

Black Hawk College psychology professor Dr. Traci Davis is using her expertise and experience to help students starting college be more prepared.

Inspiration happens

During the pandemic, Dr. Davis found herself trying to navigate the new normal of teaching entirely online.

“Teaching on Zoom is very different than teaching in the classroom. Learning on Zoom is very different as well, and I think there is a lot of research going on about what that did to students,” she said.

It was during an early morning class that Dr. Davis noticed a student was turned sideways in his little box on Zoom. She stopped class to ask him if everything was okay because he did not seem to be paying attention to the lecture.

He turned toward the camera and whispered that he was in a duck blind with his dad. She laughed and told him to enjoy the moment with his dad and began lecturing again.

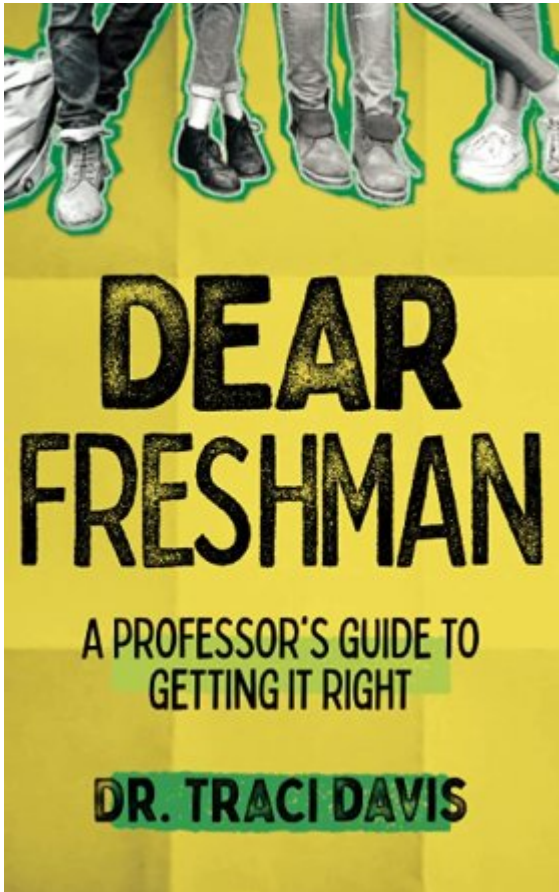
This stood out to her because he was getting a completely different version of college than he normally would have without the pandemic.

After class ended that day, Dr. Davis opened up a Word document and typed the words, “Dear freshman.”

“What I figured out along the way is that there are so many soft social skills that people are learning while they go to school, and if they weren’t going to school, they weren’t going to pick up those skills,” she said.

An idea becomes reality

After the first day of writing, she expected maybe to add it to the syllabus for her class but didn’t have any plans for it after that.



When her classes finished the next day, she had a few more thoughts to jot down in that Word document. She kept adding to it and it eventually reached more than 30 pages. That is when she knew it was a book.

She decided it was time to let others read it so she sent the draft to two colleagues she knew would have different critiques – one who was going to be nice no matter what and another who was going to be honest if it weren't good.

"I heard almost immediately from the person who would give me a pat on the back. They said it was great," she said.

The other colleague hadn't said anything after about a week and that is when Dr. Davis started to get worried.

"It's a very different form of vulnerability that I am used to at work. We talk all the time about our teaching practices but there is just a lot of me in this book," she said.

Getting the courage to continue

Her phone rang and she answered with, “How bad is it?” Her colleague said, “I need every one of my freshmen to read this book.”

That confidence from her colleagues gave her the courage to proceed with getting the book published.

During the editing process, five more people read through the book to provide feedback. That included four faculty members who said they had experienced the same thing with new students.

“We’re all seeing students really struggle reading textbooks, we’re seeing them struggle to get through the syllabus and to understand a rubric,” Dr. Davis said.

Since the book was released students have been telling her how much it has helped them. One thing that has stood out to her is how many of them tell her that their life is a lot like hers when she was a student.

Where is it available?

The book “Dear Freshman: A Professor’s Guide to Getting It Right” is available in the BHC bookstores and can be purchased online on Amazon. It has chapters on writing formal emails, getting registered for classes, and helpful resources that will help students throughout college.

Dr. Davis says that the book will always be changing as the important information for freshmen changes. Her goal is to always have it as a resource for those who are starting college.

“I want to make sure the book can keep growing as the freshmen change,” she said.

You can watch a full interview with Dr. Davis on our [BHC YouTube](#).

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