that you will be hired or selected. A bad one will cause them to pass over you within moments and move on to people who did a better job of presenting themselves.

The Career Center will do two things for you: coach you on how to write an effective résumé; and then evaluate the résumé you write, just as a professional employer or educational institution would, and suggest how you can fix your mistakes and also improve what you have done well. *Use this service.* Get to work on your résumé *now*. You begin this process with a Career Center Ambassador who is an advanced MSU student trained by the Career Center. You may drop in at the main office in Montgomery Hall to visit with a Career Center Ambassador—no appointment is necessary.

How important is your résumé? According to [www.careerkarma.net](http://www.careerkarma.net), an excellent company owned by an old friend of mine, the average potential employer will spend only about 15 seconds looking at your résumé before deciding whether or not to put you in a small group to look at further, and your résumé is likely to be one of over 200 they consider. Obviously, your résumé must be crisp, professional, and error free—with that many to choose from, they are looking for any reason to throw yours out of the running—and you must stand out in a positive, professional way.

A first-rate outfit like [careerkarma.net](http://careerkarma.net) would charge you at least \$400-500 or more for what the MSU Career Center will do with you for free. The Career Center won't create your résumé *for* you, but they will make sure that *you* do it properly, and with their professional help, you will achieve a result you can be proud of.

Many schools use résumé writing software. We do *not* do that at Mississippi State. Like each individual student, each student's résumé should be unique. The Career Center handbook and website have extensive suggestions to get you started, but your final product will be tailored specifically to fit you and showcase your best qualifications and talking points. This means extra time and effort on the front end, but you will enjoy a much better, more effective result.

The Career Center will also show you how to do a cover letter to go with the résumé you send to potential employers, as well as a follow-up letter if you earn an interview.

### **Avoid Digital Dirt**

The most attractive résumé in the world will be useless if you shoot yourself in the foot with unwise posts on social media like Twitter, Instagram,

Facebook, etc. The folks at the Career Center call this "digital dirt." A quick scan of my 1,000+ students and former students' Facebook posts made it abundantly clear that this is a real problem. I could regale you with stories of graphic descriptions of inventive bedroom antics, wild photos of heavy drinking, photos of provocatively clad men and women showing off, photos of tattoos on places most people don't even reveal, etc.—but if I get any more specific, the University might refuse to print this book. The Career Center suggests the "grandmother test": If you would be embarrassed to have your grandmother see it, then don't post it!

Likewise avoid posting angry political rants, any sexist, racist, or homophobic comments, etc. And don't complain about your teachers and bosses. This just tells a prospective employer or school that if they take you, you will probably write similar things about *them*.

Also be mindful that once you have a job, you can be fired for complaining about your job on social media—you do *not* have the freedom of speech you think you do. For instance, in one recent case, a police officer was fired for complaining on Facebook about her Chief's refusal to let her and other officers attend the funeral of a fellow officer who was killed in the line of duty, saying the Department "couldn't afford the gas" to get there. It is hard to say which is more outrageous: that Chief's refusal and rationale, or the fact that the firing of the officer who complained about it on Facebook was *upheld* by a Federal court. She is now unemployed, with a bad record.

Believe it or not, recent studies have suggested to employers that reading your Facebook posts, Twitter tweets, etc. can be a valid indicator of your desirability as an employee and even your actual job performance. This is a scary trend. At a minimum, *max out* your privacy settings, and don't take on friends or followers whom you don't know well and trust completely. It is amazing how far and how fast electronic indiscretions travel, and once they are out there, you cannot get them back. The smart move: *Avoid digital dirt.*

### **Use LinkedIn**

There is, however, one place where you probably *do* want an online presence, and that is LinkedIn ([www.Linkedin.com](http://www.Linkedin.com)). According to Jen Fishberg, President of CareerKarma.net, over 90% of companies are using social media for recruiting nowadays, and LinkedIn is the most used. Don't simply paste in your résumé. Add some personal touches, and be sure to include a nice (but conservative) picture—this literally

makes it ten times more likely that your profile will be viewed. You would be wise to go ahead and construct your LinkedIn profile now, but be *sure* to have it evaluated by your Career Center Ambassador and/or your Professional Liaison. (See below.) The Career Center has a very specific and helpful flier on how to create a good LinkedIn profile—be sure to ask for one.

### **See a Professional Liaison**

Once you have created your résumé with the help of your Career Center Ambassador, the next step is to meet with a full-time professional staff member. All Mississippi State students have their own professional “liaisons” (career counselors, basically) at the Career Center, depending on their majors. (I discovered that one of the liaisons is one of my best and favorite old students; that made me smile.) These liaisons are plainly listed in the handbook; go to the one who specializes in your college or major. Your professional liaison will meet with you to put the finishing touches on your résumé and then guide you through the various programs and options available to you. Call 325-3344 to make your appointment. Don’t just read about making an appointment: Do it!

### **Take The Assessments**

Two major *assessments* are available to help you select the career that would be best for you. The first of these is the Strong Interest Inventory®. This is a longstanding and widely used instrument that works in an interesting way. You will answer many questions. Then a computer program will compare your overall pattern of answers to those of people in hundreds of different fields who are both happy and successful in those fields. For instance, the more your pattern of answers matches those of successful, well satisfied veterinarians, the more likely the inventory is to suggest veterinary medicine as a possible career path. If your pattern matched those of high school teachers who were successful and happy with their careers, then it would suggest secondary education as a career path to investigate. This is a clever and remarkably effective approach. There is a \$20 fee for this assessment, and trust me, that is a bargain.

The second assessment is called TypeFocus®, and this one is free. It is based on a conception of personality known as psychological type. Just as we have inborn, naturally occurring physical preferences for being right-handed or left-handed, we also have inborn, naturally occurring psychological preferences for going about life in certain ways. Isabel Briggs Myers, borrowing from the Book of Romans in the Christian

Bible, refers to this as “gifts differing.” There are not “good” psychological types and “bad” psychological types or “right” types and “wrong” types; rather, there are *different* types, and these differences profoundly influence what kinds of majors and career fields you would be likely to enjoy and excel at.

The point is to identify majors and careers where what comes naturally and easily to you is exactly what that field demands. There are many jobs that you *could* do, but you don’t want to be working with your left hand, so to speak, if you are right handed; you want to identify the jobs that would fit your own psychological type. I worked with a related assessment, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®), for 33 years, and I can assure you that this is a very powerful approach that you are likely to find both interesting—it’s always cool to learn more about yourself—and valuable in selecting the right major and career options for you.

For instance, if I look at the tables of careers where my particular type is frequently found, the top 10 are these: psychiatrist; editor or reporter; researcher; writer; journalist; psychologist; religious educator; social scientist; author; and educational consultant. That is a remarkably good “hit” for someone who became a professor of clinical psychology, edited a research journal (on psychological type) for 33 years, travels around the country giving presentations on how to teach freshmen, used to teach Sunday School, and is writing this book you are reading!

### **Take the Career Course**

In addition to these assessments and associated career counseling, Career Center staff teach an entire 3-credit-hour academic course specifically designed to aid you in your major and career search. It is COE 1323 Academic and Career Planning, and it counts as elective credit toward graduation in the majority of majors at MSU. This course not only directs you to a wealth of information about various careers (educational requirements, job availabilities, typical salaries, etc.), but also the course emphasizes personal exploration, and a “gut check” of what major and/or career really, truly feels “right” to you. It is a small, personal class limited to 20 students per section, and there are multiple sections available each semester. I have recommended this course to hundreds of my own students, and if I were you, I would take it in a heartbeat. I consider the Career Planning course to be one of the “overlooked gems” in the University curriculum.

### **Explore Career Resources**

To get an idea of what sorts of resources are waiting for you, whether you take the Career Planning course or not, visit these three websites:

[www.bls.gov/ooh](http://www.bls.gov/ooh)  
[www.onetonline.org](http://www.onetonline.org)

The first website contains extensive data compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in their Occupational Outlook Handbook. You might find, for instance, that to be an accountant or auditor requires a four-year college or university degree, that job creation in this area is high, and that \$65,000 would be a typical salary. (That may sound great, and for some students it is, but remember the “gut check”: Would you *like* spending all day in an office, summarizing numbers and calculating payrolls and taxes?)

O\*Net Online shows you which careers have especially bright (or not so bright) employment outlooks. For instance, child, family, and school social work has a particularly bright outlook. I mention these only as examples of the kinds of data you can find; there are literally data for many hundreds of careers. And again, don't forget the gut check.

These sources are rich in data and information, but you need to learn how to use them to your best advantage. Your Career Center professional liaison and/or your instructor for the Career Planning course, if you take it, can guide you in using these resources.

### **Take a Gut Check**

After you sift through all the data and reason your way to some logical possibilities, always remember to do one more thing: Take a “gut check.” Does it really, truly feel right? Would you *love* this major or job? The old saying is so true: Find the work you love, and you'll never “work” again.

### **Take the Mock Interview and Ace the Job Interview**

Another thing to learn is how to ace your job interview (or admissions interview, if you are heading for med school, law school, grad school, etc.). The tricky thing about job interviews is that you are *expected* to be at your best, so even a small mistake or miscue may doom your chances. You need to dress well and conservatively, and you need to present yourself professionally and appropriately. The Career Center has a long and detailed list of suggestions and warnings. *Read it and heed it.* Some of them will be

pretty obvious, but others will be things you probably would not have thought of.

The next step is a mock interview. Career Center staff will play the role of a potential employer, interview you, and give you immediate feedback on what you did right and wrong. This is like the dress rehearsal before the performance of a play; you want to find out your mistakes *before* you are in front of an audience. Do *not* skip this step!

### **The Co-Op Program: This Is Gold**

The Career Center also oversees the Experiential Learning Program which includes Cooperative Education and Internship opportunities. *This is gold!* You can go to their website at [www.coop.msstate.edu](http://www.coop.msstate.edu). Usually, you complete your first year of coursework, and then you start alternating semesters of on-campus classes with semesters of off-campus full-time work with employers. You must apply for co-op positions, just like jobs. It is a somewhat complicated process, so follow the instructions on the website carefully. Not everyone who wants a co-op placement gets one, and some majors typically do not offer co-op experiences. But if the co-op experience is offered for your major, *go for it!*

The co-op experience will be highly valuable for two reasons. First, the hands-on work experience will help you be certain that you are in a field that is right for you. If it is *not* right for you, it is far better to find this out early, while there is still plenty of time to work out another major. Second, your co-op experience will significantly increase your attractiveness to permanent employers down the road. Co-op experience is one of the most desirable factors employers look for. If the company or organization you co-op with is impressed with your work, they may offer you a permanent job when you graduate; this happens with **80%** of our co-op students. Even if they don't have a position for you, you will have job experience and references that will put you above a lot of your competition. Plus, you can make a significant amount of money while on co-op and save some of it for your regular university tuition.

Co-op students actually graduate in fewer academic semesters than most MSU students, because they are less likely to change their majors. And because your co-op placements are paid positions, they seldom add to your overall expenses as you earn your university degree.

My son Gordon was a computer science major, and he participated in the Co-Op program with excellent results. He landed a position with a spinoff of IBM that dealt mostly with computer programming problems that the regular IBM employees were unable to solve. He found it fascinating. He also found it lucrative: With overtime, he was making more money during his co-op semester as a college sophomore than I was making as a full Professor with a Ph.D. and over 20 years of experience. I repeat: The Co-Op Program is gold!

The Co-Op Office offers information sessions near the beginning of each semester. Be sure to go to one of these if you think the Co-Op experience might be for you. You can find the schedule online, or you can call the Co-Op Office at 325-3823 or stop by in person at 335 McCain building.

### **Get Practical Experience: The Experiential Learning Program**

The Career Center emphasizes that *every* student should get practical experience directly related to his or her major. To this end, the Career Center emphasizes what it calls the Experiential Learning Program. The Co-Op Program is one great option within this program, but there are others: internships, externships, and job shadowing, to list just a few. In the Co-Op Program, you complete your first year at university and then alternate work and school semesters, for a total of at least one year's work experience by the time you are done. Internships are usually one-time placements, often in the summer, but sometimes during one of the regular semesters.

Each year, about three dozen Mississippi State students go on paid internships to congressional delegations, government agencies, lobbying firms, and nonprofit organizations, all in Washington DC. Some Departments offer up to six hours of academic credit for this. Some students participate in a joint program with the "other" MSU, Michigan State University. (They are "the MSU of the North;" we are "the MSU of the South." I have been to both places, and both are great schools, but our weather and our campus are *way* nicer.)

To illustrate what can happen, Tim Wolverton (grandson of Dr. Bob Wolverton Sr., my most admired professor on this campus) interned in Mississippi Senator Thad Cochran's office not many years ago. Not only did Tim have a great experience, but he went on to work full time for the Senator and supervise interns from MSU!

There is another outstanding opportunity run through the Career Center that involves 50-60 MSU students each year: the Disney College Program. Here you are trained by and work at one of the most successful companies in the world, with semester-long placements in Disney World. You can even elect to earn some college credits while you are there. There are also advanced internships at Disney. My son Bob participated in the Disney College Program, and he absolutely loved it. He even worked for them as a Disney College Program representative when he returned to State.

If you want practical experience in your field—and if you are smart, you *will* want it—the Career Center, in conjunction with your major department, will help you find it.

Naturally, a few years from now when you are looking for a permanent job, the Career Center will be your best friend, as hundreds of employers interview through them. You will learn more about that when the time comes.

### **Attend Career Fairs**

Meanwhile, the Career Center hosts a number of Career Fairs on campus each semester, and you should attend any of them that might interest you; some may be in a specific area in which you are considering or planning a career. Check the MSU Career Center website for dates and details.

### **Part-Time Jobs**

One more service the Career Center offers that may be of immediate interest to you is help finding a part-time job. Many such jobs are listed with the Center. For others, you should print copies of your résumé that the Career Center helped you develop, and take those résumés to every possible off-campus and on-campus employer. If you are good and persistent and make the smart moves the Career Center will teach you, you have a good chance of landing a part-time job.

