



# How College Works

By Daniel F. Chambliss, Christopher G. Takacs

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Constrained by shrinking budgets, can colleges do more to improve the quality of education? And can students get more out of college without paying higher tuition? Daniel Chambliss and Christopher Takacs conclude that the limited resources of colleges and students need not diminish the undergraduate experience. *How College Works* reveals the surprisingly decisive role that personal relationships play in determining a student's collegiate success, and puts forward a set of small, inexpensive interventions that yield substantial improvements in educational outcomes.

At a liberal arts college in New York, the authors followed a cluster of nearly one hundred students over a span of eight years. The curricular and technological innovations beloved by administrators mattered much less than the professors and peers whom students met, especially early on. At every turning point in students' undergraduate lives, it was the people, not the programs, that proved critical. Great teachers were more important than the topics studied, and even a small number of good friendships--two or three--made a significant difference academically as well as socially.

For most students, college works best when it provides the daily motivation to learn, not just access to information. Improving higher education means focusing on the quality of a student's relationships with mentors and classmates, for when students form the right bonds, they make the most of their education.

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## Editorial Review

### Review

*How College Works* is a wonderful book--both rigorous and a pleasure to read. A core insight shines through--the reminder that even with the proliferation of technology, human interactions remain central to most students' college experience. (Richard Light, author of *Making the Most of College*)

The book shares the narrative of the student experience, what *happens* to students as they move through their educations, all the way from arrival to graduation. This is an important distinction. [**Chambliss** and **Takacs**] do not try to measure what students have learned, but what it is like to live through college, and what those experiences mean both during the time at school, as well as going forward. (John Warner *Inside Higher Ed* 2014-02-03)

There is a lot to like about *How College Works*. (Mary Taylor Huber *Change* 2014-09-01)

### About the Author

Daniel F. Chambliss is Eugene M. Tobin Distinguished Professor of Sociology at Hamilton College.

Christopher G. Takacs is a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at the University of Chicago.

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