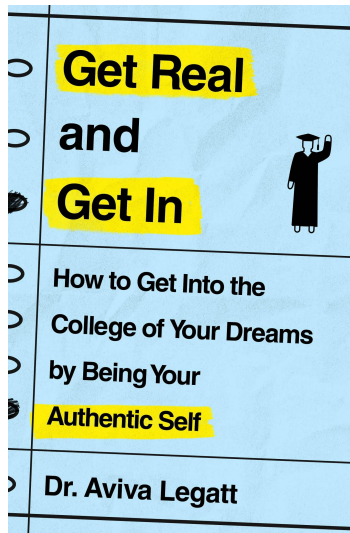


# *Get Real and Get In: How to Get Into the College of Your Dreams by Being Your Authentic Self*

## Bonus Material

by Dr. Aviva Legatt



### Chapter 1: Tom Bilyeu

#### **Three Ways for College Students to Stay Mentally Strong in the Covid Era**

There's no doubt that for college students, this year looks different from any year in history.

Students on college campuses must deal with the health threat posed by Covid-19. They experience a perpetual sense of unease, even when they take safety precautions. Virtual school forces students to contend with mental health difficulties, especially loneliness. According to a February 2021 report from Harvard's Making Caring Common, 61% of young adults are feeling "serious loneliness" (compared to 36% of the population).

But there are ways to stay mentally strong even in the toughest of times. In honor of *Get Real and Get In*, I spoke with Tom Bilyeu, a University of Southern California (USC) film school graduate who is the CEO of Impact Theory, an organization that provides entertainment and educational content, and co-founder of Quest Nutrition, a billion dollar company that manufactures protein-rich products, about how staying focused on his goals allowed him to make the most of a difficult college experience. Tom offered three tips on how college students can stay mentally strong—during the Covid era, or any time.

During high school, Tom's only goal was to attend USC film school, but, at the time, it was statistically harder to get into than Harvard Law, and Tom's SAT scores were less than stellar. Luckily, a USC admissions officer made himself available for lunch. The admissions officer told Tom that if he gained admission to USC and earned top grades for two years, he could reapply for admission to the film school. That's exactly what he did; he earned a near-perfect GPA and was ultimately accepted.

While going out to lunch may seem like a pastime from a bygone era, the way in which Tom chose to connect with a mentor can even be replicated virtually. Think about who you can surround yourself with to gain support and what mentors can help you along the way. Tom Bilyeu's college application process was unorthodox, but eventually he realized his goal of attending USC film school.

To build and benefit from community, many college students are joining the voice and invite-only social media app [Clubhouse](#), and communities like [The Conversationalist](#), which is a Gen-Z focused online forum designed to foster honest and deep discussion.

It's easy to be anonymous when class happens online. But college students should take time to connect with people who can help them achieve their goals, whether on or off-campus. Going for a virtual coffee with a professor, organizing a game night, or making time for a late-night phone conversation with a friend are all good ways to do this.

Find activities that give more energy than they take.

Sitting in front of a screen all day will deplete anyone. '[Zoom fatigue](#)' is now part of everyday life. To counter this, Tom recommends students find an energy-generating activity and pursue it.

For Tom, this activity was filmmaking. As [I previously reported](#), many students are using this time to take gap years and time off to pursue their passions and purposes. For example, one of my clients spent summer 2020 on a break from an Ivy League school as a wildlands firefighter, heroically volunteering to put an end to the tragic fires in Northern California. For someone else, it could be a hobby like swimming, painting, composing music or tennis. In my book, [Get Real and Get In](#), I highlight students who double down on their genuine passions and interests and how that helps them to achieve meaningful goals.

College students can use this time to explore new activities, not just things they've done in the past or classes that look good on a transcript. The spark generated by these activities will enable students to recommit to what they want to do and to rediscover a sense of purpose.

Embrace a Growth Mindset.

Once Tom was admitted to film school, he did well for the first two years. "I thought I had a lot of natural talent," he says. "To me, filmmaking was like painting—you're either a good painter or you're not." Tom was one of four students chosen to create a senior thesis film, but things didn't go as expected. He says he created one of the "worst imaginable" thesis films, so bad that his team cut loops of the film to make fun of it.