Just make sure your hours don't disrupt your schoolwork. Usually, a 10 hour a week job will not hurt your grades and in fact will quite possibly increase them, as it forces you to develop and practice good time-management skills. (See the Seven Secrets to Student Success chapter.) If *necessary*, you can probably handle a 20 hour a week job without serious damage to your grades, but only if you are willing to schedule a total of 60 hours a week between your studies (remember, they will require 40 hours a week)

plus your job. You will still have free time, but you will have to manage it very carefully. Under no circumstances would I recommend that you work more than 20 hours a week in addition to your studies. For first-year students, try to keep any job(s) to a total of no more than 10-12 hours a week if you can, and definitely not more than 15-20 hours a week. All of us want you to have a successful and enjoyable first year, and you need enough time to make that happen.

### **Write, Speak, Excel**

Finally, this may be the most important advice of all. What do you think is the single most important thing you can do to get a great job someday and advance rapidly once you have it? The Career Center folks were unanimous and immediate in their reply: More than *anything* else, what employers are looking for is outstanding written and oral communication skills. I totally agree: The single most important thing you can do to stand out from your competition, no matter what field you are in, is to excel at written and oral communication. Write, speak, excel, succeed.

No matter how knowledgeable and good you are at your chosen field, you cannot get by on that alone. And the more you don't want to spend time now on writing and speaking skills, the more you probably need to.

Embrace your English Comp. and Public Speaking courses. Work at them relentlessly until you *excel* at them. Some majors have incorporated advanced writing and/or basic public speaking into courses in your major department. If yours is one of those majors, invest the extra hours to *also* take courses like CO 1013 Intro to Communication and EN 3313 Writing for the Workplace.

Scholars, I gave that advice to all three of my own sons here, and when it came time for them to begin their professional careers, they were exceedingly glad they had taken it. Every moment invested in writing and speaking skills paid off, bigtime. I would say exactly the same thing about my own career. The biggest breaks and most rewarding opportunities I ever received—not to mention the most extra money I ever made—traced directly to things that I wrote that proved to be persuasive, or speeches or presentations I made that went particularly well. It will be this way for you, too, I promise. Believe it—and prepare for it.

## **REVIEW**

**Read the Handbook**

**Write Your Résumé**

**See a Peer Counselor**

**Avoid Digital Dirt**

**Use LinkedIn**

**See Your Career Center Ambassador**

**Take The Assessments**

**Take the Career Course**

**Explore Career Resources**

**Take a Gut Check**

**Ace the Job Interview**

**Take the Mock Interview**

**The Co-Op Program**

**Experiential Learning**

**This is Gold: Co-op and Internships**

**Get Practical Experience**

**Attend Career Fairs**

**Part-Time Jobs**

**Write, Speak, Excel**

\* \* \*

**Chapter 8: HEALTH AND WELLNESS:  
THE JOHN C. LONGEST  
STUDENT HEALTH CENTER**

Scholars, the most direct and personal endorsement I can give you about the MSU Student Health Center is this: I have been going there myself for nearly 40 years. I could go anywhere I want, but this is where I choose to go. These are the folks I expect to keep me bolted together long enough to teach *your* children.

The Director of the Center is Dr. Clifton (Cliff) Story. Dr. Story earned his undergraduate degree right here at Mississippi State—in fact, he was a student of mine—he earned his medical degree from the University of Mississippi Medical School in Jackson, and he is Board-certified in family medicine. In fact, all the physicians at the Student Health Center have advanced training and Board certification in either family medicine or internal medicine, and they are qualified to treat a wide variety of medical problems. Dr. Story and several of his staff shared their vision of the Student Health Center with me, and it is excellent.

**A Comprehensive Health Center**

Somehow, there are a few people out there with the perception that the Student Health Center is basically an STD clinic, with a nurse available in case you have a sore throat or cold along with your venereal disease. That being said, it is myth and nonsense! Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Longest Student Health Center is a modern, comprehensive medical clinic and health and wellness education center. It is the biggest practice in the Golden Triangle area (Starkville, Columbus, West Point, and MSU). The facility is up to date, well equipped, clean, and well run. The staff are exceptionally helpful and friendly. The physicians there have top-flight credentials. They could work anywhere; they choose to work *here*, serving *you*.

**Time for Individual Attention**

The usual patient load for each physician at the Longest Student Health Center is 20 patients a day. Contrast this to the 40 to (brace yourself) *100 or more* patients per day seen by physicians in private practice. Because the Student Health Center is state supported, there is no time or profit pressure, and you will get much more personalized, unhurried care here. Also, the various Health Center services you pay for are sharply discounted, again because they come to you at the Center's own cost. Dr. Story summed it up to me

this way: "I want this [the Longest Student Health Center] to be the standard of care by which you judge all others in your lifetime."

**Full Services Available**

Besides the physicians and nurses, the Longest Student Health Center provides a medical lab for diagnostic tests, an X-ray facility, a complete pharmacy, and physical therapy. Most health problems that students come in with can be treated right here at the Student Health Center, but if you do need a specialist, there are two advantages to going through the Student Health Center: They have a wide network of trusted specialists; and they can get you seen a lot sooner than if you contacted a specialist yourself. I have used the Student Health Center's specialist referral services several times myself, and the people they referred me to have been wonderful.

**Make an Appointment**

To be seen at the Health Center, please be a grownup and call ahead to make an appointment. You may request a particular physician if you wish to, but honestly, you will be in good hands no matter whom you see. I have seen five different physicians over the years—when one is out, another backs that one up—and I have been quite pleased with all of them. If you drop in, you will be seen as soon as a physician is available, but it will save your time and help them organize their day if you call ahead and make a definite appointment. (And once you make it, *keep it*.) You can almost always be seen within 24 hours, and quite often the same day if you call early in the day. Naturally, emergencies are seen immediately.

**No Excuses or Malingering**

The Student Health Center does not evaluate your fitness to attend class and issue you an excuse for missing class if you are sick; class absences are between you and your professor. Professors will be reasonable about this, if you are honest with them and *promptly* provide documentation. The Student Health Center will issue you paperwork showing that you were seen there. To keep your professors on your side, do not schedule medical appointments during class times unless it is truly necessary. And for heaven's sake, don't go to the Student Health Center when you are not sick—this is called malingering—in order to use your unnecessary visit as an excuse for skipping class. The doctors and nurses are pros, and they will see right through you. Your doctor's time is worth about \$300 an hour, and if you are not sick, you are

wasting their time and keeping them from treating people who really are in need.

### **Fees and Insurance**

There is no charge for your doctor visits. They are already paid for by your student health fee, and this is a serious bargain. You *are* charged for lab tests, x-rays, and medications, but again those charges are discounted compared to what you would pay privately.

There is a complete insurance plan that would cover those other expenses, plus hospitalizations, etc. should they arise, available to students at a highly favorable rate, far superior to what university faculty and staff pay, and far superior to what you could get through the Affordable Care Act. There is a 30-day registration window at the beginning of each semester. Check this out on the Longest Student Health Center website, or call them for details. Whatever you do, *don't* go without insurance, either through this program or through your parents' insurance. A single, relatively routine medical event and recovery could literally bankrupt you, like the rattlesnake bite that cost \$153,000 by the time the patient left the hospital.

### **Get Your Shots**

A full range of vaccinations, allergy shots, tetanus shots, and flu shots are all available at the Health Center. If you had allergy treatments at home, these can be taken up by the Health Center; you don't have to go back home for them. If you are traveling abroad, contact the Travel Clinic at the Student Health Center *at least three months* prior to your departure. Various vaccinations are required, and they take time to take effect. The Health Center professionals know what shots are required for each country you are traveling to. And for heaven's sake, *get your flu shot every year*. Not only will you greatly reduce the risk of catching this miserable disease; but also I promise you that you won't have *time* to miss a week or two of classes if you get the flu. No way. If you are hesitant to get your flu shot because someone told you they got the shot and it gave them the flu, please know that this is a total myth. You cannot get flu from a flu shot. You may, however, catch the flu before the immunity from the shot takes hold, so get your shots when they are first offered. There will be locations all over campus.

### **Student Sexual Issues**

You can get birth control, pregnancy tests, and STD screenings at the Student Health Center. You won't get

preached at; you will simply receive factual information and sound medical advice. It may seem awkward to have this conversation, but trust me, the good folks at the Health Center have it with students just like you every day. Go to them. It is the consequences of *not* having the conversation that can be disastrous.

I am now going to give you the short version of The Infamous Dr. C. Sex Lecture. This is Dr. C. talking, not the Health Center, but they do not disagree with it.

### **Don't Get Pregnant**

Let's look at pregnancy—'cause I don't want *you* looking at a pregnancy. Lots of you want to have sex—okay, that's understandable—but precious few of you want to be involved with a pregnancy at this point in your life. For almost all of you, it would be a serious, costly, burdensome mistake. Surely you know you need to use birth control, but you probably don't know as much about birth control as you think you do. Nowadays (and how things change; this would have been unheard of when I was young) you have probably been told repeatedly, even beginning in elementary school, "Don't have sex, but you probably will, so when you do, USE CONDOMS." You have probably heard that advice so many times that you take it to heart and imagine that you are safe if you use condoms. *Wrong!*

### **Dumber Than a Condom**

Like every other form of birth control, condoms have two kinds of failure rates: the theoretical, or "perfect use" failure rate; and the real-world, or "typical use" failure rate. Think of it this way: The theoretical, mechanical failure rate of automobiles is very low; in this day and age of redundant design and built-in accident avoidance features, accidents due to mechanical malfunction or failure of the car are pretty rare; yet tens of thousands of people are killed in car accidents every year, and far more are seriously injured. This is because of user (driver) error. Nowadays, most people aren't as "smart" as their cars.

It's the same with condoms. I hate to tell you Scholars that you are dumber than a condom, but the sad fact is that, in a sense, you are. Failures (pregnancies) due to the failure of a properly preserved and used condom are rare. But it is not "theoretical" sex that people engage in. Real people engage in real sex and inevitably make occasional real-world mistakes in the process. The *actual use* failure rate of condoms or any other form of pregnancy prevention is defined as the percentage of fertile, sexually active couples who use

that (and only that) as their method of birth control for a year, yet fail to prevent pregnancy. In other words, after one year of actual, real-world use, how many of those 100 couples will be facing an unwanted pregnancy? For the traditional male condom, the answer is 18%. That ought to worry you. (My source is the textbook *Sexuality Today, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition*, by Gary Kelly. Research data not otherwise referenced in this chapter are from David Myers' textbook *Psychology*.)

If the failure rate is 18%, then the success rate (the rate of *avoiding* pregnancy) is 82%. Maybe you like those odds, especially in return for the promise of great sex. But it's not that simple. You have an 82% chance of making it through *one year* without a pregnancy. But if Joe and Susie become sexually active as freshmen, and they stay here for five years, their odds of getting their degrees before they face a pregnancy are not good at all. The odds of getting through freshman year are indeed 82%. But to *also* get through sophomore year, their odds are 82% *times* 82%. To also get through junior year, multiply again; senior year, again; and "bonus year," *again*. The odds of Joe and Susie getting through all five years without a pregnancy are  $.82 \times .82 \times .82 \times .82 \times .82 = 0.37$ , or only 37%. To put it another way, your odds of facing a pregnancy sometime during your five years here without only using condoms would be an astounding 63%.

### **Don't Get Gobsmailed Get Professional Advice**

This is why Susie will start having strange symptoms, go to the Health Center, and be absolutely dumbfounded (I rather like the British term "gobsmailed") when she is told she is pregnant. How can that be, when she and Joe did what they were taught all those years in school, and *used condoms*? Scholars, the numbers do not lie. This is why, if you are sexually active, *you need professional advice about birth control*. The Student Health Center will give you that advice, no questions asked, but all questions answered.

### **Sexually Transmitted Diseases**

I don't want most of this chapter to be about sex, 'cause that is not what the folks at the Student Health Center spend most of their time on when they are treating students; but I would be remiss if I did not at least mention STDs—sexually transmitted diseases. (Another term for these is STIs, or sexually transmitted infections.) There are dozens of them, a few of them deadly, but all of them capable of making you miserable and upending your life. Read the STD

chapter in the *Sexuality Today* book I referenced earlier. It will surely give you pause.

### **You're Not Alone**

You are not alone, and I mean this in a very creepy way. The key concept is that when you have sex with someone, you are taking your chances not just with that one person, but also with whatever microbes that person may have picked up from their previous partners, and whatever microbes those previous partners might have picked up from *their* previous partners . . . and so on. You can see where this is going, but you probably don't realize how fast you get there.

### **Numbers Increase Exponentially**

It would not be unusual for a sexually active college student to take on two new sex partners a year, on average. Over five years, that would be a total of 10 partners. But those are just the people you actually see; the number of people whose microbes you may have exposed yourself to is far, far higher. To keep the math easy, I am going to ask you to make two assumptions: that everybody starts having sex at the same time and has new partners at the same rate; and that one person's previous partners do not have sex with another person's previous partners. In the real world, neither of these assumptions would be true, but as I say, it keeps the math simple. The formula for the total number of people whose microbes you may have exposed yourself to would be  $(2^n) - 1$ , where  $n$  = your number of direct sex partners. Sadly, if you have 10 partners, 2 to the 10<sup>th</sup> power is 1,024. But hey, not to worry, you get to subtract 1 to complete the formula, so you have "only" exposed yourself to 1,023. Are *you* ready and willing to take your chances on over *a thousand* people, all but 10 of whom you have never even met? I really hope that you are not.

### **Abstinence Makes Sense**

Scholars, if you want to be safe, don't have sex! There is a lot to be said for saving yourself for that one, truly special, lifelong partner. And before some of you dismiss that approach out of hand, let me tell you this: Today, it is common for college (and even high school) students to be sexually active; when I was in college, most of us were not sexually active. Yet there is no difference in the average level of happiness between college students today and college students 50 years ago. Sex doesn't make you happy; it just makes you less horny.

### **Outercourse Is an Option**

If you just won't buy that, then there is something a lot riskier than abstinence, but a lot safer than intercourse. It is called "outercourse." You can have physical play with your partner, and even achieve the release of mutual physical climax, without exchanging bodily fluids. Get creative, and use your imagination. You'd be surprised how well this can go.

