

Chapter 1. Start with One



Ask Yourself ...

1. Have you met anyone yet who might be the “start” to your relationship-rich education? If you have, how will you deepen this relationship?
2. If you haven’t found that person yet, make a list of people who could potentially be an initial connection for you. If you don’t have specific people in mind, you might just list categories of people (for example, a professor, or a student who has already been admitted to the nursing program). How can you begin to establish connections with this person or these people?
3. Could you help someone else start their relationship building? What could you do to help that person make meaningful connections in college?



Try This!

1. Follow your college on social media to find out about upcoming events. Choose one to attend, whether in person or virtually, then hang around for a few minutes after it ends to chat with people there about the event.
2. Find out where the career services staff are located or how to access online assistance (by searching on your college website), and make an appointment to talk to someone about your career goals.
3. Get to one of your classes early, look for a friendly face, and introduce yourself. A simple, “Hi, I’m ____; it’s nice to meet you” can be enough for an initial connection.

Chapter 2. College Comes with Challenges



Ask Yourself ...

1. What is the most significant challenge you are feeling about making the transition into or your time in college?
2. What is one simple, concrete action you could take as a positive step to address this challenge?
3. Who is one person at your college (a professor, staff member, or peer) who might help you address this challenge? How can you connect with that person?



Try This!

1. Join one or two student clubs or organizations (in person or online) where you think you might “find your people.” It’s usually better to focus on a small number of clubs or organizations where you can really get involved rather than overcommitting to too many groups and making shallower connections.
2. Make it a habit to introduce yourself to peers you meet in class or on campus. Simply learning the names of other people is often the first step in building relationships.
3. Not every college student has concerns about building new relationships with peers. If that describes you, consider taking on a peer leadership role early in your time in college because your interpersonal skills and confidence can help others make connections and find their way.
4. If you have any concerns pertaining to physical or mental health, if you have a learning difference, or if you would like to use another college resource necessary for your success, find the appropriate office (online or on campus) and email or stop by to set up an initial conversation with someone who can help you understand what is available to you as a student.

Chapter 3. You Have What It Takes



Ask Yourself ...

1. Looking back on your life, what are the things you've worked toward and achieved? What did you do (for example, practice every day or ask questions of someone who knows more than you) and what did you believe (for example, "I can do this" and "I won't give up") that made it possible for you to achieve those things? How can you apply those same practices and beliefs to your college experience?
2. If we asked the people who know you best (for instance, your closest friends, family, spouse, kids, or colleagues) to describe your strengths, what would they tell us?
3. Take a moment to reflect on where you want to be after college. What do you imagine yourself doing? With whom may you want to connect or continue being connected with along this journey?



Try This!

1. Take a few minutes to list your strengths in each of the six categories below, and then think about how your different strengths could help you succeed and thrive in college:⁵
 - social (for example, ability to relate to others, ability to maintain relationships for a long time)
 - academic (ability in writing, math, computing, or another subject area)
 - athletic (skill at a team or individual sport)
 - artistic (skill in drawing, singing, music, or other creative pursuits)
 - mechanical (ability to build, assemble, or construct)
 - cultural/spiritual (knowledge and practices)
2. Make a list of the individuals who are already part of your life, and think about whether any these people could support you in additional ways—and how you can express your gratitude for what they've done for you already:
 - Who do you turn to when you need emotional support?
 - Do you have a person in your life that you talk to about values that ground you?
 - Who in your network of relationships shares an important identity with you?
3. Look through your social network connections to find one or more individuals who attend your college (or who know someone who does). Consider sending a private

message to ask someone in your network a question or to see if they would be open to meeting with you to talk about your shared interests.

Chapter 4. Connecting with Peers: Find Your People



Ask Yourself ...