That experience helped Tom realize that a fixed mindset wasn't serving him. Such an attitude sees identity as immutable: you are born with a certain amount of motivation, talent, relationship skills, etc. There is nothing you can do to change your abilities. In Tom's case, he believed he was a talented filmmaker, but suddenly he questioned that belief. For a while after his thesis project, Tom lost all confidence in his filmmaking abilities because he didn't believe he could become better.

Yet with a [growth mindset](#), change is possible. Your character traits are not set in stone; rather, you can enhance your own potential with work and persistence. Tom says that embracing a growth mindset was key to his later success as cofounder of a company worth billions of dollars.

This idea is embraced in Adam Grant's latest book, [Think Again](#). Grant argues that learning to question your own opinions and open your mind helps to position you for excellence in life. The ability to unlearn and to rethink is one of the most important skills that we can embody.

It's a safe bet that most college students aren't having the experience they planned for. While the pandemic is taking a toll on everyone's mental health, students can stay mentally strong by connecting with mentors and speaking their needs, engaging in energy-generating activities, and embracing a growth mindset. These skills will serve them well long after graduation.

## Chapter 2: Clarissa Silva

### **How the Common App Can Level the Playing Field for Marginalized Students**

There's a new essay prompt on the [Common App](#), inspired by scientific research into the benefits of gratitude and kindness:

*Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?*

Common App President and CEO Jenny Rickard says the question is motivated by a desire to help students think about something "positive and heartfelt" in the COVID pandemic era. The new essay prompt is one of seven from which students may choose for their 2021-22 college applications.

[The Common App](#) is used for undergraduate admissions by nearly 900 colleges and universities. The idea is that instead of re-entering their information dozens of times for online college applications, students may submit their application in one place and apply to multiple schools. The Common App began in the 1970s, when several colleges decided to band together and make the application process easier for prospective students.

It would be nice if the Common App served as a "one and done" location where students could submit their information once, and then have a completed application--but that is not the case. Universities may request supplemental essays and materials, with more selective universities typically requesting the most additional material. A wide array of universities utilize the Common App; from Ivy League institutions to public universities to HBCUs to small, liberal arts colleges.

Though the Common App has its drawbacks, it serves the worthy purpose of making the college application process more equitable. I recently spoke to [Clarissa Silva](#), a Behavioral Scientist, Researcher, and Relationship Coach with 17 years of experience in mental health, behavioral science, and public health. She is the founder of C Silva Solutions, LLC, a research and consulting firm that provides evidence-based solutions to companies and individuals. Clarissa, the child of immigrants, grew up economically disadvantaged. She spoke with me about the

prohibitive costs of applying to colleges, and how this could bar marginalized students from applying widely.

For herself, Clarissa applied to one school: Hunter College. Later, Clarissa attended graduate school at the University of Michigan and received her MSW. These were the only two schools to which Clarissa applied; she had no safety schools.

According to Clarissa, marginalized communities do not always have the means to invest in multiple rounds of standardized testing, which can boost an applicant's attractiveness to colleges. Similarly, under-resourced students may not have the funds to apply to many different schools. Clarissa recommended that students identify faculty they want to learn from in fields of study that excite them, and do everything they can to make connections at their top-choice schools to boost their chances of acceptance. This is the approach Clarissa took. From the time she was 14, she had been volunteering on the AIDS ward at New York Presbyterian Cornell; Clarissa became interested in how to improve the quality of the patients' lives. Researchers from Hunter were doing caregiving studies at the hospital during Clarissa's volunteer tenure; faculty members invited Clarissa to be part of their research teams. Those relationships with faculty members were in place long before Clarissa began her college apps. Rather than apply broadly, Clarissa went all in on her top choice.

Whether a student is applying to 20 schools or just one, as Clarissa did, it's good to go in with a plan and leverage whatever advantage they have--be that a close connection with a faculty member, a single-minded focus on a certain field of study, or a knack for writing essays.