**Have the Conversation  
Head for the Exits  
You Owe Nobody**

If you are going to have sex, you must have a candid conversation with your partner beforehand, and assess the risk. Someone with a bunch of previous partners is a poor risk. I know this is a difficult and awkward conversation to have, but you must have it. No matter what the outcome of that conversation, insist that both of you get tested and screened for STDs before you have sex. They do this for couples all the time at the Student Health Center. If your partner is reluctant or unwilling to get tested, run! Why do you suppose they would be unwilling? The only probable answer: "There ain't good news comin'." If you are dumb enough to skip this step, at least "inspect the equipment." If you see *anything* suspicious, stop! Realize that plenty of people will lie to you if they think it will get them sex. If you don't really and truly want to have sex, and/or don't really enjoy it, *don't have it*. It's not worth the risks. Finally, you never, ever owe someone sex. I actually had one student explain to me why she had sex with a fellow when she really didn't want to: "But he bought me a hamburger."

**Alcohol Use and Abuse  
Poisonous, Depressive, Addictive**

Now, let's get back to the Student Health Center, and take up a new topic: alcohol. The beer companies would have you believe that if you are guzzling lots of beer, you must be having fun. They spend multi-millions of dollars every year trying to brainwash you into believing this. Alcohol is a poisonous, depressant drug that can become addictive and ruin your life. The alcohol in what you drink is kissing cousin to the alcohol they rub on your arm before they give you your flu shot, to kill anything that might be alive on your skin. What do you think alcohol does to your brain cells?

**Depressant Drug Blunder:  
Don't Do This!**

They say the road to hell is paved with good intentions. I have seen students screw up a friend bigtime, all the while thinking they were helping. Remember I said alcohol is a *depressant* drug. It may seem like a stimulant drug at first, because it weakens people's judgment and self-restraint, and they may act wild or crazy; but ultimately, alcohol is a depressant drug. Suppose a good friend is heartbroken and depressed over, say, the break-up of a romance. They are just sitting around all sad, ruminating, crying. You need to jolly them up! Get a up a bunch of friends, and go hit the bars and clubs. Get the depressed person's mind off their misery. They'll feel better. *Wrong, totally wrong!* If someone is depressed, the worst possible thing you can do is fill them up with a depressant drug. This never helps, and it may even end tragically. It has happened. Don't do it! And if you are alone and depressed, the worst thing you can do is drink. Please read the Counseling Center chapter instead.

**Act Your Age**

If you are under 21, this shouldn't even be an issue: Alcoholic beverages are illegal for you, unless you are 18 and have your parents with you—and I cannot imagine a more uncool date than that. Regardless of your age, alcohol cannot be possessed or consumed in a campus residence hall. Violate these rules, and you will quickly find yourself in trouble with the Dean of Students Office. (This is no joke; it happened to one of my own sons who didn't listen to me.)

**Driving Under the Influence  
Alcohol Impairs Judgment**

Alcohol impairs judgment and is associated with dramatically increased rates of serious automobile accidents and fatalities, violence, domestic violence, and sexual assault. Sure, you already know not to drink and drive, but guess what? In actual studies, virtually all drinkers who insisted, when they were sober, that they would *never* drive under the influence of alcohol, *did* so when deciding to drive home from a bar—even after being given breathalyzer tests and being told they were legally drunk. The alcohol that gets you drunk, simultaneously screws up the part of your brain that is responsible for good judgment. Avoiding this problem is simple: Keep *all* drinking *very moderate*. One alcohol-induced lapse in judgment, followed by one accident or assault, and you could rot in jail for the next 10-20 years. Seriously, this has happened.

**Special Peril for Freshmen:  
It Only Takes One**

In the state of Mississippi, anyone under 21 who is caught driving with a blood alcohol level of .02 or higher will be arrested for DUI. This level is achieved after *just one drink*. This is a far stricter standard than the .08 blood alcohol level for DUI among adults 21 or older. *Beware of this trap.*

### **You'll Pay and Pay**

Pick up a DUI, and you will pay and pay: the arrest; the jail time; the fine; the expensive legal fees; dramatically increased insurance rates; damage to your credit rating; and a criminal record for potential employers to find. And that's the best case scenario. Injure or kill someone, and your life is ruined.

### **Never Drink on a Date**

One study at the University of Illinois showed that prior to sexual assaults, 80% of men and 70% of women had been drinking. Susie, why do you think Joe's first move is to liquor you up? Not only does it loosen your judgment, but it loosens your assailant's judgment, too. Bottom line: *Never drink on a date!*

### **The Silent Majority**

One last note on alcohol: Research done right here at Mississippi State University showed that the average student *thinks* that most students drink far more than they actually do. We have been brainwashed by all those commercials put out by Big Beer. Most people *aren't* getting drunk, and it *isn't* considered cool by most people. The big drinkers make all the noise; but the silent majority regards alcohol with great caution.

### **The G.A.I.N. Program**

Our Health Education and Wellness people here on campus operate the G.A.I.N. program: the Goal-driven Alcohol/drug Intervention Network. They can give you a raft of practical information on alcohol use, and if you have fallen into an unhealthy drinking pattern, they are a great first step in extricating yourself from it before it is too late. They don't preach and moralize. What they do with you is based on actual research and best available practices nationwide.

### **The Collegiate Recovery Community**

There is also a Collegiate Recovery Community that is comprised of students who are recovering or have recovered from various serious issues. Participants find support in this community, help support fellow

students in it, and help educate other students. There are meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and Eating Disorders Anonymous, as well as other groups. Social support is extremely important in recovery, and the Collegiate Recovery Community facilitates this very effectively. For more information, go to the Student Health Center website, click on Health Education and Wellness, and then click on Collegiate Recovery Community.

### **Tobacco Cessation Programs**

Another valuable service of the Student Health Center is the tobacco cessation treatment programs they offer. Again, what they do with you is based on actual research that indicates the methods most likely to result in successful outcomes.

### **Tobacco Kills You**

Smoking is the single greatest *preventable* cause of death in America. Nicotine, the active ingredient in tobacco, is a viciously addictive stimulant drug that has its effect on the brain within moments—and yes, it actually alters your brain chemistry. If nicotine did not have centuries of tradition and billions of corporate dollars behind it, there is no way it would be a legal drug today, and if a new drug with the same properties appeared, it would never make it past the FDA into unregulated mass consumption. If you start smoking in your teens, which is when most users start, and continue the habit on through what remains of your life, *you have a 50% chance of dying from your nicotine habit*. Read that again. Not a 50% chance of getting sick from it; a 50% of chance of *dying* from it. On average, it robs you of *at least ten years* of what would have been your life. Trust me: Someday, those ten years will be extremely important to you.

### **Tobacco Is Addictive Get Professional Help**

Three-quarters of smokers wish they could stop; but in any given year, only one smoker in seven who tries to stop smoking succeeds in doing so. The task is so difficult (because of the highly addictive nature of the drug nicotine) that you really should *get professional help* to up the odds of successfully quitting tobacco and its nicotine. Naturally, the Student Health Center provides the best in tobacco cessation programs.

### **Smoke-Free Campus Stupid and Disgusting**

Mississippi State University now prides itself on being a Smoke-Free Campus. Use of *any* tobacco product is banned in any University building, facility or vehicle (such as our shuttle buses). You may *not* smoke, even outside, anywhere on campus<sup>1</sup>. If you are addicted and/or desperate, you can hole up in your own, private vehicle and use tobacco products there, but if your need is *that* bad, you really need to kick the tobacco habit. It gains you nothing, and you lose more than just your health and money. I remember a bumper sticker that said “Kissing a Smoker Is Like Licking an Ash Tray.” Unfortunately, that is dead-on true. And you don’t look cool with a cigarette hanging out of your face; you look stupid. Wise up, Scholars. If you aren’t smoking, don’t start; and if you are smoking, let the Student Health Center help you stop.

### **Diet and Health: Your Personal Dietician**

Another service of the Longest Student Health Center is nutrition and diet advice. They have a professional nutritionist on their staff. Have you ever heard the phrase “You are what you eat?” There is much truth to this. If you eat junk food, you may start feeling like junk, and you may start looking like junk, too. An intelligent, balanced, wholesome diet aids health, raises spirits, fights disease, and fights depression. It’s not that hard to learn to eat right, and for you (but not for me or any nonstudent), this valuable professional advice is already paid for through your student health fees. Take advantage of this opportunity to be coached by your own certified dietician.

### **Vanity Versus Health**

Dieting is another concern for many of you, especially women. I cannot count how many times students, usually female, have told me they need to lose weight, and they want me to tell them how to do it. My first question always is, has a *physician* told you that you need to lose weight? Most diets are embarked on for vanity (concern for your looks) rather than medical need. It is a fact that most of the weight in your jeans, is in your genes. (Sorry, I couldn’t resist.) In other words, your genetic endowment determines most of whether you are slender or stocky. Most of you will never look like fashion models, and most of you should never try to. If I may be grandfatherly for a moment, most of you are beautiful the way you were made.

### **Obesity Shortens Life**

Some of you, however, really are clinically overweight to the extent that your excessive weight can and will harm your health if not intelligently remedied. The prevalence of obesity nationwide is accelerating, and it is associated with dangerously increased risk of diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, stroke, depression, and just about every unhappy medical and emotional outcome you can name.

### **Most Diets Fail**

That alone is bad news. But here is worse news: Most diets have the long-term effect of leaving you *heavier* than if you had never dieted at all. You may see short-term gains (well, losses, actually), although the effect is likely to be less than you’d hoped; but within a year or two, the likeliest outcome is that you will have regained all the weight you lost, *and more*. There are complex physiological reasons for this; for right now, you just need to know the fact of the matter.

### **Get Professional Help**

Unsupervised dieting is about as stupid as treating your own cancer. *If you need to lose weight, you need professional help to do it.* Don’t go to the book store or the internet in search of the latest “miracle” diet. *Go to the Student Health Center.* Between your Health Center physician, dietitian, and health and wellness educator, you can put together and monitor a weight loss plan that will actually work. This is a complex task. If you are going to do this thing, you must do it right. The Student Health Center has helped many, many students before you, and they can help you, too.

### **Dieting Run Amok: Dangerous Eating Disorders**

Occasionally, the desire for thinness runs amok. This is where eating disorders come into play. People may starve themselves down to walking skeletons (anorexia), binge—have bouts of overeating—and purge (bulimia) through vomiting and/or laxatives, or go on repeated binges of overeating followed by emotional remorse but no change in behavior (binge eating disorder). They see themselves as fat even though many of them are already absurdly thin, and they become obsessed with their weight and/or losing more weight. They also may exercise excessively and compulsively in order to lose more weight. In the early stages, well meaning friends may actually encourage them. (“Oh, you look great.”) In the late stages, people with these disorders may not listen to friends, family, or anyone else. Eating disorders are dangerous and even fatal. They *must* be treated. If this is you, get help.

If this is someone you know, then get them to help. Eating disorders are very serious.

### **Laughter the Best Medicine? Exercise the Best Free Medicine**

Have you ever heard the phrase, “Laughter is the best medicine?” It is certainly true that positive emotional states are correlated with good health. (See the Counseling Center chapter for practical paths to happiness.) However, Dr. Story pointed out—and remember, he has been practicing medicine for many years—that one of the best, most powerful “medicines” of all is not actually a medicine: exercise. All his staff were quick to agree. A regular program of appropriate, vigorous, physical exercise is highly beneficial for you, and it costs nothing. (You *do* know about the Sanderson Center, right?) There are a great many ways to go about exercising, and the folks at the Longest Student Health Center will be more than happy to point you toward some good ones.

### **Health Education Volunteers**

One of the cool things I learned when I talked to the Student Health Center staff is that if you are planning on a career in a healthcare-related field, or if you simply find these topics interesting and exciting and would like to help fellow students, you may be able to become a Health Education and Wellness student volunteer. Volunteers help provide information to classes, student groups and organizations, etc. If you would like to be considered for this, just go to the main Longest Student Health Center website, click on Health Education and Wellness, and then click on Become a Volunteer.

### **Treatment, Prevention, Education**

In closing, let me emphasize what makes the Longest Student Health Center such a uniquely valuable resource. Not only is it an excellent medical clinic; it also engages in extensive outreach, education, and prevention programs. The best disease to “have” is the one you never get! The Student Health Center is where to go if you get sick; but it is also by far the most prominent and powerful resource available in this area for keeping you healthy and well in the first place.

This is the ultimate realization of the vision of Dr. John C. Longest himself, the legendary physician who came to Mississippi State in 1948 and in whose honor the Center was named when he retired 40 years later. It took two decades of hard work and persuasion, but in 1965 came the construction of the new facility we

have today, Dr. Longest shepherded us from simply having a campus infirmary to having something much more. With decades of further development and the leadership of his successors, Dr. Robert Collins and recently Dr. Cliff Story, we now enjoy a modern, high tech, comprehensive Student Health Center that all of us can not only use, but be proud of.

