

Flunking college is not as easy as it sounds

Santiago Canyon College teacher Cari Cannon writes the how-to book for scholastic unsuccess.

By TOM GRAVES ORANGE CITY NEWS

Psychology teacher Cari Cannon would love it if every college student who read her study skills book stayed as far away from her advice as possible.

The associate professor at Santiago Canyon College wrote “How to Flunk Out of a Community College: 101 Surefire Strategies That Guarantee Failure.”

The cheeky title sets the tone for its often sarcastic content, such as strategy number 2: “Believe You’re a National Idol,” or number 13: “Assume It’s Your Professor’s Job to Go Over the Stuff You Missed.”

Cannon found that a bit of barbed writing and reverse psychology gets students’ attention.

“There are those who might say, ‘why couldn’t it be more positive, and talk about ways to succeed in college?’ ” Cannon said. “There are hundreds of those books. Apparently, they aren’t working.”

As a trend, students Cannon sees are getting less serious about schoolwork.

“They are more serious about getting the titles of success but less expectant about earning those things,” Cannon said. “They feel entitled to those things. They need to know that true happiness comes from earning those things.”

After being a “pretty flakey high school student” at Canyon High, Cannon saw how easy it was to fall behind at the college level at Fullerton College. Moving on to UCLA, Cannon noticed she was out of sync with students who had been there two years, knew the campus and had better access to psychology professors.

She’d like her own students to avoid the same pitfalls, most of which fall under categories of bad study skills, poor time management, careless attitudes and the ever-growing culture of victimhood.

What seems to bother Cannon most is a supreme lack of effort on the part of many students.

“All my lectures are on Power Point,” Cannon said. “I’m doing a show up there with video vignettes. I give it my all. I expect them to do their work and read. I want them to do well by earning it.”

The academic publishing house Kendall/Hunt Publishing produced the second edition last year. Cannon said it often gets used in study-skills and academic counseling classes at colleges nationwide.

“Students gave positive feedback and they think it’s funny,” Cannon said.

“She doesn’t BS or sugarcoat things,” said SCC student James Head, who worked for Cannon as a teacher’s assistant. “It’s kind of like what she preached in class. It’s more of a comedic approach because it’s how to flunk out.”

Truth be told, Cannon follows up the how-to-fail tip titles with examples of bad habits and then gives out more positive advice. That part, she loves seeing students

follow.

“The most exciting thing is when they come back and say ‘I enjoyed school’ and ‘This time I’m serious.’ ” she said.

The book reflects what Cannon tries to draw out of students in class, one student said.

“She’s wants people to find out what their true motivation is,” said SCC sophomore Kenneth Carey. “She asks students ‘what in life excites you?’ ”

Cannon has moved on to other writing projects but said she is open to polishing her book on flunking college for a third edition.

“I might fine-tune it a little bit,” she said. “But if we didn’t need the book, that would be great.”

EXHIBIT F: Psychology teacher and Orange resident Cari Cannon used a cheeky approach to breaking students’ bad habits in her book “How to Flunk Out of a Community College.”

Ready, set, fail

Here are a few of Cari Cannon's tips and samples from her book on how to flunk community college. Under each title, the author describes what students often do wrong and follows up with ways to avoid the mistakes.

- ▶ **Strategy no. 48: Remain Computer Illiterate:** “It’s important for students to have what educators like to call information competency. This is the ability to use the Internet as a research tool, to do simple searches and to retrieve documents. Computers aren’t going away, so get comfortable with them.”
- ▶ **Strategy no. 55: Practice Perfectionism:** “I believe it’s a good idea to set high standards for yourself. However, if the standards are set so high that you’re sure to fail, then it’s a mistake. I have had at least a handful of students who dropped one of my courses because they were getting a B.”
- ▶ **Strategy no. 61: Forget the Learning and Focus Only on the Grade:** “Some students are focused only on what will be on the exam and have no interest in learning. If this describes you, try to keep this a secret from your professors, who hope you have a passion for knowledge and learning for its own sake.”

-“How to Flunk Out of a Community College” is published by Kendall/Hunt Publishing at www.kendallhunt.com.