It's no secret that costs of college applications can quickly add up. A 2020 survey found that the [average cost to apply for college was \\$44](#), with some schools averaging a \$78 application fee; the most expensive applications cost \$100 or more. Application fees are a source of revenue for colleges; in some cases, colleges make [millions a year from rejected applications](#). That's one reason the Common App can level the playing field for marginalized students; 46.5% of the colleges that use the Common App [do not charge an application fee](#).

Whether a student is applying to 20 schools or just one, as Clarissa did, it's good to go in with a plan and leverage whatever advantage they have--be that a close connection with a faculty member, a single-minded focus on a certain field of study, or a knack for writing essays. While the College Board recommends that students apply to [five to eight colleges](#), there is no "perfect" number. The right number of applications--just like the right college choice--can only be determined by the applicant.

## Chapter 3: Deke Sharon

### **The Advantage of the Passion Project in College Admissions**

At elite universities, application rates have risen while [acceptance rates have declined](#). This is due to a number of reasons: incoming freshmen deferring their admission until the fall of 2021 due to the COVID pandemic, the college application process becoming more accessible via the Common App, the entire college touring and application process being moved online, allowing students to consider schools which they may have formerly considered out of reach--just to name a few. The bottom line: it is harder for extremely qualified applicants to get into selective universities.

In the past, admissions panels have put a premium on the “well-rounded” student. The well-rounded student is involved in many extracurriculars, volunteers in the community, and has a perfect GPA and stellar SAT score. Now, many well-rounded students are being turned away. Admissions panels prefer to see applicants who have [engaged with a passion](#) and showed leadership in their chosen field.

[Deke Sharon](#) is someone who took his passion and turned it into an entire industry. Heralded as "The Father of Contemporary A Cappella," he is responsible for the current sound of modern a cappella, having pioneered the modern vocal-instrumental sound in college and subsequently spreading it around the world. Sharon produced "The Sing-Off" on NBC; in addition, Deke served as arranger, on-site music director and vocal producer for Universal's "Pitch Perfect" 1, 2 & 3, starring Anna Kendrick & Rebel Wilson. Yet when Deke discovered a cappella music, there was no foreseeable career in sight.

Deke's love of vocal music started early. He joined the San Francisco Boys Choir when he was nine--the youngest member to ever join the group. Deke toured the country and sang with Pavarotti, all before entering the ninth grade. When Deke was cast as the lead barbershop singer in *The Music Man* in high school, he fell in love with what would become his life's work.

Deke learned to arrange and direct acapella music. When it was time to tour colleges, Deke was interested in only one thing: the quality of the schools' music programs. He toured Yale and Columbia and was turned off by the lackluster music facilities. Said Sharon: "I didn't really care about the brand name; I needed to get what I wanted to get, which was really strong academics but a fully immersive musical experience." Deke eventually chose Tufts University, largely because he was enamored with the school's acapella group, *The Beelzebubs*.

Deke joined *The Beelzebubs* as a sophomore and began arranging popular music for the group to sing. He would stay up late at night, arranging the hottest tunes on the Billboard charts or sending out a newsletter on the a capella scene from his dorm room. Deke chose to focus on his music rather than classes he found dull. He found creative ways to maintain his GPA, including reading all the required material for a class *before* the class began, then showing for the midterm and final.

Said Sharon: "The point of school is to learn. The point of school is not to get good grades. So I would work hard at the things that I cared about and I wouldn't work hard at the things that didn't matter to me."

It's an approach he encourages other students to take. Deke eschews the standard of the well-rounded, straight A student in favor of the student who goes all in on a passion. According to Deke, too many students obsess over things that don't actually matter to them. He gave prospective college applicants three pieces of advice: 1.) Find the place where you fit in and where your talents lie, 2.) Look for a school that has the right feel, and 3.) Don't aim for anyone else's target--aim for your target.

Aiming single-mindedly at his own target has led Deke Sharon to massive success, in a field he essentially created. Said Sharon: "If you know what's right for you and you really want it, then keep going."