### **REVIEW**

**A Comprehensive Health Center**

**Time for Individual Attention**

**Full Services Available**

**Make An Appointment**

**No Excuses or Malingering**

**Fees and Insurance**

**Get Your Shots**

**Student Sexual Issues**

**Don't Get Pregnant**

**Dumber Than a Condom**

**Don't Get Gobsmailed**

**Get Professional Advice**

**Sexually Transmitted Diseases**

**You're Not Alone**

**Numbers Increase Exponentially**

**Abstinence Makes Sense**

**Outercourse Is an Option**

**Have The Conversation**

**Head For the Exits**

**You Owe Nobody**

**Alcohol Use and Abuse**

**Poisonous, Depressive, and Addictive**

**Depressant Drug Blunder:**

**Don't Do This**

**Act Your Age**

**Driving Under the Influence**

**Special Peril for Freshmen**

**It Only Takes One**

**You'll Pay and Pay**

**Never Drink on a Date**

**The Silent Majority**  
**The G.A.I.N. Program**  
**The Collegiate Recovery Community**  
**Tobacco Cessation Programs**  
**Tobacco Is Addictive**  
**Get Professional Help**  
**Smoke-Free Campus**  
**Stupid and Disgusting**  
**Diet And Health**  
**Your Personal Dietician**  
**Vanity Versus Health**  
**Obesity Shortens Life**  
**Most Diets Fail**  
**Get Professional Help**  
**Dieting Run Amok**  
**Dangerous Eating Disorders**  
**Laughter the Best Medicine?**  
**Best Free Medicine**  
**Health Education Volunteers**  
**Treatment, Prevention, Education**

\* \* \*

#### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup>This includes “electronic” cigarettes (“e-cigarettes”) and all forms of “vaping.” Misleadingly marketed as safe or safer alternatives to smoking, these devices lack a long-term body of convincing scientific evidence of safety to fall back on, and the United States Food and Drug Administration, the United States Surgeon General, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Harvard University Medical School, and the famed Mayo Clinic *all* recommend *against* using these products. Some are shaped to resemble real cigarettes; others, like the widely popular JUULs, look like little flash drives and are easily concealed. A single hit of JUULs may contain as much nicotine as an *entire pack* of regular cigarettes. (Do you find it interesting that “JUUL” rhymes with “fool”?)

An ironic twist is that electronic cigarettes can turn out to be “gateway” drugs leading to use of

conventional cigarettes. The powerful nicotine punch in vaping can get you swiftly addicted, but electronic cigarettes are relatively expensive, so once addicted, some users turn to conventional cigarettes, which the Harvard University Medical School Health Report correctly describes as “perhaps the only consumer product that kills [its own users] when used as directed,” killing almost *half a million Americans every year*, which is more people than are killed by motor vehicle accidents, firearms, HIV (AIDS), heroin, methamphetamines, cocaine, and alcohol *combined*.

While e-cigarettes do eliminate *some* of the harmful substances delivered to the lungs by conventional cigarettes, they introduce *new* dangerous toxins of their own, and there may be other unidentified ingredients added. Also, like conventional cigarettes, e-cigarettes introduce vaporized formaldehyde into the lungs. Formaldehyde is what the fetal pig was pickled in that I had to dissect for week after week in 8<sup>th</sup> grade biology. (I swear, I can still remember that awful smell!) Scholars, why on earth would you want to pickle your own lungs in this stuff? Please, if you are smart enough to be at Mississippi State, don’t be an idiot, and don’t mess with nicotine in *any* form. And if you go around vaping, you’ll *look* like an idiot, too.

## Chapter 9: DIVERSITY AT MISSISSIPPI STATE

Over my 44 years at Mississippi State, I have seen dramatic and welcome changes in the diversity of this campus. In 1973, the idea of accommodating students with disabilities was in its infancy. Even the most basic curb cuts and access ramps were few and far between. Far too many of these wonderful, interesting students gave up in frustration and went home.

As you have already read, Mississippi State University had been successfully integrated eight years before, but we were still in the process of ramping up our number of black students, and the town of Starkville was lagging quite a bit behind in its attitudes. My deceased wife Julia and I were astonished at how friendly and hospitable everyone we met in town was—it was absolutely remarkable. Yet the self-evident racism in this seemingly lovely little town was quite a shock.

The first time our children got sick, Julia took them to one of the local doctors. They had *segregated* waiting rooms—in 1973! Julia settled into the black waiting room. The office staff went into a tizzy, not knowing what to do. They kept coming up to her and saying “We know you would be much more *comfortable* in this *other* waiting room, over *here*.” She didn’t take the hint. “Oh, don’t worry,” she’d say, “I’m very comfortable right here. The children and I are doing fine.” This replayed several times. The office folks couldn’t figure out if Julia was clueless, or if she was defying them. I’ll give you a hint, Scholars: She wasn’t clueless; she had seen the signs, and she knew exactly what she was doing.

Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual students existed, of course, in 1973, but most of them were hidden so far underground that most people didn’t even know they were there.

I loved Mississippi State 45 years ago, Scholars, but today our University is immensely better and stronger because of the diversity we have achieved, and I love it more, now.

### **Diversity Is Inevitable and Diversity Is Good**

Scholars, diversity is everywhere, and diversity is inevitable. Every demographic plot shows diversity increasing sharply in this country over the next few decades. Fortunately, diversity is a very good thing: It enriches all our lives. Consider this: You have already read about our athletic traditions and history. Would

you really want *every* team in the SEC to be maroon and white and ring cowbells? Of course not! The many different traditions of its member schools enrich the entire Conference. You have already read about the history and traditions of The People’s University. Would you really want to turn back the clock to when Mississippi State had no black scholars and precious few women? No way!

### **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Not many people hate people with disabilities; but it is much too easy to be oblivious to their challenges. I am very happy to say that for years Mississippi State University has been a leader nationwide in accommodating and serving students with physical and/or cognitive disabilities. We have an outstanding office of Student Support Services, headed by Ms. Julie Capella, who has devoted her entire career to this service. They are located on the ground floor of Montgomery Hall. They evaluate the needs of students with disabilities and make sure these students receive all necessary accommodations.

### **Americans with Disabilities Act**

Because of the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990, you have a *right* to any reasonable accommodations you may need at this or any other university. That landmark legislation was modeled after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and was designed to protect persons with disabilities from any potential discrimination or second-class treatment because of their disabilities.

### **Student Support Services**

Students with disabilities who need extra time or special conditions (like a reader, or a minimum of distractions) for taking their tests can take them at Student Support Services instead of in their regular classrooms. It works great—I send tests over there all the time for scholars who would be at a disadvantage if they took their tests in a regular classroom. It’s not that these students get easier tests—they just get a fair shot at acing them, same as you.

If you think you may have any special needs, talk to the folks at Student Support Services *now*, and they will get you started on the necessary certification process. I say “now” because the process takes some time, and we want you taken care of right from the start. The folks at Student Support Services are definitely there to help! In fact, my “adopted” daughter Marla works there, and I know how much she loves

you Scholars. Student Support Services also provides special support to first-generation and low-income college students, two groups that may have an especially rough time of it when they first hit university.

### **The T. K. Martin Center**

Another amazing resource on our campus is the T. K. Martin Center for Technology and Disability. The Center has a highly trained team of rehabilitation and biomedical engineers, occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, and special educators to do everything from building assistive mobility devices and modifying vehicles, to providing special computer hardware and software cleverly designed to bypass certain disabilities, to providing occupational and rehabilitation therapy to persons who need it. Their reach extends into the community as a whole as well as the University. The T. K. Martin Center is located on Hardy Road, next to the Longest Student Health Center, and what they do is quite impressive.

### **Don't Hesitate to Help**

One of the most frequent questions people have about folks with disabilities is whether they should offer help, or if doing this would seem condescending and be unwelcome. The answer to this question is simple: If it looks as if people need help, they probably do! If they are looking confused, they probably are. There is *nothing wrong* with approaching disabled people in a cheerful, natural manner and asking if you could help them in some way. If there is a way you could help, they will be happy to tell you, and they will be relieved that you asked. If there isn't, they are not going to be offended, and they will most likely appreciate your concern. Rarely, you may get a grouchy or sarcastic response, but that is true of *anyone*, not just disabled people. So please, don't hesitate to offer help.

### **Watch Your Language**

One thing you should avoid, however, is calling students with disabilities "handicapped." I learned from Ms. Capella that the term "handicapped" harks back to when people with disabilities literally had to beg for a living, by holding out their hands with a cap or hat for people to put money into. That is degrading, and it is no wonder that many disabled students do not like that term. Some don't even like the term "disability," and prefer to talk about "challenges;" to others, that may seem a little too pat and trendy. You usually do not have to use either term when

interacting with these people, but you can be alert to how *they* describe themselves, and go from there.

### **Don't Pet the Dog**

One last detail: We don't often have them on campus, but if you see someone with a "seeing eye" dog that is trained to assist and guide blind people, *don't pet the dog!* That dog is *working*, even when it is sitting still, and your attempts to pet it are a confusing and inappropriate distraction. The odd thing is, when you see one, you naturally want to pet it, as a sign of friendliness. But that would be like one of my scholars coming up in the middle of my lecture and hugging me—sweet thought, but don't do it!

### **They're Like You**

What students with disabilities most wish that the rest of us would realize is that except for their disabilities, they are like us. They are here at Mississippi State for the same reason you are: to get a great education and to have wonderful experiences during their years here. They have some classes that are great and some that are not, same as you. They worry about tests and papers, same as you. (They may have to work a lot longer and harder at them, though.) They have ups and downs in their love lives, same as you. They enjoy having friends, same as you. They have good days and bad days, same as you. They wish they didn't have their disabilities, but they adapt and deal with them, and in the vast majority of cases, their emotional happiness and satisfaction in life are the same as yours. Except for their disabilities, *they're like you*.

### **STEREOTYPES**

Before talking about racial diversity and sexual orientation, we need to talk briefly about stereotypes. There aren't that many stereotypes about people with disabilities, and they aren't especially derogatory, but when we get to race and sexual orientation, the stereotyping gets much worse.

### **Stereotypes Are Stupid**

Stereotypes are beliefs we have about people based upon their group membership or some category they fall under. For instance: dumb jocks; absent-minded professors; donut-scarfing cops. The list is endless. People's capacity to stereotype amazes me. Back in graduate school, I had a friend who was Jewish. If he mentioned that fact, people would immediately say "So, you're from New York." No, he was from Maine. There are temples in Maine, too, Scholars.

My third year here, I had to drop my car off at a local tire store. My graduate assistant kindly volunteered to follow me down there and bring me back to the office. The guy at the tire store was about half a century old and had an odd habit of rolling his false teeth around in his mouth. When my assistant Richard pulled up to get me, the fellow said "What do you want, Son?" "I'm just here to give him a ride," he said, gesturing to me. "You talk funny," the man said. "Where are you from?" "Manitoba, Canada," Richard replied. "Oh, a lumberjack!" the fellow said, with a confidence born of certainty. Richard looked him in the eye with a perfectly straight face and replied with a pleasant smile, "Oh yes, Sir, clever of you to guess that!" "Was obvious," the man grunted. He seriously believed it. Richard and I laughed all the way back to campus.

But that is the point: *All* stereotypes are laughable. The problem is, many of them really hurt people. Stereotypes aren't funny: Stereotypes are stupid.

### **It's Still a Stereotype**

Perhaps the most insidious problem with stereotypes is that even educated people believe that if there is a certain amount of truth to them, they aren't stereotypes. *Not so!* Unless a characterization applies to *everyone* in a group, it is still a stereotype. New York does have a higher percentage of Jewish residents than you would find in many other places in this country, but most people in New York are *not* Jewish, and most people who are Jewish do *not* live in New York. Yes, there is a lot of logging in Canada, and they probably have more lumberjacks per capita than we do; but 99.9% of the people in Canada are *not* lumberjacks.

## **RACIAL DIVERSITY**

### **Denial, Privilege, and Fear**

I could tell you stories of malicious, murderous racism that occurred not long before I got here, and those stories would make your hair stand on end. But I know what you're thinking: "Enough stories, Dr. C.! That is ancient history. My parents were in kindergarten then, and I would not be born for another 20 years. Racism is over. Our generation is way past all that. "

Wrong, Scholars. We do have a racially harmonious campus, and we should be very proud of that. But if you think racism is over and done with, you must not know many black people very well. When I asked my "adopted" daughter Marla, who is black, about racism, it was like opening the floodgates.

There are advantages to being white that you probably never think of. I commend to your attention a landmark article by Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege." To give you just one relatively innocent example, if I walk into class late, people figure "Oh, Dr. C., the absent-minded professor." But if someone black comes in late, people think "Black people again—always late; they don't do time the way we do." So *I'm* late because I'm me, but that *other* person is late because he or she is black. That's ridiculous, and it stinks. And that is just the tip of the iceberg. I can shop in a store without people following me around to be sure I'm not about to steal anything. If I walk toward a car, nobody locks their car doors, and if I am walking in a white neighborhood at night, nobody calls the police. I can drive a nice car and not get stopped because someone thinks that I either stole it or am a drug dealer. It is a much different story for black people, Scholars: They get no such privilege.

The more white people deny racism exists, the more frustrated and angry black people become. Yes, blacks can engage in racism, too, but that certainly does not make it right.

It might shock you to know that many black people fear for their lives and the lives of their children on a daily basis. Not long ago, I got stopped by a policeman here in Starkville. A traffic light was green, but I crossed the intersection from the left turn lane, because I wanted to avoid a bumpy section of the street. I wasn't too smart to do this right in front of the police station! A police car came out to stop me, but I didn't notice. He turned on his blue lights, but I still didn't notice. I was deep in thought (mentally planning another chapter of this *Insider's Guide*, actually), and he followed me for at least six blocks with his blue lights flashing before I finally noticed him. Once I did notice, I stopped immediately. He was very nice about it. He just told me what I had done, and didn't even give me a ticket. I'm sure I looked pretty harmless.

But what if I had been young and black instead of old and white? Within six blocks, would there have been three patrol cars surrounding me, with police jumping out of them with guns drawn? Would the slightest miscue on my part have gotten me shot? If you think those are ridiculous questions, then consider a recent incident up north where a black motorist was stopped for not wearing a seat belt. When the man stepped out of his car to see what was wrong, the police officer demanded his license. The man reached into his car to get it. The policeman, thinking he was reaching for a

gun, shot him. The man was unarmed. Fortunately, he survived.

In short, if the majority thinks there is not a problem, but the minority thinks there is—then there *is* a problem.

### Explicit and Implicit Prejudice

Blatant racial prejudice is, thankfully, very much on the decline. *Explicit prejudice* is prejudice you may not even want, but at least you know you have it. Most of you will swear that you are not racially prejudiced, and most of you sincerely believe it. But I challenge you to go to <http://implicit.harvard.edu> and take some of their tests of racial prejudice. The results will probably shock you. It has been scientifically demonstrated that besides the explicit prejudice we are consciously aware of, there is also what we call *implicit prejudice*, prejudice we are *not* consciously aware of, but prejudice that influences our perceptions and decisions nonetheless.

