

Differences between Colleges and High Schools

1. ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT: Includes differences in operational, or logistical, variables.

- Instruction is mainly by lecture
- Reading assignments complement, but do not necessarily duplicate, lectures
- There are usually more students on campus
- There are more social distractions
- Classes meet less frequently and for fewer hours per week
- There is less “busywork”
- The tasks often are less structured and less concrete
- Instructors usually are not trained to teach
- Using the library effectively is more important
- Students are held responsible for what they were supposed to have learned in high school and in other courses
- Class discussions are aimed at raising questions with no clear right or wrong answer
- There is much more emphasis on understanding theory

2. GRADING: Includes differences about how grades are earned.

- Harder work is required for earning a grade of A or B
- The simple completion of an assignment often earns a grade of C or lower
- Many semester grades are based on just two or three test scores
- Student progress usually is not monitored closely by instructors
- Exam questions often are more difficult to predict
- There are more major writing assignments
- Essay exams are more common

3. KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION: Includes differences about how students study and acquire new knowledge and expertise.

- Instructors rarely suggest ways students can learn the material
- Effective reading comprehension skills are more important
- Taking good notes is more important
- Few visual and study aids are provided
- Identifying the main ideas is more important
- Effective communication skills are more important
- Students must independently seek additional and supplementary sources of information
- Students usually must recognize the need for, and initiate requests for, additional help
- Students need to monitor their own progress
- Paying attention in class is more important
- Studying is more important

4. SUPPORT: Includes the significant differences in the amount of support that students receive.

- Relationships with family and friends change
- There is less contact with instructors
- There is less individual feedback
- Instructors sometimes are not student-centered
- There often is more academic competition
- Behavior problems are not tolerated
- The environment sometimes is more impersonal
- Students sometimes are given little direction

5. STRESS: Includes differences in the concerns and perceived pressures students experience.

- There is an increased work load and a faster pace
- Students are more independent and are held accountable for their behavior
- It is more difficult to earn high grades
- An entire course is completed in 16 weeks or less
- Many students experience increased financial responsibilities
- Many students experience new and often increased social pressures
- Students are expected to know what they want from college, classes, life, etc (although help for career exploration and college exploration is available)

6. RESPONSIBILITY: Includes the changes associated with a student's role in high school and college.

- There is an increased number of choices and decisions to be made
- More self-evaluation and monitoring are required
- More independent reading and studying are required
- Students are more responsible for managing their own time and commitments
- Students establish and attain their own goals
- Students determine when they need help and must locate the appropriate resources
- Students are more responsible to whoever is paying for the education (including themselves!)
- Interest in learning often must be generated by the student
- Motivation to succeed often must be generated by the student

Adapted from:

Claire E. Weinstein, Karalee Johnson, Robert Malloch, Scott Ridley, and Paul Schults. Innovation Abstracts (Vol X, No. 21; Sept 30, 1988). National Institute for Staff & Organizational Development (NISOD); University of Texas: Austin, TX 78712.