



What the Best College Students Do

By Ken Bain

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The author of the best-selling book *What the Best College Teachers Do* is back with more humane, doable, and inspiring help, this time for students who want to get the most out of college?and every other educational enterprise, too.

The first thing they should do? Think beyond the transcript. The creative, successful people profiled in this book?college graduates who went on to change the world we live in?aimed higher than straight A's. They used their four years to cultivate habits of thought that would enable them to grow and adapt throughout their lives.

Combining academic research on learning and motivation with insights drawn from interviews with people who have won Nobel Prizes, Emmys, fame, or the admiration of people in their field, Ken Bain identifies the key attitudes that distinguished the best college students from their peers. These individuals started out with the belief that intelligence and ability are expandable, not fixed. This led them to make connections across disciplines, to develop a “meta-cognitive” understanding of their own ways of thinking, and to find ways to negotiate ill-structured problems rather than simply looking for right answers. Intrinsically motivated by their own sense of purpose, they were not demoralized by failure nor overly impressed with conventional notions of success. These movers and shakers didn't achieve success by making success their goal. For them, it was a byproduct of following their intellectual curiosity, solving useful problems, and taking risks in order to learn and grow.

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What the Best College Students Do By Ken Bain Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #51158 in Books
- Published on: 2012-08-27
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.50" h x 5.75" w x 1.25" l, 1.04 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 304 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

Some very good books are worth reading for a few splendid pages alone. **Ken Bain**'s *What the Best College Students Do* is one such book. His interview with the TV satirist Stephen Colbert is revealing both for its insight into Colbert and for its ideas on how higher education ought to work... *What the Best College Students Do* combines interviews with a review of academic research on university learning. The book builds on Bain's 2004 bestseller, *What the Best College Teachers Do*. To some extent, both books state what we already know--that straight A's are nice, but hardly guarantee a happy or productive life. Instead, it takes a personal sense of purpose. The 'best' students are curious risk-takers who make connections across disciplines. By following those instincts--rather than simply chasing 'success'--the best students achieved it. Bain's new book is a wonderful exploration of excellence. (David A. Kaplan *Fortune online* 2012-08-10)

Bain reports on research about highly 'creative,' productive, and socially conscious students and how they negotiated college to attain their goals. They developed a 'deep,' transformative learning orientation, tenaciously pursuing what mattered to them over high grades. He reports that these successful students turned failure/mistakes into learning opportunities; learned to make choices/decisions in murky situations by reflecting and learning from past experience; and maintained self-esteem, which sustained them through failures or setbacks on their way to achieving goals. Bain writes in noncomplex language and artfully weaves scholarly literature and rich narratives from dozens of interviewees into a provocative, interesting, and fast-moving book... This book is informative and beneficial not only for current and future college students, but also professors, researchers, and parents and caregivers who strive to foster successful learning in children. (D. Truty *Choice* 2013-09-01)

The experiences of successful students are certainly burnished by exposure to the length and breadth of a liberal curriculum, but they are spurred by awe and fascination. The best students seek the meaning behind the text, its implications and applications, and how those implications interact with what they have already learned. To think in so rich and robust a way as **Bain** describes--'trying to answer questions or solve problems that they regard as important, intriguing, or just beautiful'--is an aspiration of the first order...A soundly encouraging guide for college students to think deeply and for as long as it takes. (*Kirkus Reviews* 2012-06-15)

What the Best College Students Do delivers on the promise of its title with rich descriptions of what the best college students do, how they think, and what they believe. **Bain** challenges his readers to give up the standard model of short-term success, in favor of deep learning with payoffs in living purposefully and well. I wish every college student, and every parent, could approach higher education with this sage orientation. It isn't just about the 'A.' (Pamela Barnett, Temple University)

We are always telling students to 'find their passion.' Now we have a book that looks at how that happens, and how we can encourage students to use their uniqueness, and be more curious and more resilient. **Ken Bain** can really tell a story and it is very rare for a book based upon research to be such a compelling read. (José Antonio Bowen, Southern Methodist University)

Ken Bain, author of the best-selling *What the Best College Teachers Do*, has written the perfect follow-up. He skillfully weaves together some of the best research about effective learning strategies with moving stories about remarkable life-long learners. Some of them had great teachers. But most of them succeed because of what they did for themselves. If every college teacher read the first book and every student read

this new one, we'd have taken a huge step toward solving some of the great challenges for higher education.
(Thomas Luxon, Dartmouth College)

About the Author

Ken Bain is President of the Best Teachers Institute and a former professor of history at Northwestern, Vanderbilt, the University of Texas, and New York University.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Brian Nelson:

Are you kind of occupied person, only have 10 or 15 minute in your morning to upgrading your mind ability or thinking skill even analytical thinking? Then you have problem with the book as compared to can satisfy your limited time to read it because all this time you only find publication that need more time to be study. What the Best College Students Do can be your answer as it can be read by a person who have those short spare time problems.

Brian Bauer:

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