### Effects of Affirmative Action

I have noticed that when it comes to black and white, people in the white majority tend to focus on the *process*: If the process (for university admissions, job hiring, whatever) seems fair, then they are comfortable with the result. But people in the black minority tend to focus on the *result*: If the result seems unfair, then nothing can convince them that the process was fair, and they have no faith in it.

As a psychology professor, I can tell you that we are often influenced by factors we are unaware of and/or cannot control. The process that seems fair to the extent that we examine it, may still be unfair due to factors we are unaware of and/or have yet to discover.

This takes us into the area of Affirmative Action. When it comes to race, I get more questions and objections from students about affirmative action than on any other topic. Why should minorities get special consideration for scholarships, jobs, etc.? Slavery is long gone, segregation went out generations ago, and integration is a fact; so what could be more equal than letting the chips fall where they may?

The problem, once again, is the result. When I first got here, the MSU Psychology Department was 100% male, and 0% black. What message did that send to our majors, a majority of whom were female and many of whom were black? All the white male professors were excellent, well qualified people; but it was high

time we made a conscious effort to get a faculty that was a better representation of our students, our state, and the general population of the United States.

A problem with affirmative action is that it leads to a large number of people feeling unfairly bypassed in favor of people less qualified. Everyone seems to have some story like their Uncle Jack who worked for the Fire Department for umpteen years, got a great score on the promotional exam, but lost out to a minority candidate with less experience and a lower exam score. Yes, sometimes that happens. But *everyone* in the majority tends to think that they lost out because of affirmative action, when in fact all but *one* of them would have lost out *anyway*.

Let's start with a simple example. Suppose a parking lot on campus typically fills up by 8:15 in the morning. Suppose some idiot parks so badly that their car takes up two spaces instead of one. Everything is fine until 8:14. But then there are no more spaces. Maybe *fifty more* people will drive into that lot before 9:00 a.m., hoping to score a parking place. And *all fifty* will believe that if it hadn't been for that *one* idiot, they would have had a place to park. But forty-nine of them wouldn't have had a place, anyway! Without the idiot, the lot would have been full at 8:15, same as always, and the next forty-nine cars would have been out of luck—disappointed, maybe, but not mad at anyone, and not thinking they were robbed of a parking place.

Now, if you understand that example, let's look at affirmative action. This is a fictional example, but suppose Harvard University were to create a highly desirable program for prospective medical students: Harvard will pay all their college expenses at any school they choose, and after they graduate, they will be *guaranteed* admission to Harvard Medical School. Now that would be a sweet deal!

Suppose Harvard has 12 places in this program, and suppose Harvard decides that at least 2 of those places must be filled by minority candidates, even if nonminority candidates score higher on the admissions test. Suppose that 1200 students apply, and 100 of them are minority students. If all 12 top scorers out of the 1200 applicants are majority candidates, but Harvard rejects 2 of those 12 in order to admit 2 minority students, how much will that change the chances for each majority candidate to be admitted? The answer may surprise you.

There are various ways to figure it, but this is the simplest: Without affirmative action, there are 12 places and 1200 applicants; since only 1% will be

admitted, the odds are 99% that any particular candidate will *not* be admitted. With affirmative action, we have 100 minority candidates competing for 2 places. That leaves 1100 majority candidates competing for the remaining 10 places. Now the odds of success for each majority candidate are .09% (instead of 1%), and the odds of losing out are 99.1% instead of 99%. That difference of 0.1% is one chance in a thousand! Is the majority's giving up *one chance in a thousand* a reasonable price to pay for the program achieving a diversity representative of the country as a whole, and compensating for any unknown factors that may be working against the minority?

Yes, Scholars, it is very much worth it, and it does not cost you much at all if you are in the majority. Mississippi State is *all* The People's University, not *some of* The People's University. *All* of the people of Mississippi support us with their taxes, and the University we create should represent *all* of them.

### **Would You Trade?**

Scholars, for the rather modest advantages minorities sometimes receive via affirmative action, would you really want to trade places with them and endure a lifetime of stress and painful, often hateful discriminatory attitudes? No way! You would be crazy to say yes. No black person would.

### **It Only Takes a Few**

Bear in mind that prejudice and discrimination do not have to be *frequent* in order to have a large negative impact. If you are in my class and just four times (less than 10% of the time) during the semester I make a point of insulting and embarrassing and humiliating you, you will almost surely hate me and hate my class. (I do *not*, of course, do this.) If just 10% of the 330 other students in my class treat you with meanness and disrespect, you will feel terrible. Walk a mile in the shoes of a black person, so to speak, and you will experience this kind of thing far too often, even if 90% of the people you encounter treat you decently.

### **They're Like You**

In race as in disability, *they're like you*. Yes, there are some cultural differences. If for many years you exclude one race from the majority culture, it is not surprising that they will start to form their own culture that is significantly different from the one that excluded them. And if for years the minority is treated less well than the majority, it is not surprising that the minority will develop anger and distrust.

Nor is it surprising that the majority will tend to ignore or deny a situation that does not impact themselves adversely. But it would certainly help things if the majority would realize that the minority is not so very different, and that the majority and the minority share the same values and goals.

As my adopted daughter Marla told me, "Racism is not our only conversation." Black people are distracted and distressed by racism, but they do not build their lives around it. They, too, are trying to live the American Dream, and most of them work a whole lot harder at it than many people imagine.

Just like most of their white counterparts, most black scholars are not lazy, are not criminals, are not on welfare, and do not want to be. They take responsibility for their own actions, and when they do make mistakes, they do not blame white people for them. I have often had both black scholars and white scholars tell me they blew a test because they didn't study hard enough; but I have never had any black scholars tell me they blew a test because they weren't white enough.

My black scholars are intelligent, just like my white scholars; they would not be at Mississippi State University if this were not so. In fact, the only Rhodes Scholar in MSU history, Field Brown, is black, and the Rhodes is the highest, most sought-after intercollegiate academic honor in the world.

Black people do not want to be white people, but most black people feel that most white people do not understand their situation and never will. That last part saddens me greatly. Black people crave fairness, equality, and opportunity, yet they are painfully aware that this may not happen in their lifetime. Again, that saddens me.

Black scholars at Mississippi State University have the same dreams and drives and determination as white scholars. They come here for the same reasons all of you do: to get a great education, to experience a wonderful time in their lives, and to go on to a great job and a great career. Naturally, it is the dream and the goal of your teachers and of the University that this should happen for *all* of you.

### **SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

Of the three topics in this Diversity chapter, sexual orientation is probably the touchiest. No one asserts that disabled people will go to Hell. No one asserts that

people will burn in Hell for being black. Yet significant numbers of people assert that people who are gay (male homosexual, although this term is often used to refer to all homosexuals), lesbian (female homosexual), bisexual (enjoy both genders), or transgendered (have medically undergone a physical change of gender) are doomed to perish and dwell in perdition for eternity. Mercy!

### **The Facts On Frequency**

Sexual orientation tends to be a topic that generates a lot more heat than light, and people on both sides of the issue often stretch and politicize the “facts.” If you are interested, what I consider to be the most intelligent discussion and summary of what we know about sex and sexual orientation can be found in one chapter of an outstanding and easily read book by Martin Seligman, *What You Can Change and What You Can't*. (This book also covers what currently is and is not possible to change in areas like depression, anxiety, alcoholism, obesity, PTSD, etc.)

Meanwhile, let's look at some facts right now. Dr. David Myers, who writes the most widely used general psychology textbook in the country, *Psychology*, summarizes a number of studies showing that on average, about 3% of men and about half that number of women are exclusively homosexual. Less than 1% are actively bisexual, and only a much tinier proportion of the population is transgendered.

### **Not a Disorder or Illness**

Neither the American Psychological Association nor the American Psychiatric Association considers homosexuality or bisexuality to be a disorder, nor is it among the disorders listed in the widely used and carefully researched Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition (often referred to as the DSM V or DSM5). Homosexuality has not been considered a medical or psychological disorder for decades.

### **A Biological Imperative Not a Psychological Choice**

The best *scientific* evidence to date is that homosexuality is a result of a combination of genetics and prenatal hormonal exposure in the uterus. There is no reliable scientific evidence that it is the result of any particular set of psychological, family, or social conditions. To put it another way, there is no convincing evidence that sexual orientation is a *choice*; one does not *decide* to be homosexual or heterosexual. The choice that homosexuals do have is the same one

that heterosexuals have: They can choose to act on their built-in desires, or they can choose to refrain from physically acting on their desires. The desires themselves, however, are not a choice.

### **Not “Treatable” or “Curable”**

There is no persuasive evidence that homosexuality can be “treated” or “cured.” This may be a moot point, because, as already stated, it is not considered by medical or psychological experts to be a disorder in the first place. Be that as it may, typically the desire is not subject to change, even if an individual wants, even fervently wants, to change it.

### **Consider the Dilemma**

Consider the dilemma you would face if *you* found yourself in the place of someone in a sexual minority. What if you felt an increasingly strong and certain realization that you were not like most people, that you were not attracted to the opposite sex but instead were attracted to the same sex. You would feel burdened with a terrible secret. If you let people know, you might be hated, denounced, harassed, and/or fired. Worst case, you might be physically attacked or even murdered. If you let your family know, they might disown you. You would be urged by one person after another to settle down with a person of the gender you *aren't* attracted to. To imagine how that would feel, pretend that the majority was homosexual, and heterosexuals were a persecuted minority: If you were a man, you would be urged to quit your disgusting, dangerous attraction to women, and instead find a good man and to settle down with. No way would that fly!

You would be torn between intense desire and intense guilt. You would see yourself stereotyped and ridiculed in the media and by friends who did not know your secret, and you would hear yourself denounced and promised the fires of Hell if you tried to go to church and practice your faith. Mercy, for having to deal with all this, my GLBT scholars should get extra gold stars just for keeping their sanity!

### **A Religious Problem**

If having a minority sexual orientation is not a medical problem and is not a psychological problem, what *is* it? Basically, it is a religious problem: Most of the predominant religions in this country condemn homosexuality, based on their current interpretation of ancient holy texts. You should be aware, however, that the same texts were once interpreted as justifying

slavery, and you should also be aware that there are serious theologians who do *not* interpret the same holy texts as condemning homosexuality. I am told by Christian authorities that as quoted in the Gospels of the New Testament, Jesus Christ is mute on the subject of homosexuality, not even mentioning it. Thus any Christian conclusion on this topic is dependent on what others say, elsewhere in the Bible.

Again, this may be theologically naïve, but I have seen many heterosexual scholars who I know are engaged in heterosexual affairs, lash out vehemently and condemn scholars who engage in homosexual activity. Aren't *both* of those considered sins in the Bible?

While such questions may be of interest to the faithful, legally they are a moot point. In this country, no religious authority dictates our legal system. You might wish it to be otherwise, but consider the ramifications of that: If we were to draw our laws from religion, whose religion would we use? I hope you would all be prepared to join the Roman Catholic Church, because that is the denomination with the highest number of followers in this country.

Wait, Scholars, you don't want the Catholic Church determining our legal system? Well good, 'cause neither do I, even though I am Catholic. Freedom of religion, and freedom from control by any particular religion, are core values that are built straight into our Constitution.

Please do not take these statements as being against religion. You will learn in another chapter that religious or spiritual faith is one of the factors found to be associated with deep and lasting happiness. And you have every right to have your religious faith inform your views and votes on key issues in our democracy. You just can't impose your religious beliefs on others, including people with minority sexual orientations, when imposing those beliefs would violate rights guaranteed them by the United States Constitution.

More fundamentally, you might want to ask why you would want to control other people's sex lives in the first place, other than crimes like sexual assault or child molestation. Personally, the only people whose sex lives I am interested in are people who are proposing to have sex with me—and trust me, that is a very small number in this lifetime. I think all of us have much more pressing issues than worrying about *other* people's sex lives.

### **LGBTQ: If This Is You,**

### **You're Not Alone**

Scholars, if you are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or questioning your sexual orientation or identity, you may be in a statistical minority, but you are certainly not alone. There is an active student organization on campus you can check out, the LGBTQ+Union. They have a website at <https://orgsync.com/123582/chapter>. They (like MSU) are built around values of diversity and inclusion, and anyone is welcome. If you find yourself struggling with or anxious about your sexual orientation, identity, or behavior, the MSU Counseling Center (see the Student Counseling Services chapter) has several staff members who list this as one of their specialties. This does *not* mean that you are "sick" for having a different sexual orientation. The Counseling Center also helps a great many heterosexuals who seek guidance about *their* sexual issues and decisions. Just remember: You are not alone.

### **A Note To Parents**

If you learn that one of your children is homosexual or bisexual, this may come as a distressing shock to you. But please consider how difficult it was for your child to tell you this, and how much they need your support. Whatever you do, do not reject your child, and do not destroy your relationship with that child. I have seen this happen to some of my GLBT scholars, and it is painful to watch. Parental rejection is deeply and terribly hurtful, and I promise you that someday you will regret it—but by then it will be too late to undo the damage. Also, please do not think that your child is that way because of anything you did or did not do in raising that child. I can tell you as a professional that this is *not* where sexual orientations come from.

### **Myths about Sexual Orientation**

There are additional myths about sexual orientation. You can't pray homosexuality away; it is not there because you have not prayed hard enough or believed deeply enough, any more than you could pray away being right-handed or left-handed. You can't "catch" gayness, nor can you "recruit" gayness. (Think: Could *you* be talked out of *your* sexual orientation?) You have nothing to fear from homosexual teachers, scout leaders, or parents.

AIDS is not a "gay disease." It is an epidemiological accident that it first arose in this country among gay populations; worldwide, the majority of AIDS victims are heterosexual. Except for the marriage of two virgins—a good idea, in my opinion, but not very

frequent anymore—*anyone* who is sexually active must be very cautious, not only for AIDS but for a wide and grisly variety of sexually transmitted infections.

If you are heterosexual and you come across someone of your gender who is homosexual, it doesn't mean that they want to have sex with you—in fact, they very probably don't. Do *you* want to have sex with *everyone* you meet of your preferred gender? And would *you* want to have sex with someone who thinks your sexual orientation is disgusting? I didn't think so! There is no reason not to work next to someone of your gender who has a homosexual orientation.