## Chapter 4: Elaine Turner

### What Size College is Right For You? Four Questions to Consider

There are plenty of questions to evaluate when choosing a perfect-fit college. Applicants may consider: do I choose a school close to home, or far away? Do I want to go where my high school classmates are going? What extracurriculars does this school offer? What is the department's reputation for my chosen field of study? etc., etc.

[College size](#) is also a determining factor for many students. Consider: are you drawn to a smaller environment where you're more likely to know a higher portion of the student body? Or do you gravitate toward a huge institution and the amenities and opportunities it provides?

While size isn't everything, it can play a major role in shaping a college experience. I recently spoke with [Elaine Turner](#), fashion designer and lifestyle entrepreneur, about her experience going from a high school student in a somewhat homogeneous suburb of Houston to one of tens of thousands of students at the diverse University of Texas. Elaine described her experience as a freshman at [UT Austin](#) as "sink or swim." Going from her self-described "sheltered" high school experience, Elaine wondered if she could navigate the huge university on her own.

Finding her way at UT involved taking a close look at her priorities; for instance, what major she chose (she wanted a smaller program, where she would be able to form relationships with professors and peers) and how involved to be in that major. Ultimately, Elaine found that she *could* find her way within UT; she became connected to others within her fashion major and sorority. The ability to navigate an enormous institution gave Elaine a new-found confidence. This confidence enabled Elaine to cope when her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer her freshman year.

I could relate to Elaine's story. A few weeks into my freshman year at NYU--where there are currently over fifty *thousand* students--the events of September 11 rocked New York City and



the country. The event marked a chaotic, traumatic beginning to my college experience; I had to find my way. The process took a while, but I learned more about myself, and eventually chose to pivot from my undergrad study of music business and begin my career in higher education.

Like Elaine, I found that a big university offered big benefits. Yet the huge university experience is not for everyone. What role should size play in your college choice? Here are four questions to consider:

1. Larger universities are more likely to offer students many areas of study. How committed are you to your chosen major? If you think you're likely to switch--or at least would like more options if you do--a larger university may be a good fit.
2. At a smaller university, you have a better chance of developing close relationships with faculty and advisors; whereas at a large university, expect hundreds of students in a class and the teaching to be done by TA's (especially in gen ed classes). Either scenario can work for you, but consider which learning environment you prefer.
3. How important are the "classic" social elements of college to you--such as Greek life and attending large sporting events? If you want these experiences, a larger university might meet your needs.
4. By contrast, smaller universities can offer more opportunities to try new things. Fewer students can mean less competition for spots in extracurricular activities or high-demand classes.

Ultimately, you can find community within any university: large, mid-sized, or small. Weigh your desires for college against your ultimate career goals, and choose the college that best suits your future vision. For instance, if you hope to become a research assistant and have the opportunities to work on exciting projects, then it wouldn't make sense to attend a smaller school that lacks a well-funded research facility. Likewise, if your dream is to perform on a college a cappella team, then you'll narrow your search to colleges with excellent groups--regardless of size.

Size matters, but it isn't everything. Consider college size as just one of the factors which will help you determine the best school for you.

## Chapter 5: Heather Lu-Lasky

### **Three Ways College Faculty Can Provide a Better Experience for International Students**

Under the Trump administration, the US experienced a [steady three-year decline](#) in the number of international students attending college at US institutions. Under President Biden, that trend is [expected to reverse](#). However, even if international students are more drawn to US universities under Biden, they will still face challenges when they get here.

Heather Lu-Lasky is the founder and CEO of [ChampAmerica](#), a career coaching service for college students. Heather was born in Beijing and attended college there; she then came to the US and received her MBA from Georgetown before working in finance and becoming a Wall Street executive. Heather's own experience of navigating the US higher education system inspired her to form ChampAmerica and coach others through the difficulties she faced.

I recently spoke with Heather, who offered three ways that universities can help provide a better experience for their international students:

- 1. College recruiters should help international students make decisions based on the students' desires for their future careers.**

According to Heather, colleges will often recruit the "best and the brightest" to their universities. But when the students arrive, they don't have a full picture of where that university fits into their future career vision. For example; if a student wishes to pursue a career in finance, they would benefit by being located in New York, Washington DC, or the Tri-State area. Yet if they attend an institution far from the US's "finance hub" and without a clear plan on how to make an entry into a satisfying finance job, the student is likely to return to their home country without receiving the full benefits of their degree.

