

**Solving the small problems and nurturing the important ones:
A vision of academic success**

An educator should embody the Renaissance ideal of a cultured, well-educated person. He must inspire, challenge, and support students. This requires a broad range of interests, an open and trustworthy nature, strong listening skills, and the ability to identify and solve problems. But to truly inspire, an educator needs to surprise students—to connect seemingly disparate bits of information in meaningful and beautiful patterns, weaving together the humanities and sciences in novel ways, with intellectual rigor and a sense of playfulness. This is the ideal toward which I strive.

“Try. Fail. Fail *better*,” Samuel Beckett once advised actors performing “Waiting for Godot.” I help students understand what that means. Taking risks and failing are fundamental to success but they are rarely lauded.

For example, once they experience the rigors of college, many talented students find themselves working harder with unsatisfying results. They may not recognize the cause of their difficulties and may lose confidence. Often, they simply need to learn how to work smarter, to hone their time management and study skills. As an educational psychologist and a mentor, I can help them identify, learn, and practice the strategies they need to succeed—in college, and later in life.

Over the years I have worked and taught in the arts, the social sciences, and the physical and natural sciences. I am a historian, an actor, a computer technologist, and a psychologist. I am a photographer and a storyteller. These diverse perspectives help me to connect with students and to encourage them to think critically, and to fearlessly explore the rich cultural and intellectual opportunities presented by their college.

The greatest advantage of a liberal arts college is the way it embraces connections between many disciplines. An educator’s approach to advising must reflect this philosophy naturally. In teaching psychology, I often discuss nanotechnology, sculpture, music, engineering, and literature. As an advisor, I encourage students to delve into unfamiliar subjects and different perspectives, so they can envision the familiar in new ways.

Like the Renaissance individuals of the past, and those yet among us, we all must discover our passions, and enhance our skills and understanding to contribute to our own growth and to the betterment of our world.

—William S. Altman