### **Join the Twenty-First Century**

Scholars, if you aren't on board already, it is time to join the twenty-first century. A *conservative* Supreme Court of the United States has ruled *in favor* of gay marriage. Legally, the Supreme Court is the highest authority, and they have spoken. It is now the law of the land. Even the Boy Scouts of America have decided to welcome gay scouts and gay leaders. The trend is clear, Scholars: Don't be on the wrong side of history.

### **They're Like You**

I said it about disabled scholars, I said it about black scholars, and now I will say it about GLBT scholars: In most ways, *they're like you*. Before you protest, please realize that for the vast majority of these people, their sexual orientation is not what defines them, and they do not center their lives around it. Just like you, they want to succeed at university, have cool experiences, have deep and meaningful relationships, get a great education, and have a great job and career. Just like you, they want to be loved, accepted, and respected. Just like you, they want to be lastingly happy. Except for their sexual orientation, *their* dreams and goals are *your* dreams and goals.

### **ONE CONSISTENT CONCLUSION: THEY'RE LIKE YOU**

I find it fascinating that in all three groups we considered in this chapter, what they most wanted you to understand about them was the same thing: Except for the one obvious difference—their disability or their race or their sexual orientation—*they're like you*. We can and should celebrate diversity; but I hope we never neglect to celebrate our joyous and human commonality, as well.

We have come a long way in our tolerance and respect for diversity. At times, however, the speed of progress

has seemed glacial, too often measured in decades instead of years. You scholars really are the leaders of tomorrow, and you can start right now by embracing and understanding diversity in all its forms. Yours *will* be a much more diverse world—of that there is no doubt—and you *can* make it a better world. Just keep your eyes, ears, minds, and hearts open, always; never get complacent, and never think the job is done.

Meanwhile, I can say this: I love my Scholars—*all* my Scholars.

### **REVIEW**

#### **Diversity**

**Diversity Is Inevitable**

**Diversity Is Good**

#### **Students with Disabilities**

**Americans with Disabilities Act**

**SSS: Student Support Services**

**The T. K. Martin Center**

**Don't Hesitate to Help**

**Watch Your Language**

**Don't Pet the Dog**

**They're Like You**

#### **Stereotypes**

**Stereotypes Are Stupid**

**It's Still a Stereotype**

#### **Racial Diversity**

**Denial, Privilege, and Fear**

**Explicit and Implicit Prejudice**

**Effects of Affirmative Action**

**Would You Trade?**

**It Only Takes a Few**

**They're Like You**

#### **Sexual Orientation**

**The Facts On Frequency**

**Not a Disorder or Illness**

**A Biological Imperative**

**Not a Psychological Choice**

**Not “Treatable” or “Curable”**

**You’re Not Alone**

**Consider The Dilemma**

**A Religious Problem**

**A Note To Parents**

**Myths about Sexual Orientation**

**Join the Twenty-First Century**

**They’re Like You**

**One Consistent Conclusion**

**THEY’RE LIKE YOU**

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## Chapter 10: ACADEMIC ADVISING

### Requirements Are Complicated

Scholars, there is an incredible variety of academic majors at Mississippi State University—well over a hundred of them, in fact—and each has its own set of requirements that you must meet in order to graduate. Each major (for instance, Psychology, History, Chemical Engineering, Agricultural Economics) has its own set of requirements; then each College (for instance, Engineering, Education, Arts and Sciences) has an additional set of requirements that must be met; and finally the University has a University Core Curriculum that dictates requirements that apply to all students in the University. In most cases, the University Core Curriculum requirements are the most general, and the individual major requirements are the most specific, with the College requirements falling somewhere in between.

Depending on your major, you may have lots of choices to make, or just a few. But coming up with the right set of courses and teachers for you each semester is a very important task. Your Academic Advisor is the person who will help you navigate your way through the thicket of requirements that you must fulfill in order to graduate. Furthermore, meeting with your academic advisor before you register for courses each semester is *required*.

I will be candid with you, Scholars: Meeting all the major, College, and University requirements is so complicated that for years I used to live in fear of mis-advising a student and causing them to be unable to graduate on time because of missing some obscure requirement. Finally, I spent an entire Spring Break pouring over all the requirements for our Psychology major (as well as for the College of Arts and Sciences and the University Core Curriculum), just so I could boil all these requirements down to a check sheet that fit on two sides of one sheet of paper. If students followed each of the requirements they saw listed, they could easily make the right choices and be guaranteed to graduate without any nasty surprises.

But wait: If it took an entire week for a full Professor with 20 years of experience to get all the requirements straight, how hard is it for a brand new student to get everything right? The answer is twofold: By yourself, it is darn near impossible; but with a good academic advisor, it is relatively painless, relatively easy, and actually satisfying and enjoyable.

### Departments Advise Differently

For many years, all regular academic advising was done by faculty members in your major department. Now, many different models are used, depending on the department you are majoring in. You may still get advised by a regular faculty member. Or, you may be advised by a professional advisor, someone who specifically specializes in advising, in your Department or College. Some Departments start you off with peer advisors who are more advanced students in your major; they can help you create a *tentative* course schedule, but you will then meet with a regular faculty or professional advisor who will have the last word.

If you are an Undeclared major, you will be advised by a professional advisor in the University Academic Advising Center (25 Morgan Avenue on campus, 662-325-4052, [www.uaac.mstate.edu](http://www.uaac.mstate.edu), [advising@org.msstate.edu](mailto:advising@org.msstate.edu)). The advisors there are excellent. They will help you select courses that will count to meet basic requirements in most majors, and they can tailor their suggestions to fit general areas you think you might be interested in as you explore major and career options. Trust me, you are in excellent hands with them, and there is absolutely nothing wrong with being an Undeclared major at first. (If fact, the college I went to myself would not even *let* you declare a major until you had been there at least a year and had sampled various possibilities.)

Even though we have several different models for advising on this campus, the bottom line is this: If you are being advised by your assigned advisor, you are being advised by someone whom the University has faith in to do the job well. In this chapter I will tell you what your responsibilities are, what should happen in a good advising session, and what you should do about it if you do not think you received good advising. Advising matters!

One clarification: Academic advising is different than what you receive from the counselors at the MSU Counseling Center and from the Career Center Ambassadors and Professional Liaisons. (See those chapters for detailed information about these excellent campus resources.) Your academic advisor may refer you to these people, however, if your advisor thinks they would be of additional help to you with issues that come up in your academic advising session.

### Who's Your Advisor?

First, watch your email. Many Departments will email you the name of your advisor. But if they don't, simply

stop by in person or call the main office of your major Department—it's in the MSU online directory, as well as on the web page for each Department—tell them you are a major in the department and what year in school you are, and ask who your advisor is and how to contact that person. Then contact your advisor (I prefer email, but phone is fine, too) and ask for an advising appointment. Some advisors will post sign-up sheets outside their offices—if so, then go sign up.

Especially if you are a freshman, you may be told to come to a large group advising session at one of just a few specific times. I realize this may seem like a far cry from the leisurely individual advising you were expecting or hoping for; but freshman schedules are often so straightforward that the choices are really pretty simple to make. Departments may use this method when the number of majors compared to the number of professors or professional advisors is simply overwhelming. *However*, once you have your large group advising, you can *still* make an individual appointment, and my advice is that you should. It is the smart move, but so few students typically make it that you will probably have no problem arranging an individual advising session after the group session. If all you want to do is get your course schedule set, then simply going to the group session alone can often do this for you; but smart students look for more from their advising sessions, and good advisors give it to them.

If repeated attempts to contact your major advisor fail, call or visit your major Department and ask who the Undergraduate Coordinator is; most Departments have one. Sometimes, the Undergraduate Coordinator is your academic advisor, but if you have made repeated and unsuccessful attempts to contact your major advisor, most times the Undergraduate Coordinator can take care of you. If this fails, or if your Department has no Undergraduate Coordinator, contact your Department Head.

### **Preparing For Advising**

The surest way to have a grumpy advisor and an unsatisfying advising session is to simply come in without having done any preparation, with no idea what courses you want to take or why. This is not respectful of your advisor's time. First, read about your major curriculum in the University course catalog, the Undergraduate Bulletin. You can get a hard copy from the Registrar's Office, in Garner Hall, or you can go online in the Banner System (click on MyState on the main MSU webpage) and find the entire catalog there. Your major department will show

up in two places in the catalog. In the second half, arranged in alphabetical order by your major Department's course prefix (usually two or three letters, though sometimes four; for instance, Psychology is PSY) you will see all the courses that are ever taught by that Department, along with a short description of each, and any prerequisites (other courses you must have completed before taking that one). Not all of the courses listed, however, are taught every semester.

For you, the section on your major in the first half of the course catalog will probably be more useful. Here, the Colleges of the University are listed in alphabetical order, and then for each of them, each of the academic Departments are listed. This is where you can see all the course requirements for your major. Again, you will see requirements from the University Core, your College Core, and your major Department. Also, your Department may have separate Concentrations depending on your specific interests. Absorb all this as best you can.

After you have done this, go to the website for your individual Department. Most Departments put lots of information on their websites for their majors, including what courses to take and often when to take them. Read all this material carefully.

Next go online to the main MSU web page, click on MyState, sign in, and go to Banner. Now look for the Academic Records column. Under that, click on CAPP Compliance—CAPP stands for Curriculum, Advising, and Planning Program—and under that, click on Generate New. Now, take a deep breath, 'cause you may be a little bit overwhelmed by what you see next. What will appear is a list of *all* the requirements you must meet in order to graduate in your major, along with an indication of where you stand with respect to each one of them.

When you are a freshman, most of the requirements will be unmet, but this is no cause for panic, as you have not been here long enough to have met very many of them. It is simply a road map of what all you must do in the future to be able to graduate. Another important feature you can tap into is the What If option that is listed where before you clicked on Generate New. For What If, you can specify any major you are *not* in but might want to consider, and the program will show you what requirements you would have to meet if you switched to that major. It is an interesting and useful tool, especially if you are not entirely sure what major you want to graduate with.

While you are online, print out your CAPP report and also your University transcript. Also while you are online, look up and write down the date on which you may preregister for your next semester's courses. Typically, dates for freshmen come after the dates for almost everyone else. (But hey, when you are a big old senior, you will be first in line.)

Now, based on everything you have learned, write down a *tentative* list of courses you want to take the following semester. This is very important! Right near advising time, the next semester's course offerings for each Department will be available to see online in Banner. If they are not there yet, look at the offerings for that semester last year. Most Departments offer about the same courses for that semester each year.

### **Your Advising Session**

Now, when you come to your advising session, bring these things: your tentative course schedule for the next semester, the one you are pre-registering for; a list of the courses you are in now; your academic transcript; your CAPP report; and a list of questions you have for your advisor. Before you and your advisor start choosing courses, be sure that your advisor knows what your career plans are, or at least what you think they will be. This will help your advisor help you choose the right courses to take next. If you have been having trouble in any of your courses, be sure to let your advisor know that, too.

Because courses may fill up between the time you see your advisor and the time you actually preregister for your next semester's courses, I strongly advise that you have a couple of extra courses approved by your advisor in advance, in case you cannot get into all your intended ones.

At this point, you may think that your advising session is finished. It isn't! Your advisor may even think it is finished. It isn't. Describe your career goals to your advisor, and ask if you are in the right major to achieve them. Ask about the level of schooling you will need in order to work effectively in your chosen role: the four-year college degree you are working on right now; a master's degree (typically one to two—more often two—additional years after your four-year college degree); or a doctoral degree (Ph.D., M.D., J.D., etc., typically requiring four or five years after your undergraduate degree). ("Doctoral," by the way, refers to the *level* of advanced training; most doctoral degrees have nothing to do with medicine.) Now, ask about the grades and other credentials you will need,

and ask for your advisor's candid assessment of your chances.

This last part is important. Advisors hate to give you bad news, and too often they don't do it when they should have. Instead, they leave you with too many false hopes and unrealistic expectations. For instance, if a student who has a 2.3 grade point average and has barely eked out a C in College Algebra comes to me and says they want to have a private practice in clinical psychology someday (which requires a Ph.D. in a clinical psychology graduate program, something that is harder to get into than medical school), I *hate* to do it, but I have to tell them that their chances are essentially zero, and that their odds of even getting their undergraduate degree in Psychology are not good.

That can be an unwelcome shock, but once we get past that, then we can discuss alternative majors that might lead you to the general kind of work you want to do, but in majors and career paths you are much more likely to be successful in following. Just remember to *ask* for a realistic appraisal of your goals in light of your performance and abilities, and if the picture is not good, then ask what might be some more realistic goals and alternatives for you. Not everyone can be a nuclear physicist, but if you are smart enough to be at university, you are definitely smart enough to succeed at *something* interesting and important. The key is to find out early if you are in a major that is not right for your talents, so that you can switch to a more suitable one in plenty of time to still graduate on schedule.

Finally, even if you are very talented and are doing very well so far, you must ask what you can do *now* to make yourself more competitive at the next level, whether it is employment immediately after earning your college degree, or entry into a graduate or professional program. Every single semester, it is very important to sit down with your advisor and evaluate your progress and goals. There is much more to advising than simply picking courses for next semester.

### **Advising Early and Often**

If this sounds like a lot to cover in one advising session, you are right! It is critically important that you get advising *early*. If you only come in a week or two before you preregister for classes, your advisor will be swamped with other advisees and extremely stressed and rushed. The smart move is to get advised *twice* each semester. The first time, about a month in, for general discussion about your progress, your

career goals, what you can do, etc. Mull that over, and then come *back* about a month later to decide on your specific courses for the next semester. The course schedule for the next semester may not be posted online yet, but if you have already talked about the courses you want to take, most advisors are quite willing to clear you for registration when the time comes. (You cannot register yourself until after your advisor has gone into Banner and cleared you.) Your advisor will also tell you the day and time after which you can register for courses. (if your advisor forgets to tell you, be sure to ask.) Normally, you want to register for your courses as early as possible, because courses you want or need often fill up fast.

