

STUDENT FEEDBACK

Attending College is Like Running a Marathon by Kenneth B.

Each year the crowd at the starting line gets bigger and bigger, the stakes higher and higher, yet only half will finish the race. Only the elite few start and finish strong, but most every other person must endure pain at every step, struggle up every hill, and dig deep to find the willpower to keep going. Most have never run a marathon before. They just know that once you cross that finish line, great rewards should follow. So they keep their eyes down, follow the shoes of the hundreds of people in front of them, and start the run of their lives.

Family is there to cheer you on from the sidelines, but that doesn't help you get through the system any faster. It's an interesting paradox. Parents strongly encourage you to go to college, but once you're there, you are left to figure it out yourself. How much do parents influence their child's initial choice of college and career?

You still get the side aches of registration and roommates, finances and food, new books and buildings. I was intrigued by the concept of an "informal knowledge network." There must be a way for older students to take younger students under their wing to teach them how things really are — the shortcut hallway, the best professors, where to get a flexible job, the helpful website. What are effective ways for students to network with other students, especially within departments or majors?

As your feet pound the pavement you ask yourself, why am I doing this? All I knew about my future career when I enrolled was that I was good at math, and that I liked science and music. In the

back of my mind I thought, "Maybe I could be the guy who engineers the acoustics in concert halls." All I knew about USU was that they offered me a scholarship and that I could graduate from the engineering program with a master's degree in five years. But after two semesters, the engineering coursework had become so demanding that I was close to losing my scholarship. It seemed like all the other kids had more experience and natural smarts than me. My dream was still there, but I didn't see how I could ever reach it. I just wasn't excited about it anymore. From the website: "When they enroll, students hire a school to help bring a dream alive.... Many students have lofty, impractical career dreams and have no clear path to achieve them." How can students discover their niche without spending years of time and money? How can students understand the realistic steps required for their dream?

Again from the website: "This system, which is the only route by which a student can journey from application to graduation, is, for the most part, built to serve institutional policies that reflect administrative goals and operational realities rather than student needs and demands....The current model of education is based on the need to educate as many people as possible at the cheapest cost and with similar types of knowledge." How can the system framework be altered so that students can gain the knowledge and skills necessary, not just for graduation, but for their niche?

What do we do about the money? The college and the students need money to survive. The college wants students to complete their degree as soon as possible. But the student needs to work to earn money to pay for everything. If the student only does homework, then they lack valuable experiences outside of the classroom. If the student is always at work, their education is prolonged and college life becomes drudgery. There must be a way to integrate the student's need for income and valuable experience and the college's need for employees and well-rounded graduates. How?

I would never attempt to run for four or five hours, especially if the route wasn't clearly marked and I had to find my own path to the finish line. Are you crazy?! Yet many college students intend to do just that: Spend four or five or more years trying to find that finish line, that magical college degree. But there are so many unexpected turns, academic bumps, and administrative roadblocks; it's a wonder that anyone makes it at all.