Podcast Text

**Podcast 1**

Today’s topic is college.

I know—you’ve been talked at A LOT about college. I remember my own kid’s second day of kindergarten. They got in the car with their two teacher parents and burst out crying. When we asked what was wrong, here’s what we heard:

*I’m never going to get into college! There’s this test you have to pass to graduate from high school and it’s hard and Mom, Dad…I don’t even know what’s on the test! I’m going to fail!* Day 2 of kindergarten. (For the record we skipped dinner and went out for ice cream—the only response I think educator parents can have to dealing with what school does to their kids and what they realize they are doing to other people’s kids.)

Here’s my personal “ideas worth sharing” on college: it’s complicated, and people with insider info (because they have family who went/are going, etc) know ins and outs that others don’t. Today, I’d like to be your insider. I once had a senior ask me—embarrassed—if, when you got to college, they gave you a set schedule of courses like in Harry Potter. So, forgive me for perhaps repeating something you already know—but I want to lay out the basics just in case: FIRST—college means different things. It can mean a set of classes that, if you pass, give you a certificate to do technical jobs like auto mechanics, plumbing, medical or dental assistant, welding, etc. Certificate programs are offered by most community colleges. You sign up for the courses you want in order (maybe auto mechanics 1, then 2, then 3), pay for each of them you take, pass—and when you’ve got all of them done, then you submit your transcript (or transcripts if you take courses at more than one college) to a state agency, pay a fee, and get your certificate. Teachers have certificates, as do doctors and other professionals.

**You do not need a high school diploma, an SAT score or anything else to enroll in community college courses. That’s what the “community” in community college stands for.**

There is another program you start and finish entirely at a community college: An Associate’s Degree. (an AA or AS) This is a college degree that takes full time school for two years to finish. And there are lots of careers that look for it as the “degree” to be hired. I put a link to a site that looks at the jobs that use Associates on this assignment. Lots of associate degree courses are the same as university classes.

<https://www.geteducated.com/careers/highest-paying-associate-degree-jobs/>

In fact, most of the courses students take in the first two years at a 4 year university or college—ones like Chemistry, Math, English, etc—are also offered at community colleges and count toward Associates degrees.

Let’s call these *100 and 200 level prereq* courses. 100 refers to Freshman level; 200 is Sophomore level. *Prereq* means that these courses have to be passed—sometimes you even have to get a high grade in them—in order to be allowed to enroll in more advanced classes in the same department.

To give you a real life example: business programs at nearly every college usually have more students than they can handle. So, they set rules like “only the top 10% of students in Accounting 101 can enroll in Accounting 201—and only students who get a B or higher in Accounting 201 are allowed to go on to Account 301, etc.” To get a four-year business degree, one of the requirements a student has to meet is to have, say, 3 years of accounting courses. Students who can’t enroll in Acct 201 because they are not the top 10% *can’t get their degree in business*. They need to pursue a degree in something else—maybe something they weren’t as interested in.

When you hear someone say they are going to “start at community college and transfer to a university” they mean they are going to take as many 100 and 200 level prereq courses as possible and then apply to enter a university as a JUNIOR (3rd year) student, bringing the credits for those courses “with them” –called *transferring credits*—to “count” as their FRESHMAN and SOPHOMORE year credits at the university. Then, all they have left is 2 years of 300 and 400 level courses and any missing prereqs to pass so they can earn their Bachelor’s degree—a BA or BS…BS is for sciences, BA is for everything else.

Why take this route to a degree? Well—first, you don’t have to go through the stress of admissions to start taking courses that “count.” That’s a plus my seniors can probably relate to right now. Second, community college is much, much, much, much cheaper than most colleges—even though the courses are the same. Third, community colleges’ scheduling of their courses is often much more convenient for someone who isn’t doing full time school, isn’t living in a dorm on campus or who works during the daytime. Also, community college teachers are professors and not graduate students who are assigned to teach a class while they are studying, like public 4 year university instructors often are.

***Wait, what?***

Who teaches—and that also means who GRADES you—in a college course is something lots of students don’t think about. But you know how much it matters in middle and high school. Imagine now that you’re *paying* for school and you *have* to do well in the course to go on in that degree—who teaches and grades it really, REALLY matters.

So—it can be really wise to take especially the hardest prereq courses at community college, where the class will likely be smaller than on a university campus and will be taught by a professor. Like instead of 600 in a big lecture hall with study and quiz sections dividing students into small groups, the class will be 25 and meet together with the same teacher every session.