### **Advisor Approval Always**

Once you have been cleared to register and your time has come, you have the opportunity to make one of the dumbest moves ever. *Never* change your course selection from what your academic advisor approved without getting the *change* approved by your advisor. Well-meaning friends may tell you to take different courses. And your parents, bless 'em, may do the same thing. They think they are being helpful, but *don't do it!* The worst schedules I have ever seen, the ones that were hardest to fix, and the ones that made it the most difficult for students to be successful and graduate on time, have always been those that students screwed up by following the advice of their friends or parents. Your friends and parents mean well, but they are *not* professional advisors, and they do *not* know all the traps you can fall into or all the good moves that you can make. *We do.* Get advisor approval always!

### **Advising Gone Wrong**

If you do your part, your advising session should go great. But what if you do not think you were well or completely advised? It does not happen often, but yes, occasionally it does happen, for various reasons. First, go back to your academic advisor and ask to meet again. At least 90% of the time, this will solve the problem. Trust me, no one *wants* you to be dissatisfied with your advising. If that doesn't work, make an appointment with the Undergraduate Coordinator for your department. Just about every Department has one. They are very student-oriented and often pick up and solve problems regular advisors have not been successful with. If you *still* have problems, talk to the Department Head for your major Department. I have very seldom known a problem to persist beyond that level, but if you *still* feel that something has been seriously wrong with your advising, go to the Dean's Office for the College your major is in, and ask to see

the Associate Dean who handles undergraduate academics. In my experience, Associate Deans are certified "Good Guys" on this campus. And if *they* can't solve your problem, *you* are probably the problem. Seriously, be open to that possibility, okay? Collectively, we do our best to help you get quality advising in any way we reasonably can.

### **Getting Good Teachers**

One of the dilemmas you face in making up a good course schedule is knowing which professors to take and which, if any, to avoid. First, let me tell you this: Almost all the professors on this campus are pretty darn good, a very large number are excellent, and still others are somewhere between outstanding and legendary; the number of indifferent or bad instructors is really small. That is not only my impression, but it is backed up by actual statistics. I have several times chaired the Student Evaluation of Teachers Committee, and I could show you in black and white that most students think most professors are quite good. High quality teaching is something we take pride in here at Mississippi State, at every level.

Your academic advisor is not going to tell you *not* to take a certain professor, but you can phrase it positively by asking, "Do you know of a teacher you think would be especially good for me in this course?" There are two or three dozen professors who are designated John Grisham Master Teachers, having won the highest teaching award on this campus. I have observed quite a few of them, and they really are outstanding. If you look online—our Library has the list of them in its section of the MSU website—you can find out who they are.

All faculty in all courses are evaluated by students each year, but those results are not made available to students. (They do help faculty improve, however; no professor *wants* to be bad, and in fact they all want to do the best job they can.) I would *not* trust independent online websites. You can find comments there, but they literally represent only a tiny percentage, maybe 1%-5% at most, of students who took the course, and you can't even be sure that the people who wrote the comments really took the course. It can be a good idea to ask a lot of students, especially ones in your major, about their experiences with certain professors; but realize that your experiences may be different. If you have absolutely nothing else to go on, I would take a section of a course with a name by it rather than a section that says "staff," and I would take a course with a full-time professor or instructor rather than a course taught by

a graduate student; but this ups your odds only somewhat.

The way I see it, *every* professor has *something* valuable to teach you, and you need to get used a wide variety of teaching styles. Doing so will serve you well in the future, Scholars.

### **Take an Academic Adventure**

I will conclude with one last piece of advice: Take an adventure! Most majors have room for about one elective course a semester, or at least one a year, although there are some majors where you have few or no electives. If you keep hearing that a certain professor is super, take one of their courses, even if it has nothing to do with your major. There are some legendary teachers out there, and some cool electives most students overlook. For instance, if you don't take a Political Science course with Mr. Whit Waide sometime while you are here, you are missing something special. And speaking of something special, Dr. Bob Wolverton Sr.'s course in Classical Mythology is the one class at Mississippi State University that I have ever taken myself, and I took it for the sheer enjoyment of it. I treasured every minute!

The speed reading course (LSK 2013) you learned about in the Learning Center chapter won't keep you on the edge of your seat like a lecture from Mr. Waide or Dr. Wolverton, but I advise all my students to take it. And you already know about the Career Planning class (COE 1323) you learned about in the Career Center chapter. This is a great, too often neglected option for many students.

These are just a few examples. There are so many more. Ask around, Scholars, and ask your academic advisor. Take an academic adventure, at least once or twice a year if you can. Years from now, those courses may very well turn out to be the ones you remember the best.

## **REVIEW**

**Requirements Are Complicated**

**Departments Advise Differently**

**Who's Your Advisor?**

**Preparing For Advising**

**Undergraduate Bulletin**

**Departmental Website**

**CAPP Report**

**University Transcript**

**Tentative Course Schedule**

**List of Questions**

**Your Advising Session**

**Course Scheduling**

**Realistic Goal Appraisal**

**Advising Early and Often**

**Advisor Approval Always**

**Advising Gone Wrong**

**Getting Good Teachers**

**Take an Academic Adventure**

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## Chapter 11: MSU STUDENT COUNSELING SERVICES

### You're Not Alone

Scholars, if you ever feel seriously and persistently out-of-sorts emotionally, and/or persistently behave in ways that just don't work and cause you or others serious difficulty, you are certainly not alone. In round numbers, in any given year *one-quarter* of all Americans suffer from a significant, diagnosable psychological disorder; even worse, among college and university students, that figure goes up to *one-third*. (See *Psychology*, by David G. Myers.) Odds are, at least *half* of us will suffer one or more psychological disorders in our lifetime. That is a *lot* of people.

To put that number in perspective, next time you are in a class of 25 students, look around you: Eight will not make it through freshman year at university without suffering from a psychological disorder, and at least a dozen will suffer one during their lifetimes. One of these could be *you*, and the key to success is knowing where to go when it happens: The MSU Counseling Center.

### Counseling Center Staff

For this chapter of the *Insider's Guide to MSU*, I originally interviewed Dr. Leigh Jensen, who at the time was Director of Student Counseling Services. I have known and respected Dr. Jensen for nearly 30 years. In fact, some years ago when I just could not seem to get past the grief I felt after my father's death, I saw Dr. Jensen myself, and she was wonderful. Dr. Jensen has since retired, but she described the new Director of the Counseling Center, Ms. Luellyn Switzer, as "phenomenal." From my own communications with our new Director, I have every reason to agree! Ms. Switzer earned a Master of Science degree concentrated in Clinical Psychology from our own Psychology Department here at Mississippi State. (We love it when our top graduates assume key positions on campus.) I can assure you that the Counseling Center is in great hands with her, and it is a place that can be enormously helpful to you.

Competence and experience are the prime criteria in hiring staff, but the Center also prides itself on the diversity of its staff. Multiple races, genders, sexual orientations, ethnicities, degree specialties, and ages are represented. Our MSU Counseling Center staff would stack up competitively with the professional staff at any college or university counseling center in the country, and I have faith in anyone who works at our Counseling Center.

### There's No Stigma

Does it surprise you that we have a Student Health Center to take care of your colds, flu, stomach viruses, sprained ankles, etc.? Of course not, and I bet at least a third of you will need their services, too, sometime this year. (Fortunately, they are excellent. I go to the Student Health Center myself.) It should be no surprise, then, that we also have MSU Student Counseling Services (the formal title of the Counseling Center), for students who are suffering from anxiety, depression, relationship problems, etc.

It is curious that almost everyone who breaks an arm or a leg will go to the doctor or hospital immediately and get it fixed; yet most people who are overwhelmed by anxiety or depression or other psychological difficulties and dilemmas do *not* get professional help. How crazy is that! I vividly remember a few years back when I wrecked my knee. It took surgery from Dr. Rusty Linton, who is also the team orthopedic surgeon for MSU Athletics, to repair it. What if I had said, "Knee surgery is for wimps and crybabies, not for me! Sure, I won't be able to walk or drive, and the pain will be constant and miserable, but hey, I can teach from a wheelchair. It is what it is." Obviously, that would be nuts. It makes no more sense to just endure it if you are suffering from anxiety, depression, etc. If you have a problem like that, *get it treated*. Persistent psychological pain is like a warning light in your car, a sign that something is wrong and needs attention. Heed the warning, and take the necessary steps. The Counseling Center is here to help *you*, as they help over 200 students *every week*.

To this day, some people erroneously attach a stigma to getting counseling. If people are having problems, they or others think they should be able to simply "snap out of it" or "quit it." To them, getting counseling is considered a sign of "weakness." Wrong! As far back as 1972, a brilliant young psychologist demonstrated that when it comes to the sorts of problems most likely to bring students like yourselves to get counseling, the "helpseekers" are not greatly different from the rest of the student body, and for those with significant problems, those who seek help for them are actually in *better* shape, *before* they even get counseling, than those who fail to seek help. The worst problems are the ones the folks at the Counseling Center *don't* see, the students who don't have it together enough to get help when they need it.

Furthermore, the "helpseekers" differ from those who do not seek help in a number of positive ways: They

are more independent, more open-minded, more concerned for others, etc.; again, this is the case *before* they even receive counseling. I kid you not. (I was kidding, however, about the “brilliant young psychologist;” it was me, by no means brilliant, but what I just described is what I found in my doctoral dissertation. Who knew it would come in handy 45 years later!)

### **Where To Go: Student Counseling Services**

We have had a student Counseling Center at Mississippi State for as long as I have been here. The size of the student body has doubled in that time, but the size of the Counseling Center has quadrupled, as people have gotten past the “stigma” of long ago and now have the good sense to use the Counseling Center.

The Counseling Center is located on the first floor of Hathorn Hall. (Hathorn is down Magruder Street, which is behind Allen Hall.) It has its own, separate entrance toward the left side of the front of the building. You can call them at 662-325-2091 for an appointment, or you can drop in 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. Either way will work fine. Do not use email, however; this is due to potential privacy issues with email. If you wish to make an appointment with a specific staff member, you may. If you wish to be seen by a licensed staff member, you can request that, too, but rest assured: They will not give your case to a counselor in training unless they know that that person can handle it effectively.

If it is an emergency or you urgently need a counselor and it is after normal business hours, call the regular Counseling Center number (662-325-2091) and you will be reach what they call a ProtoCall counselor, who will talk to you and make an initial assessment. If the need is immediate, the ProtoCall counselor will put in a call to an MSU Student Counseling Center counselor. That almost always works fine, but if for some reason you don't get through to anyone through the Counseling Center number, then call the University Police Department at 662-325-2121 and they will get you connected. There is *always* a professional counselor on call. (The police are certainly not going to arrest you for being anxious or stressed out! They are simply the back-up number because they are always open and know how to connect you to a counselor if there is a breakdown in the phone system, which very seldom happens. The University Police are quite friendly and helpful any time they are needed, however.)

### **Confidentiality Is Respected**

Normally, everything you say to your counselor is confidential, including the fact that you went to the Counseling Center at all. Barring a court order, your records can only be shown to others outside the Counseling Center if you specifically request and authorize it. The only exception is if you reveal to your counselor or give substantial evidence of actual or intended criminal activity or intended harm to yourself or others. In that case, your counselor, like all counselors, would be legally *required* to take action and report it. (This would include anything illegal falling under Federal Title IX regulations protecting you from sexual assault, harassment, or discriminatory mistreatment.) Fortunately, required involuntary suspension of confidentiality seldom occurs.

### **Employers Never Know**

You may be worried that a future employer will pass over you if you have been treated for psychological difficulties. Not so. This is straight from the MSU Career Center, which you read about in a previous chapter. No employer would have knowledge of your having been seen at a counseling center unless you voluntarily disclose it, and it would be illegal for any employer or potential employer to ask you if you have ever used a counseling center or had ever been treated for a psychological disorder.

You might be interested to know, however, that the health insurance plans of most major employers include psychological services. This is because they know that treating psychological disorders is highly cost effective: Treating psychological disorders significantly reduces claims for medical illnesses. Depression, anxiety, etc. if left untreated can literally make you sick. Employers also know that stressed, unhappy workers are less productive workers. Thus it is in everybody's interest to keep you healthy, happy, and well, free from both medical and psychological disorders. Once again, your use of counseling services is *not* reported back to your employer, unless you specifically request it.

### **Typical Student Problems: Depression, Anxiety, Relationships**

University students seek counseling for a wide variety of problems, and they are wise to do so. I will briefly describe *some* of the more common problems here, but these are definitely *not* the only ones the Counseling

Center sees in a day. And don't worry: Kind of like priests and ministers, counselors have heard it all. You are not going to shock them, and you need not feel embarrassed. They are there to help you, not to judge you. They are there because they have made a career of helping people like you.

**Depression.** Depression is a very common problem. It involves feelings of intense, prolonged emotional sadness that has no rational basis and continues for weeks or more. Typically depressed people feel helpless and hopeless. They lose their normal interest, energy, and enjoyment of things. Their thoughts and even their behaviors slow down. Often there are disruptive changes in their sleep patterns and in their appetites. They have sad, pained facial expressions, for the simple reason that they *are* in great emotional pain. You have probably heard the phrase "Depression hurts." Believe it. And get help for it if *you* develop significant depression.

**Anxiety.** If you think university is stressful, you are quite right. Moderate, manageable amounts of stress and anxiety can actually help arouse us and motivate us. If anxiety is intense or overwhelming, however, it needs to be treated. If you are miserably anxious again and again, if you are beset with irrational fears and worries, if you have intense social anxiety, such as painful levels of shyness or severe discomfort in normal dealings with other people, and/or if you frequently engage in irrational, self-defeating behavior to try to reduce excessive anxiety, then you have clinical levels of anxiety, and this anxiety needs to be treated, for your own happiness, health, and success.

**Relationship problems.** Life at university, like life in general, is filled with relationships, and sometimes these become seriously problematic. Issues with your parents or family may come to a head. Relations with roommates and friends can become chronically distressing. Romantic relationships can produce painful dilemmas. "Breaking up is hard to do," as the old song says, but sometimes staying together is even worse. What to do! Figuring all that out is seldom easy, but sometimes it can become agonizing. A good counselor can help a lot.