Colleges can mitigate this problem by providing a full picture of how their degree program fits into the student's career vision. Admissions faculty should also be aware of the time pressures imposed by the student's visa, and how these may impact her career choices.

- 2. Faculty can be mindful of the international students in their classes and limit the use of cultural references**

Heather said she was often confused when a professor would begin class with a comment such as "Did you see the tackle last night?" Many of the students would respond enthusiastically, while Heather had no reference point for what the professor was saying. Heather was committed to learning the nuances of these cultural references and asked about everything unfamiliar to her. Yet many international students may not have the time--nor the bandwidth--to learn US culture on top of their studies.

Faculty can be mindful of the international students in their classrooms and commit to creating an inclusive environment that does not rely on cultural references for academic discussions.

- 3. Advisors must explain the realities of the job market and the importance of networking**

According to Heather, there is a mistaken idea among many international students that "degree equals job." Many students are surprised to learn about factors of the job market that US



students take for granted: the importance of internships, networking, forming relationships with mentors who can present opportunities, etc.

Heather recounted her own experience of overcoming her insecurities about speaking English as her second language and pitching herself at job fair after job fair. While this process helped her gain confidence, she described the job hunt as “traumatic.” Said Heather: international students often don’t understand that “presenting yourself in the right manner to the right people will help you find a job.” College advisors can coach international students and prepare them for this reality; in addition, they can instill in international students the value of seeking out mentors once they *do* land a job.

Uprooting from one’s home country and entering an education system conducted in a non-native language will always present its fair share of challenges. However, colleges can mitigate these challenges and make life easier for their international students at every step in their journeys.

## Chapter 6: Michael Sorrell

### **Amid Troubled Times for HBCUs, One School’s Success Story**

Historically black colleges and universities, or H.B.C.U.s, make up only three percent of four-year colleges in the US. However, [H.B.C.U.s have an outsize impact on the Black community](#), and by consequence, American society: H.B.C.U.s have produced over 80% of the nation’s black judges, as well as 50 percent of its black doctors and teachers, respectively. Many Black students are drawn to H.B.C.U.s for the strong sense of community they provide, and for the opportunity to develop in a university atmosphere without the need to “code switch” for white professors and peers.

Yet as the benefits H.B.C.U.s create for society are undeniable, it is also undeniable that they face significant funding challenges. [H.B.C.U.s rely on federal, state, and local funding](#) more heavily than their non-H.B.C.U. counterparts, and their endowments lag behind non-H.B.C.U. institutions. Federal budget cuts have taken a heavy toll on H.B.C.U.s. And since many students have limited financial resources, alumni may be enthusiastic about their university--but a lower percentage donates to the school as opposed to non-H.B.C.U. grads.

I recently spoke to Michael Sorrell, president of Paul Quinn College, an H.B.C.U located in a working class neighborhood of Dallas. When Sorrell took over as president of Paul Quinn, the school was on the verge of financial ruin. Fourteen years later, Paul Quinn is looking to expand and create a second work-study location in a wealthy North Dallas suburb.

How did Sorrell engineer this turnaround?

Sorrell said that his family always expected him to do great things and lead in the community. While he had an affinity for H.B.C.U.s and friends and family members who attended them, Sorrell attended Oberlin for undergrad; he later earned a law degree and master's in public policy from Duke. Sorrell was a practicing lawyer with no experience in higher education when he took over as president of Paul Quinn; however, he was confident he could do the job. Said Sorrell in his initial interview to the board: "You don't need an academician, you need a salesman, you need someone who cares about the students, someone with credibility. I can do this job."

