

**“Give me one moment in time, when I’m more than I thought I could be. When all of my dreams are a heartbeat away and the answers are all up to me.”**

—Albert Hammond and John Bettis

These lyrics from “One Moment in Time,” a song that is often sung at high school graduations, capture the optimistic spirit of the moment when students stand at the end of their high school days and at the beginning of their undergraduate path. However, students finishing high school are often unprepared for the challenges of the college classroom. According to AAC&U’s 2002 report, *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College*, as “colleges admit many more students, the professors who teach them report greater numbers underprepared for college work. The evidence supports these impressions. Less than one-half of high school graduates complete even a minimally defined college preparatory curriculum in high school, leaving colleges to remedy the educational gaps.”

As the parent of a student finishing high school this year, I approached my work on this issue of *Peer Review* with personal interest. My daughter Gillian’s senior year was filled with anxieties and excitement about college choices and decisions. As she and I visited a number of campuses, she began to define for herself the best choice for her next academic destination. At one institution’s prospective student day, a campus official advised students to investigate and consider the three “P”s of each campus—the people, the place, and the program. I found it interesting that as we participated in subsequent visits, we heard quite a bit about the place and the people on each campus, but most sessions did not go over the various academic programs in depth. While learning about the various options for room and board was of interest to us, we knew that the ultimate decision on where to apply would be based on the institution’s educational philosophy and program.

While on these campus visits, I was able to conduct an informal survey in which I questioned parents about their expectations of their child’s college choice. I found in my small-scale study that most parents’ top concern was that their child’s final school choice be a good match. In addition, almost all of the parents with whom I spoke wanted assurances that the appropriate academic measures would be in place to support their child throughout their college career—particularly during the first year.

Last fall, 263,710 first-year students entering 385 institutions participated in the 2005 Freshman Survey—a project of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program that is housed at the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. One section of the survey asked students to predict their behavior while in college. When students were asked to make their best guesses as to whether they would earn at least a B average, 62 percent indicated that there was a very good chance that they would achieve this goal. However, only 32.5 percent of participants responded that there was a very good chance that they would communicate regularly with their professors. Clearly, there was a disconnect for many of the students who had high academic objectives but did not see frequent faculty interaction as a means to achieving these goals.

To provide students with guidance on how to take advantage of their college learning resources and experience, AAC&U recently produced a student publication on making smart educational choices in college. In the opening pages of his book *Why Do I Have to Take this Course?*, AAC&U senior fellow Robert Shoenberg advises students that “Making good choices as you begin your college experience means facing seriously some questions you may not have thought about much: ‘Why am I here?’ ‘Why am I willing to invest four years of my time and a great deal of money in seeking a college degree?’ ‘How do I want to be different at the end of my time in college?’”

For the past few years, first-year programs on college campuses have helped students begin to answer the questions posed by Shoenberg. These programs generally introduce students to the institutions’ learning expectations and address other first-year concerns, such as major selection, time management, and student life issues. This edition of *Peer Review* features articles from a range of institutions with programs that provide strategies for positive transitions into college for both traditional and nontraditional students. As my daughter stands with her class of incoming students this fall—each student making choices that will define his or her academic undergraduate career—the opportunity for these students to participate in first-year programs may make the difference between first-year floundering and a successful transition into a college career that will provide students with the outcomes they need to navigate a complex and challenging world.

—SHELLEY JOHNSON CAREY