1. Name a peer you admire. What are the qualities of this person that you respect?
2. Do you have a friendship that supports you in a number of overlapping ways (academically, emotionally, practically)? How could you support your friends in overlapping ways?
3. What are three simple ways you can give greater attention to peer relationships? (Examples: put down your phone, use social media more strategically, invite a classmate for coffee after class.)
4. How could you extend relationships with peers in the classroom outside of class? (Examples: form study groups, set up a class group text.)
5. Have you ever had to reassess or cut off a friendship because it was not healthy? What did you learn about yourself from that experience?
6. How do you use social media to enhance meaningful peer relationships? In what ways might your social media use be more healthy?
7. Are your relationships with peers from high school—or other aspects of your life outside of college—nourishing or limiting?



Try This!

1. If you are doing most of your studying alone, try the benefits of a study group, where peers review material and teach each other. These scheduled meetings also help ensure you are devoting your time to academics.
2. Do you have a peer who supports you in more than one dimension of your life (well-being and emotional support, academic support, practical support)? Express gratitude to that person for being such an important friend.
3. Find a student who seems lonely or who appears to be ignored, and introduce yourself.

Chapter 5. Connecting with Professors: In and Out of Class



Ask Yourself ...

1. If you need to contact a professor, how would you reach out? How would you write that email? Do you know how your professor prefers to be addressed? (When in doubt, use “Professor ____.”)
2. Who are your favorite professors—or what are your favorite classes—this year? Would you consider talking to one (or more) of those professors before or after class about what interests and excites you about the course?
3. What are three to five questions you could ask your professor during office hours that are not directly course related? (For example: How did you decide to become a professor? What was the most important thing you did in college to be successful? Did you experience homesickness when you were in college?)



Try This!

1. Find out when one of your professors has office hours by checking the course syllabus. Before you stop by or virtually attend their office hours, write down a couple of questions and bring them with you.
2. Introduce yourself to your professor during one of the first few days of class. You might tell them your name, where you are from, your major or class year (for example, first-year or sophomore), and one thing you are looking forward to in the course.
3. Practice writing an email. Below is one example of how you could write an email to a professor. Yours does not have to look like this, but emails generally follow this format: (1) “Hi Professor _____,” or “Hi Dr. _____,”; (2) introduce yourself if the professor does not know you; (3) state your reason for reaching out; and (4) close with something like “Sincerely, [your name].”

Chapter 6. Connecting with Staff: Allies Everywhere



Ask Yourself ...

1. Who have been your most important allies, mentors, and advisors in college so far? Has one been a staff member? What sorts of things do you talk about? What are the most important things you have learned from them?
2. Do you have a job on or off campus? What are you learning from your supervisor? Have you discussed how your supervisor discovered their career?
3. What one simple step could you take to get to know a staff member (and potential mentor) better?



Try This!

1. Walk into your college library and ask a librarian about the resources and services available through the library. (While you're there, hang around. It's a great place to study and meet people.) Many college librarians teach, and most of them partner with professors to find ways to deepen your learning and teach important skills like information literacy. If you're a fully online student or not yet ready to talk in person, try chatting with a librarian virtually, whether through a chat function on the library website or by sending a quick email to a librarian.
2. Check out student support services on your campus website (such as career services, academic advising, counseling services, and financial aid), and make an in-person or online visit to at least one to explore a question or interest.
3. Schedule some time to talk with your academic advisor so you can get to know each other before planning your next semester's schedule of classes. It's helpful for your advisor to know about your interests and goals.

Chapter 7. Relationship Accelerators



Ask Yourself ...

1. Which relationship accelerators already exist at your college? Are there any you are interested in getting involved with?
2. If you are already participating in a relationship accelerator, how is it going? Do you feel like you are connecting with faculty, staff, or peers more deeply? If so, what are you learning that you can apply to other aspects of your education and life? If not, is there anything you can do to strengthen these relationships?



Try This!