When Sorrell took over as president, he faced the real possibility that Paul Quinn--which had existed since 1872 and was the first institution of higher learning for African Americans west of the Mississippi--could shut its doors. [Sorrell made an early controversial decision to disband the football team](#), which he viewed as financially untenable. He oversaw the conversion of the football field into the "WE-Over-Me" Farm; here, students work and sell produce from the farm to local businesses. Since Paul Quinn is located in a neighborhood with a lack of food resources, the entire community benefits from the university's farm.

Sorrell also oversaw the transformation of Paul Quinn into a work university; students work 15-16 hours a week and earn money, some of which is applied to their tuition. Most students graduate with less than \$10,000 in student loan debt. Paul Quinn lost 80% of its students in Sorrell's first two years as president and was on the verge of de-accreditation; today, the student body has swelled to over 550 students, and the college has had to build to accommodate the expansion. In August of 2018, Paul Quinn broke ground on its first new building in 40 years.

When I spoke with him, Sorrell said that his time at Oberlin taught him how to be entrepreneurial and create experiences on campus that he wished to have, but that didn't exist yet. That's exactly what he is doing at Paul Quinn: creating a new urban work model of college education. Sorrell has engineered a success story that can serve as a guidepost for other H.B.C.U.s--which remain more vital to the American cultural landscape than ever.

## Chapter 7: Dr. Peter Fader

### Why You Shouldn't Go to College to Get a Job

"Go to college to get a good job."

For most, this thought is so ingrained into the cultural psyche that no one questions it. Numerous studies that compare the earning potential of college grads vs. non-grads seem to support the idea; experts project that [college grads will make one million more](#) over the course of their lifetimes. A study by Harvard researchers noted the rising trend of "[degree inflation](#)," or requiring entry-level workers to have a post-secondary degree even though most *current* employees in the field do not have one. It's easy to argue that a college degree (or two) is necessary for a good job and a good life.

Yet the path from graduation to lucrative career is often not a straight one; and in fact, while many college students say that they're going to college to get a job, their actual motivations reveal a different story. [In a study by Inside Higher Ed](#), students reported four major motivations for choosing their alma mater: to get into the best possible college, to do what was expected of them, to get away from home, and to access a new level of personal growth. Another study conducted by BestColleges indicates that the students who went to college to "get a job" or "do what was expected of them" may have regrets: while 82% of degree holders think that college was a good investment, [62% would change their majors if they could](#). This 62% wished to study something more in line with their passions.

I recently spoke with Peter Fader, the Frances and Pei-Yuan Chia Professor of Marketing at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Fader believes that it's a mistake to attend college with the narrow focus of "getting a job" upon graduation:

*College is not about getting a career, college is about figuring out who you are... You don't want to be taking courses because they might help you when you graduate or help you get that summer job. That's all wrong. You wanna just learn stuff. Because what you'll be doing 20 years later is going to be completely different than whatever you majored in or whatever you're doing right out of school."*

Dr. Fader's career path diverted from his undergraduate major; he came to MIT to study applied mathematics. A professor convinced Dr. Fader to study marketing; he eventually got his Ph.D. in the subject, gained acclaim as a professor, and turned down an offer to teach at Harvard because he thought he would have more opportunities to do interesting research and projects at Wharton. At Wharton, Dr. Fader has held the award of Frances and Pei-Yuan Chia Professor of Marketing since 2003; he's also been named one of 25 Marketing Trailblazers by Advertising Age, and he co-founded Zodiac, a predictive analytics firm, [that was later sold to Nike](#).

Dr. Fader says that since he genuinely enjoys his subject, his students, and his colleagues, he's never had to work a day in his life. To him, college was about laying a strong foundation: discovering what he was passionate about, and then becoming qualified to pursue opportunities related to that passion as they arose. Said Fader: "You want to be in a place that's going to help you learn how to think." Learning how to think and connecting with the right people are the two factors to which Fader attributes his success.

So while college applicants may say they're going to school to get a job--perhaps because they sense this is what the adults around them want to hear--those who attend

with the goals of pursuing their interests and growing as individuals may have a more satisfying experience. Perhaps if we started with those end goals in mind--the deepening and developing of interests and personal growth--the college application process would be less fraught for everyone.

It's an approach Dr. Fader would recommend.