This is the real world case for the NUMBER ONE most IMPORTANT class for students who are interested in anything having to do with medicine: Chem 101. All over the country and at every level of college—community, public 4 year, private and elite, Ivy league schools, HALF of all students who set out to do a science degree drop out of sciences because of Chem 101. It is designed that way: to “weed” out students—just like the rules for Acct 101. You need a 4.0 in Chem if you want to go on to med school—what do you do when you barely pass or even fail it? HALF switch to a different degree.

PRIVATE 4 year colleges **rarely** use graduate students as instructors—but they may still have **huge class sizes** and quiz sections for some prereqs. Some PUBLIC 4 year colleges (ahem…WSU, UW Bothell, Western) RARELY use grad students as teachers; others (ahem…UW Seattle) ALMOST ALWAYS use grad students to teach prereq courses. When you’re considering a college—check who teaches and how big class sizes are.

Don’t get me wrong. Some grad student instructors are fantastic—after all, they’re students, too; so they can be better in-touch with what it’s like for you. But, it’s hard to know in advance if your class will have a good one—since they usually only teach a course once or twice. Professors have ratemyprofessor.com and other history you can look at to judge before you enroll.

That’s ALREADY a lot—looks like this topic will need to be continued.

**Podcast 2**

Today we continue on college.

I hope going through certificates, Associates degrees and the whats and whys of “starting at community college and then transferring” was neither too boring nor too confusing. If I confused you, email me! If I bored you…well…

Before I talk about Bachelors degrees, majors and all that—I want to go deeper into what it means to TRANSFER—to transfer credits, to transfer AP exam scores, to transfer from one college to another. There’s going to be some important vocabulary here.

First—**transfer equivalency**. Say it with me: *trans-fer e-quiv-a-len-cy*. This is the term colleges use for what they will “count” from outside their school. Colleges may count

* Exam scores—like AP exams (*rarely* schools will take SAT II/Subject area tests)
* Community College credits (often only in-state community colleges)
* Other Colleges’ credits (these are usually national)

To find out what “counts,” you go to Google and type in **the name of a school** and **transfer equivalency** and—if it’s exams you want to know about, **AP exams**; if it’s *community college or college credits*, usually just *transfer equivalency* is enough. What should show up in the search is a site that has a table with columns that list—let’s talk about exams first:

left column will have an exam name—say AP Bio—then middle column will have scores the school will “take”—it might just be a 5 or maybe 3, 4 and 5—it’s different for each exam and each school.

Got that? You can stop this if you want to go find your school’s table before I tackle the very confusing right column.

OK-so, let’s say you got a 4 on AP Bio and you want to see if the school will “take” it. Well, here’s AP Biology on the list! Aaaaand—hey, a 5 or 4 counts!

Now the question is ***“For What?”***

Some exams for some scores will count at some schools AS course credits. This means that a course number and amount of credits will appear in the right column, like Bio 101 and 102 maybe—each for 5 credits. When you see this, it translates to:

the school will count my AP Bio exam score as 10 credits—Bio 101 and 102 will be listed as CR/credited through exam on my transcript.

Next question is, “**What do those equivalent course credits do for me (and what DON’T they do)**?”

This gets complicated. Ready?

Just like high school, a few courses in college are **required** courses—you have to take THAT course or you can’t graduate. Some are **elective**—you have to take a certain number of electives to have enough credits to graduate, but you choose which ones and when you take them.

Like high school, there is also a set number of **categories**—called *undergraduate requirements* or something similar, which includes things like “quantitative” or “arts.” To graduate, you have to fulfill all the categories, but you have options for when and which courses. Each category has a certain minimum number of credits/courses you must take. Say, 15 credits of quantitative. Lots of courses at the college will “count” as quantitative. You just have to a) figure out which ones and b) enroll and pass them.

To decide what courses to enroll in each quarter or semester or term, you look through the catalog for that term, which if they are helpful, allows you to search by requirement so that you can see every course you can take during the term that counts as, say, quantitative, as arts, etc. You can also click on each course you’re interested in taking and read its description—it’ll list which requirements it counts for—again like high school. Some schools allow some courses to count for more than one category at a time; others don’t. **Advising** is there to help you sort these out to make your schedule. *Can I recommend BIG TIME that you use Advising* ***early*** *and often?*

When you are looking at community college and other college courses to transfer, you get a very similar set of columns, with an additional column—**date range**. Colleges can—and do—change their transfer equivalencies all the time. So, maybe in 2010 they “took” a certain community college course credit, but not after that—or maybe they started taking a course credit from Harvard in 2014. This is what the date range column is telling you. Just make sure YOUR time taking the course fits in the range, and you’re set.