Let me tell you **Carskadon's Laws of Relationships** here. **Law #1:** If it is the right relationship, it will work; and if you put all reasonable effort into it and it still doesn't work, then it isn't the right relationship. **Law #2:** No relationship is better than a bad relationship. (Read that one twice, and make sure you get it the way I mean it: It is better to be without a relationship than to be in a relationship that is

repeatedly causing you misery.) **Law #3:** There is no predicting which relationship will be "the" relationship, or when it will come. Focus on living a happy and productive life; when the time is right, the right person will appear. Ironically, you are most likely to find "the" relationship when you no longer "need" a relationship, which brings up **Law #4:** It is better to be *wanted* than to be *needed*, and better to *want* someone than to *need* someone. Healthy relationships are about wanting and enjoying each other, not about needing each other and being dependent.

### Good Odds of Success

If you have a problem, is counseling likely to help? In a word, "Yes!" There have been literally thousands of studies done on the effectiveness of counseling. Odds of success depend on many factors, and success rates are higher for some problems than for others. Overall, however, for most of the sorts of problems that students most commonly come to a university counseling center to get help with, treatment *is* likely to lead to significant improvement or cure. If you want to learn more about this, I highly recommend the book *What You Can Change and What You Can't*, by Dr. Martin Seligman. He is an eminent but very down-to-earth clinical psychologist, and he explains a complicated body of psychological research in everyday, nontechnical terms.

### Why Not a Friend?

People often wonder why and how a professional counselor is better than simply talking to a friend or family member. The comfort of friends and family can be powerful, but there are two reasons why you should not substitute advice from friends and family for professional counseling. First, professional counselors are *objective*. Friends and family mean well, but they are themselves part of your life, and they often have conscious and even unconscious agendas of their own. Second, professional counselors are *trained and experienced*. They have had years of extensive, high-level training in diagnosing and treating psychological difficulties. Odds are, they have helped dozens, probably hundreds, of other people with problems similar to yours. None of this is true of friends and family.

I'll put it this way: When I wrecked my knee, I had many friends and family offer aid and comfort, and I really did enjoy their support; but there's not a one of them that I would have let perform surgery on my knee!

### **The Price Is Right**

If someone who was not an MSU student went to one of the professional counselors at the Counseling Center in their private practice, it would cost them about \$100-\$150 an hour (and it would be well worth it to get that quality of treatment). For you, however, the price is right: It's free. Certain specialized services may require fees, but the vast majority of students who are seen at Student Counseling Services pay nothing. The University wants you happy, not miserable, and successful, not dysfunctional. Therefore, the University provides this service for you. *Use it.*

### **What About Drugs?**

The Counseling Center does not prescribe drugs (because their staff are not physicians), and most people they see there do not require drugs. Many times, a great deal of benefit can come from non-pharmaceutical approaches, such as talking it out and receiving trained guidance, making a new behavior plan, and following a program of vigorous physical activity, healthy nutrition, and good sleep habits. But sometimes, such as for severe depression or anxiety, medical treatment, either temporary or long-term, is warranted. The counselors you see work closely with the physicians at the MSU Student Health Center, and if medications are needed, either those physicians will prescribe and monitor them, or the Counseling Center will connect you with a psychiatrist (a medical doctor specializing in psychological disorders) for such services.

### **Referring a Friend**

Often, a person suffering from a psychological disorder is the last person to realize it. Also, even if they realize they are miserable and all is not well, a lot of people think that the Counseling Center is for severely disturbed people who are talking to lamp posts, baying at the moon, and hiding from invaders from outer space. They do get such problems at the Counseling Center, but rarely; mostly, they see people like you and me who are struggling with much more common, everyday difficulties. Fortunately, *you* now know what the Counseling Center is for and when to use it.

If you are seriously concerned about a friend, roommate, family member, co-worker, or classmate, talk to that person privately and share your concern in a friendly, supportive manner. Suggest the Counseling Center. You could even share this chapter with them. Offer to walk down to the Counseling Center with the

person. Be patient. Often you have to make the suggestion more than once. Just be gentle and caring about it. If none of this works, *you* can talk about the situation to someone in the Counseling Center, and see what advice they might give you to persuade the person to come in. The Counseling Center *cannot*, however, contact the person directly and ask him or her to come in. Finally, if you say "I am worried about a friend who . . ." the folks at the Counseling Center are *not* going to think you are really talking about yourself. Sometimes people have that fear.

This does not happen often, but if you think someone is imminently suicidal, call the Counseling Center immediately and share your concern with them. They are well trained to evaluate situations like this, whereas you are not. If it is after hours, call the regular Counseling Center number (662-325-2091), and you will be connected to a ProtoCall counselor, as explained earlier. If that does not happen (but it almost always does), then call the MSU Police, 662-325-2121, tell them it is an emergency, and ask them to connect you to the counselor on call.

### **Sexual Assault**

#### **No Means NO**

Sexual assault is a vicious criminal act with long-term consequences. Rape is a very serious crime. It often takes the form of "date rape" or "acquaintance rape." Rape is rape, whether you know the person or not. You may even think that the person led you on, but everyone has the right to change their mind. "No" means "NO," period. There is an absurd myth that says that if the person says "yes," then great, go to it, and if they say "no," what they really mean is "take me." *Wrong!* Dead wrong. That is rape.

#### **Silence Means No**

A lot of times people will try to get their intended targets to drink, to loosen their resistance. This is a shameful tactic. Some will offer drugs. Don't take either offer! A few will try to slip "date rape" drugs into a person's drink. You must always, always, be alert. Some idiots believe that if the person does not say "no," then it isn't rape. If you have sex with someone who is so drunk or drugged that their judgment is impaired, or they do not know what is going on, or they are not even conscious, you are committing rape.

#### **Go to Jail**

If you commit rape, you will be arrested, you will be prosecuted, you will go to jail, and you will stay there for a long time—unless your victim’s father or brother or whoever comes after you and imposes their own death sentence, or hires professionals to do it for them. That is not a joke: It has happened.

### **Report Sexual Assault and Get Professional Help**

If you are the victim of a sexual assault, you should call the police immediately. They know how to handle these situations, and they will advise you of your options and direct you to the proper care. Contacting the police does *not* obligate you to press charges; that is a decision you can make later. If the assault was some time ago, you may wish to start with the Counseling Center or the Dean of Students Office. But please, get professional help. You need it, and you probably need medical care, as well. Do not delay. You have suffered a profoundly destructive life event, and I have never known a sexual assault victim who did not need and benefit from counseling.

To learn more about sexual assault, go to the Dean of Students website, [www.students.msstate.edu/services/](http://www.students.msstate.edu/services/) and in the upper right hand corner of the home page, click on Sexual Assault/Misconduct Services.

### **Be Very Careful**

Sexual assault is more common than you might think, even on the safest of campuses like Mississippi State. If I have two classes of 25 freshmen each, odds are that one of my students will be raped or will be the victim of a serious attempt at sexual assault that very year. I look from student to student thinking, “Please not her. Please not her. Please not him. Please not her . . .” Of course, there is *no one* for whom sexual assault would be okay. It breaks my heart every time it happens to one of my students (or anyone else). To borrow a line from an old TV show, let’s be careful out there, Scholars. Be *very* careful out there.

### **Stress and How to Reduce It: Reduce Stress Now**

You don’t have to have a psychological disorder to suffer from stress, and most students do suffer significant stress during their first year at university. What can you do to keep it under control? The most common stress takes the form of feeling overwhelmed by all your classes, assignments, and tests, in the middle of all your social and work activities, as well as

keeping up a relationship or else hunting for one. No wonder you feel stressed. You will *swear* that there are just not enough hours in the day.

### **Remember Time Management**

First, go back and review the chapter on the Seven Secrets to Student Success. *Remember time management!* Remember that I told you time management, above all, is the key to success freshman year. It is interesting—and wonderful—that the same thing that gives you the greatest success freshman year—time management—is also the biggest stress reliever, the thing that will give you the greatest happiness freshman year. Plan your work time (remember *work full time*), plan your play time, and follow your plan. If you list every task and plan when you will do it—and *follow* the plan, of course—you *know* you will get your work done. What a relief! And if you *plan* your play time and follow your plan, you can enjoy relaxing without feeling guilty or fearing that your work won’t get done.

I wish it were not so hard to convince first-year students to do this simple thing; instead, they suffer. Time management is actually easy, once you get in the habit of doing it, and I *promise* you it will work.

### **The Big Three: Get Vigorous Exercise Get Plenty of Sleep Eat Right and Healthy**

Some of the best ways to reduce stress are the simplest. Engage in regular, vigorous physical activity. Use the Sanderson Center on campus: It is great. *Get plenty of sleep*—most university students are terrible about this. Eat right and healthy. Eat three healthy, nutritious meals each day—do *not* skip breakfast—and eat calmly and slowly—enjoy your food. These three things alone will do wonders for you.

### **Consciously Relax Yourself**

Add other stress reduction techniques: Meditate, pray (if you are religiously minded), do deep breathing and muscle relaxation exercises, etc. If you aren’t familiar with the proper way to do deep breathing and deep muscle relaxation exercises, the folks at the Counseling Center will cheerfully show you. They even have walk-in group meditation sessions every weekday afternoon; these are simple, soothing, and relaxing. Helping normal people reduce stress is part of what they do every day at the Counseling Center.

## To Be Happy: Myers' Ten Ways

I will close this chapter with the most important things *you* can do to achieve long-term happiness. These findings come from Dr. David G. Myers, author of the General Psychology textbook I use, *Psychology*. The author is one of the world's experts on happiness. Based on extensive *scientific research* on who is happy and why, Dr. Myers comes to some simple conclusions.

The first thing to realize is that **happiness has little connection to wealth**. Once very basic needs for food, shelter, safety, and medical care are met, increased income has surprisingly minimal effect on happiness. One convincing study showed that over a period of *six decades*, the average buying power of Americans, adjusted for inflation, *tripled*; yet the average happiness of Americans remained essentially unchanged. To apply this to *you*, most students at university have little money, but this most certainly will not prevent you from being quite happy.

What *is* reliably associated with happiness, and what should *you* do to be happy? Based on hundreds of studies, Dr. Myers offers you the following advice, and I agree with all of it:

**1. Take control of your time.** Scholars, I am not the only person who will tell you the benefits of time management. Believe it and do it!

**2. Act happy.** Yes, act happy even if you do not feel that way. A positive attitude toward yourself and others can actually make you feel happier, even if you don't feel that way at first. There is great power in optimism. For more on this, I can recommend another excellent book by Dr. Martin Seligman, *Learned Optimism*.

**3. Seek work and leisure that engage your skills.** For the work part of this, review the Career Center chapter. For both work and play, find what you are good at and love to do. Then do it. It is the work you *love* to do, that you will do the *best*.

**4. Buy experiences rather than things.** Invest your money (and time) in *experiences*, especially socially shared experiences, rather than *things*. A trip to Europe or around the world with your family or friends is likely to produce more happiness than buying a fancier car or the latest electronics. As humorist Art Buchwald once said, "The best things in life aren't things."

**5. Join the "movement" movement.** In other words, get off the bed or couch, leave the internet, TV, video games, and social media for a while, and get some real, vigorous physical exercise and engage in actual *activity*. Do this regularly!

**6. Give your body the sleep it wants.** I know this can be difficult at university, but insufficient sleep diminishes both your effectiveness and your happiness. (When I am feeling overwhelmed by work myself, I always say, "Give me a good night's sleep, and I've at least got a fighting chance!")

**7. Give priority to close relationships.** Form and nurture close relationships. Don't take people for granted. Affirm them and extend them kind attention just as frequently as possible—this should be part of your every day.

**8. Focus beyond yourself.** Help others in need! If you don't already have a favorite way to do this, check out the Maroon Volunteer Center at [www.mvc.msstate.edu](http://www.mvc.msstate.edu) or go to their office at C306 Moseley Hall. Their whole purpose is to connect student volunteers with some of the dozens of on-campus and off-campus service projects and organizations that would best suit your interests and talents. Not only do happy people help others, but helping others makes people happier. *Try it.*

**9. Count your blessings and record your gratitude.** Dr. Myers suggests that you pause each day to savor the good moments, count your blessings, write down positive events and why they occurred (keep a "gratitude journal"), and express your gratitude toward others. Doing these simple things has been proven to increase your happiness. (Did your grandparents or parents ever advise you to "count your blessings"? They were right!)

**10. Nurture your spiritual self.** I am not about to tell you what your faith should be. Freedom of religion, which includes the freedom to have no religion, is one of the most cherished rights and blessings of our country; but as Myers puts it, "Faith provides a support community, a reason to focus beyond self, and a sense of purpose and hope." People who are religiously and/or spiritually connected are typically happier than others, and they also cope better with crisis.

If you are of a religious nature, check out some of the campus ministries like RUF (Reformed University Fellowship), BSU (Baptist Student Union), Wesley Foundation (a Methodist affiliated organization), CCM

(Catholic Campus Ministry), etc. to name just a few. I hear great things about these groups and others; one of them, or one like them, might be just right for you. And yes, I realize not all religions are Christian. Even if you already have a favorite religion and church, it would be an informative and enjoyable adventure to try attending services at half a dozen different churches in town, and sample a variety of faiths.

### **It's About Happiness**

**Happiness Isn't Selfish.** If you think about it, Scholars, a lot of life is about happiness. Not only are you most productive when you are happy, but when you are happy yourself, you have the most to give others. Giving comes most easily and naturally when *you* are happy. Pursuing your happiness is actually one of the most *unselfish* things you can do in your life.

**The Happiness Medics: Student Counseling Services.** Maybe, Scholars, you should think of the good folks at the Counseling Center as the "happiness medics." If you run off the road to happiness, these are the folks who can tow you out of the ditch, help you get fixed up, and send you back on your way. Never hesitate to use them—that is what they are here for, and that is why we have the Mississippi State University Student Counseling Services.

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*This material is a DRAFT. We are still in the process of writing, adding, and editing chapters. Comments, reactions, and suggestions are welcome.*

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