1. Search your college website to find out which relationship accelerators and high-impact practices are available to you. Use the list shown earlier in this chapter ([page 95](#)) to search for relationship accelerators individually. Choose one to learn more about, and email the person who oversees the program. If it's not listed online, ask your advisor or one of your professors where you can learn more.
2. Visit the career center at your college, and ask how you can find and apply to internships, jobs, or graduate or professional school.
3. Email a professor to ask about their research and to see if they ever involve undergraduates in their research projects. You might contact a professor who teaches one of your favorite courses. Or you could search a department's web page to find a professor whose work interests you (as Sam Owusu did), or ask your friends if they know a professor who might be a valuable contact.

Chapter 8. Make the Most of Mentoring Conversations



Ask Yourself ...

1. Can you think of a moment when someone's comment or action moved you from feeling at the margins to a place of belonging? Could you make a comment or take an action that would do this for one of your peers?
2. Describe a time when someone passed off some essential knowledge to you to aid in your adjustment to college. Have you done this for others?
3. When in your life has someone led you to someone or something that made a critical difference? How did they do it?
4. Describe a mentoring conversation when someone has helped you through a low moment.
5. Has a mentoring conversation ever left a legacy for you? How so?



Try This!

1. Choose one of your professors, whether from a class you're currently taking or one you took in another term, and reach out to request a meeting (see sample email at the end of [chapter 5](#)). Bring a couple of questions with you, questions that are not easily answered with a yes or no. You might ask about the professor's career or for advice on how to be a successful college student.
2. Practice having a mentoring conversation with one of your peers. Ask "How are you?" or "What's your favorite class right now? Why?" or "What's the hardest part of this semester for you?" and take the time to listen.

Chapter 9. Building Your Relationship Constellation



Ask Yourself ...

1. How would you describe your current constellation or web of relationships?
2. What do you want your constellation to become?
3. Comparing your current constellation to the one you want to have, what's missing? What's one thing you could do now to help develop the constellation you'd like to have?



Try This!

Danielle Lake, director of Design Thinking at Elon University, created an exercise to help students reflect on a series of questions about four domains of relationships in college: academic/intellectual, emotional/belonging/spiritual/well-being, practical, and becoming an engaged citizen. You will find the full exercise on the book's website (ConnectionsAreEverything.org). For now, take a few minutes to reflect on the people in your life who are (or who could become) part of your constellation in each of these areas. These questions will help you identify them:

ACADEMIC/INTELLECTUAL

1. Which faculty member, peer, or staff member has made you excited about learning, challenged you, and actively engaged you in the learning process?
2. Which faculty member, peer, or staff member has left you feeling inspired, and for what reason?
3. Has a faculty member or supervisor commented on something that you are good at or on work that you have done that shows good potential?
4. Which faculty members do you feel drawn to talk to outside of class?

EMOTIONAL/BELONGING/SPIRITUAL/WELL-BEING

1. Which peers on campus do you most admire and have qualities you want to emulate? How would you describe them (friend, peer mentor, etc.)?
2. Are there staff members on campus that have been champions of your success?
3. Who do you turn to when you need emotional support?

4. Do you have a person in your life that you talk to about values that ground you?
5. Who in your constellation of relationships shares an important identity with you?

PRACTICAL

1. Which people on campus (or elsewhere) have helped you find direction in college?
2. Is there a key individual who has helped you to feel at home on campus and extended a special sense of welcome?
3. If you work on or off campus, is there an individual in your work environment that you consider a mentor, teacher, or confidant?
4. Which peers have helped you develop knowledge and confidence about negotiating the college experience, including academics, clubs and organizations, and social life?

BECOMING AN ENGAGED CITIZEN

1. Who do you talk to about how you can make a difference in your community?
2. Who is a role model for you in terms of being a leader in your community?
3. Who helps you see big issues from a global perspective?
4. Who understands your talents and interests and can help you think about what you want to do with your life after college?
5. Who might be best positioned to help you explore a specific career, perhaps through an internship or field experience?