The upshot of the questions about course credit equivalency—What does my exam score or college course credit count FOR and What does that do for me?—is this:

Some exams and some community college and other college credits are totally worth the work and money to take—because they fulfill requirements you would have had to do ANYWAY in college. Especially if it’s a requirement that you don’t particularly enjoy! By having these credits when you start college, you’re ahead. So, now you’ve got room in your college schedule to take other classes that you want or need or maybe to even graduate early, since you will have fulfilled all the requirements in less than the usual 2 years for an Associates or 4 for a Bachelors.

But.

Some exams and some college credits may not be worth the work and money to take in high school. They may not transfer to the school you want to go to (this is especially true of community college credits out of state, although there are exceptions—BYU, for example, takes community college credits from most states). OR—they transfer but only as an elective (so they’re just cheaper credits toward your graduation). OR

*Brace yourselves.*

OR they count for a course you don’t want to skip in college. What, why wouldn’t you want to skip a course in college if you could?...ah, that’s where we will pick up in the next podcast! Spoilers, though: med school doesn’t accept “CREDIT by exam” for its prereqs (including Bio, Chem, etc)—you have to actually take these as courses in college. And…if you transfer in credits or exam scores to count, you might have to take the next higher level course for your major/degree. That might be great—you were ready to jump to Spanish 3 or advanced Composition. Or it might completely destroy you if you try to take the second quarter of Calculus, Chem, etc without having taken the first one at the school.

Think of questions you might have and hit me up! Until next podcast…

**Podcast 3**

Today’s topic is more about college transfers!

I’ve talked about transferring community and other colleges’ credit and exam scores into a college. And my cliffhanger was that it’s not always the BEST decision to take college credit or exams—or to actually transfer your credits or scores.

There are two strands to my answer to the question Why not? The first is logistical. As I hinted at last time, logistically adding transfer credits to your college transcript may end up being **moot** (that means meaningless)—because even though you can get “credit” for it, you need to take the equivalent course anyway. This is the case for med school, which comes after your Bachelor’s degree. Med schools—all grad schools—have prereqs for admission. Med schools won’t count an exam equivalent as meeting the requirement.

Example: say you got that 4 on AP Bio and you transferred it into a Pass/Credit for Bio 101 and 102—like the college said you could. Then you go to apply to med school. It says you have to have, say, **one year of Bio**. If your school operates on quarters, that’s 3 quarter courses—Bio 101, 102 and 103 for 15 credits total. For schools that use terms or semesters, it’s probably Bio 101 and 102 as 6 credit courses, so 12 semester credits total.

In either case, using the AP exam score to replace 101 and 102 means, to the med school, that you are MISSING 101 and 102.

People who plan to go on to med school take the Bio classes at the college and don’t transfer the credit. The same mismatch of “it counts at *this* college” but doesn’t count somewhere *else* you enroll can happen if you move from school to school as an undergrad (that is, Bachelor’s) student. Watch how this works:

Say you go from Everett Community College, which gives credit for a 3 on the AP Bio course for Bio &100, to UCLA. UCLA counts AP Bio exam scores 3, 4 and 5 as life science ELECTIVE credit, but not a required course for science majors like Bio 101. You need to take Bio 101 at UCLA to graduate with a science degree.

The other logistical problem you face if you transfer credit or an exam score is having to go into **a more advanced** course to fulfill one of the category requirements. The most common example of this is Calculus. Calc is HARD in high school. It’s even harder in college. So, if your college gives you credit for an AP Calc or AP Calc AB score and you still have more Calc classes you need to take for your major/degree (which is generally true for Engineering, Computer Science and most science degrees), you’re putting yourself into a more advanced level of a harder course than you took in high school.

Even my calc genius kids—and I’ve had them, believe me—opted to start at their colleges’ first Calc course instead of “skip” ahead by using their exam credit or community college credit. If they had transferred the credit in, they would not be allowed to take the first Calc course, since they already “had” it on their transcript.

This drawback can be hard to recognize—sometimes transfer/exam credits can be used to “*waive a requirement*”…which sounds like a no-brainer. BUT—with that requirement “waived” on your record, you may not be allowed to take the courses that meet the requirement and be forced instead to take more advanced courses. So, you waived the Writing requirement—now you can’t take ENGL 100-level writing courses. You have to move on to the 200 level.

ADVISING, again, is a great place to sort all this out—you don’t automatically transfer credits or exam scores, it’s a form and process you go through once you’re enrolled at the college. Going to advising to see what courses/exams would count for what and what that would do for you—as well as what the drawbacks are is a smart move!

So the bottom line for logistics:

If you’re given the chance to take an exam or buy college credit for a course—it’s worth it to look at the *trans-fer e-qui-va-len-cy* of colleges you might apply to. At least you’ll know if it’s likely to be accepted and for what. Later, when you have actually enrolled in that college, you can decide if it makes sense to actually transfer the credit or not.

What’s the other strand that might make you want to skip taking or transferring credit? It’s **your sanity**. Being forced to take an advanced class might not just hurt your GPA in college, it might really destroy your confidence and love for your subject. Or—to state it in the positive way: imagine starting at a college knowing that you’ve already done some or all of the learning and work that an important class requires—because you took AP or a college-in-the-high-school course for it. You sign up for the class and…feel the confidence? The break you’d be giving yourself so you can handle your other classes better?

I have had *hundreds* of kids do this for the writing requirement course I teach. They take it from me as a Jackson class, no college credit. Then they go on to—

I’m about to use words that are often referred to as “explicit language”…but, as a linguist I can say: because I care, I swear—

Kids who took my class—learned what colleges expect for writing, practiced it, got credit for senior English—kick ass in Writing classes in college. In fact, they often email me or stop by and tell me, *you won’t believe it, Baker—the other kids in my classes don’t know anything about how to write for college, how to research, how to cite sources. But I’m an A student*. Some of them would say they barely passed my class—often because it took everything they had to keep their sanity in high school, let alone deal with me!—but it paid off when they needed it to.

So, rather than only focus on the bang for the buck in terms of transfer credits of AP exams and college credits: and I know, we are always hyping how these will help you in the future—consider putting that buck in your personal sanity bank and earning some interest. Future you is going to be really grateful.

On that note: yes, college admissions likes college and AP on your record—but this does not mean you had to take the exam or take the course FOR COLLEGE CREDIT. You challenged yourself with college-level work, which is what they wanted to see. You stayed sane at the same time? Score!

**Podcast 4**

Today’s topic—wrap up transferring!

A recap:

1. Your well-being should be considered alongside the benefits you might get from taking a course for college credit or buying the AP exam.
2. Trans-fer e-qui-val-en-cy can mean you’re done with requirements you don’t enjoy, but proceed carefully: you might have to take a more advanced course instead or actually retake the course if you switch schools, programs or go on to grad school.
3. Community colleges offer lots of benefits that you may not have considered as part of or as your whole college plan—like Associates degree classes that are the same as 4 year schools, with professors not TAs as teachers, convenient schedules and small class sizes.

I want to bring your attention back to community colleges and transferring now. We learned that important phrase *transfer equivalency*. There is a related term that you should know about: **direct transfer agreement**.

A direct transfer agreement is a contract that guarantees a student who finishes certain courses through a community college will be admitted to a particular major/program at another college—which, in some cases, is even in a different state (see Everett Comm College’s list link, you Oregony people). UW has ended its direct transfer to majors with all schools, but, UW Bothell’s incredibly hard to get into Nursing program still has one with Everett. The **direct** is key here: it’s a specific plan with a promised reward at the end. Googling your school’s name and direct transfer agreement is a smart move—you might find out that there is a guaranteed path to the exact major you want at a lower cost than just entering as a freshman.

My California dreamers may not be aware of this, but UC schools have what they call the Transfer Agreement Guarantee with all California community colleges (they also consider transfer students without it—but they don’t have the promised major). If you wish you could go to California, but out of state tuition makes it too hard to do—consider going the California community college then UC route. (See the link of programs). Having spent the time to finish the community college courses in-state, you’ll be qualified for in-state tuition at UC. Bada-boom, bada-bang!

<https://www.everettcc.edu/files/enrollment/transfer/2019ArticulationListREVISED.pdf>

<https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/_assets/files/transfer-requirements/tag-matrix.pdf>

Remember that senior I had who didn’t know that you had to register and plan out your classes in college? I hope you didn’t laugh at their story, because YOU might not know some things about registering for college courses that are absolutely crucial.

Ready?

I want to tell you the story of two universities, both located in the same big state. One was in the West and one was in the East. Really, really REALLY bad economic effects hit the state after the financial crisis in 2008, and the universities’ budgets were cut. How *ever* would they manage?

The decision-makers at the school in the West met in their decision-making room to think hard about the problem. After a while, one said, “I know…let’s admit more students, especially international students since they pay the most in tuition!” “But,” said one probably *junior* decision-maker, squeakily—“won’t we have to offer more sections of classes and pay more instructors to teach the classes if we have more students?” That made the senior decision-makers frown; they did not want to pay more than they were already paying to run the school. Luckily, the smartest decision-maker of them all chimed in, “*Not necessarily*. We can offer the same classes we do now, and students will just have to take the classes that aren’t full. We’ll actually save money on top of making more money that way!”

All the decision-makers at the West school, both the senior and the junior ones, were very impressed at how smart the smartest decision-maker really was.

Meanwhile, at the school in the East, the decision-makers were also talking about what to do. They were hearing that many more applicants wanted to enroll than in years past because the financial crisis had made it too expensive for them to go out of state like they had planned. But, admitting more students would require that the school offer more classes and pay more instructors to teach those classes—even though they were getting less money from the state than they were before.

*Slam*—the head decision-maker’s palm struck the big decision-making table, grabbing all the other decision-makers’ attention. “This is a challenge we must face. I say we *double* the size of the entering class and increase the number of sections to match it—we’ll have to cut expenses everywhere we can—and it won’t be easy—but we have got to be sure those students get their chance to go to college!”

The decision-makers at the school in the East felt a lot of pride—and some fear—but they voted to put the plan in motion. And it worked even better than they had hoped, even with all the cuts they had to make. In fact, the state legislature was so impressed at how the school in the East had handled the budget crisis and helped out the state’s students that the next year they proposed to charter a new medical school—the only one in the East—and to make it part of the school in the East. When the school in the West complained loudly that *it wasn’t fair to their medical school to have another one in the state* and when they testified in hearings that they should run any new med school since they were smarter than the school in the East—the legislators said, “mmmm” and “aaaah” and then passed the charter.

The end.

This story is, of course, true. And it highlights something you need to know about registering for college courses:

Most PUBLIC state universities—all over the country—have the same system for registration. It goes like this:

Grad School students—like me, when I was in the PhD program—get to register before anyone else—like in April for September classes.

Then, seniors get to register—say, 8 weeks before classes start. They get their spots. Then, juniors get to register—6 weeks before. Now those spots are taken, too. Sophomores, 3 weeks before: your turn! They snatch up spots. And…oh, yeah. Who’s left? Yeah—the poor freshman. When the freshmen go to sign up for classes…well, lots of them are already full. *Oh, wait here’s one…at 7am every day, with a prof no one thinks is very good.* Yikes.

Seriously—since the budget crisis *10 years ago*! first years at UW have been telling me that they cannot get into the classes they need in order to go on in their major…sometimes until the last quarter of their freshman year. They had to fill their schedule with electives and third-choice options—some even took the online version of classes even though they knew, like for Math, this would probably mean they’d fail. Because they couldn’t take, say, Bio 101 until the Spring, they had to try to remember everything over the summer to do well in Bio 102 the next Fall (when they were sophomores), then go into 103 in Winter. THEN they can move on to Bio 201, etc.

Do you see what can happen here? Some students have to stay in college longer or take courses outside of their college and transferring them in—paying additional tuition—to finish the 4 years of courses they wanted to take. Not ok.

This is why you research on collegeconfidential and other sources to find out whether at YOUR school, for your major it’s hard to get a spot in classes or not.

It is? Then, you’ve got a reason to take as many AP exams and community college credits as you can transfer in. Why?...the way you become a sophomore is by having a year’s worth of credit—45 quarter credits for UW. If right now you’re 10 credits away from that—look over the transfer equivalency list for the school. Is there an AP exam you can take for some credit? Got some classes that offer credit? Make sure it’ll transfer and then go for it.

Next podcast? Let’s talk about majors, degrees and what employers look at when they hire a college grad.