

# The fear to fail: my opinion on the student fear factor by rebecca cox

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## **The Fear of Failure Is Very Common**

“ Regardless of age, ethnicity, academic background, educational goals, or the path to college, students reveal tremendous anxiety about their educational trajectories and ability to succeed in college” (Cox 20). Change in life can be scary, but it is something that everyone must face at a certain point. The transition from high school to college is a drastic change that brings forth more challenges but also more opportunities as well. Author Rebecca D. Cox highlights these points in her book titled “ The Student Fear Factor” where she details encounters with students and professors. By reading through a small portion of her book, it is clear that anxiety and the fear of failure are evident in modern-day classrooms. Along with her commentary, Cox also includes stories from multiple first-year college students who struggle with these exact issues. Whether it be the fear of failing or intimidation of professors, Cox details how anxiety plays a huge role in this important transition from high school to college. The college fear factor prohibits students from passing in school by instilling a lack of confidence.

## **The Pressures and Nervousness of Starting School**

When writing this book, author Rebecca D. Cox thoroughly highlights and explains the many challenges and issues that college students are facing nowadays. She begins by talking about how some students, for example, straight-A high school students, were feeling the pressures of college, causing them to not do as well as expected. Cox then highlights the main fears that students have, starting off with anxiety. She goes into detail and

describes a student's experience with feeling the pressures and nervousness of starting school. Nikki, a college student that Cox interviewed in her book stated that "[she was] so unsure of what to expect at the next level. It was scary to come here — [she] wasn't sure what to expect" (Cox 30). This is a mindset that multiple people, including myself, all have. The fear of not knowing what to expect causes the most anxiety among college students.

The next point covered in her book is low self-confidence. Cox goes into detail and describes how "even students who did not explicitly discuss past failures revealed an underlying lack of confidence" (25). This goes on to show that everyone was feeling this pressure to succeed, it was shared amongst new college students. Along with showing the fears of college, Cox also discusses different coping methods that students can use in order to help them out throughout their lives. She talks about scaling back, redefining success and failures, and lastly, not doing any formal assessments. Cox provides the reader with examples of students who have tried these methods and it seems as if the first two are the best. By scaling back and redefining success and failure, one can take a lot of stress off of their shoulders and work towards the path of success.

## **My Personal Experience**

As I read through this book, I caught many important details that I can personally relate to. The first time that I had to deal with anxiety was during my freshman year of high school. When school first started, I hadn't known what to expect. I was a bright-eyed, naive freshman who did his best to earn good grades in school. At first, the workload was overwhelming, and it took a

while to get used to it. I had to learn to build new skills that would help me achieve success. As more and more time passed, I learned strategies and ways to cope with the workload. I realized that in doing this, I wasn't alone. I wasn't the only teenager who struggled with their first year of high school. As I looked around, my classmates and peers also felt the anxiety and pressure of succeeding that I had felt. I knew that I wanted to make my high school experience a great one. In order to do this, I had to implement changes in my life to help set myself up for a bright future. After the first week or two of high school, I felt as if I could no longer do it. The workload was overwhelming and I felt as if there was no way that I was going to pass any of my classes. I truly wish I knew about these fear management strategies. They would have helped me out, especially with the transition from middle school to high school. The classes I took were also more difficult and demanded more work as time went on. For example, I took an advanced English course in which I had to write multiple different essays based on the books that we read. I vividly remember the first essay we ever had to write and how much anxiety I had while constructing it. I knew nothing about the teacher's preferences or how she graded work. I was scared to walk into class the day it was due and hand it to my teacher. After I had finally mustered the courage to hand her my final draft, my anxiety had skyrocketed up until the day it was graded. When we finally received the grades, I was scared to check what was written on my paper. When I finally opened my eyes, a wave of relief came over me. I had received an "A." After that experience, I realized that I should have more confidence in myself and be proud of what I turned in. When reading through an excerpt from Rebecca

Cox's book, it seems as if this is what many students struggle with. Turning in their very first essay because they feel as if it isn't good enough. It is important to be confident in yourself because, as it turned out in my situation, you could have something well written, you just don't know it until you try it.

Another experience that I closely relate to Cox's book on the college fear factor is my very first day of college. I remember this day as if it were yesterday, even though it hasn't even been 3 weeks since I started. Anxiety had the best of me. It was a new start and a very different experience than high school. My high school had about 1,300 students at most while my college is around 8,000. My anxiety stacked with this intimidation was not a good combination. I wasn't sure if I would even succeed in college. My major is Nursing, the hardest out of the whole university. Plain and simple, I was scared to fail. I was afraid that one day I had to go up to my parents and tell them that I couldn't do it anymore. The first few days were hard, I had to get used to managing my own time and balancing my life out. On top of all this, I had moved out of my house and into an apartment directly across the street from my school at the age of 17. The stress of school was getting to me and I began to feel the pressure of succeeding. I knew that if I wanted to reach my goal I had to overcome these fears and work through them. I began thinking of ways to ease the workload on myself. This is where I learned about fear management strategies. As stated in the book "The College Fear Factor," author Rebecca D. Cox suggests that "one strategy consisted of scaling back" (33). This is exactly what I did. I knew that by scaling back and taking

things one day at a time, I could not only improve my life but also help with my anxiety and fear of failure. I had talked to my sisters after the first week of college and that is the exact advice that I was given. I was told to “slow down” and “take deep breaths.” The workload in college only seems overwhelming if you make it overwhelming. I began taking things day by day, not thinking about the final in-class essay I had to write in English, or the midterm for statistics. It felt like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders and my self-confidence slowly began to rise. This wasn't a one-day thing however, it took me a few days to minimize my stress and teach myself that I had to take things one day at a time. I feel more comfortable, especially after reading the stories of other students in Cox's book who are experiencing the same fear and anxiety that I had to go through when I first began college.

To this day I still struggle with some anxiety. After reading through the excerpt from Cox's book, I learned ways to help cope with the college workload. I am slowly and steadily getting used to college; however, I am aware that this will take time. I will need to learn new coping methods and turn this into a positive experience for myself. I want to look back at my college days and think about those great moments I had with friends and professors. As I read through the articles and write this essay, I have realized a major flaw in myself. I dislike talking to others about my struggles because I feel as if I am a burden amongst them. This needs to change. Expressing your emotions is something that everyone does, and it can help sometimes. For example, in Cox's book, she states how students feel as if they cannot

approach their professors because they feel intimidated by them. I want to change this about myself. I don't want to feel intimidated by my professor, I want to be able to talk to them, ask any questions I may have, and build a great relationship with them. In reality, professors are there to teach us and help us succeed as students. By talking to others and developing a good relationship with them, I can improve myself as a person and set myself up for a great future. When it comes to Nursing, there is a lot you have to know. I feel as if by working on this trait of learning to approach others, it can prove very beneficial to me. For example, if I have a question, I have to talk to my professor and ask them about it in order to learn and apply it to real-life scenarios. By reading through "The College Fear Factor," I have made multiple connections to my own life and realized new things about myself that I can fix as well as work on for the future. I look forward to taking this experience and using it to set myself up for success.

## **Works Cited**

1. Cox, Rebecca D. *The College Fear Factor: How Students And Professors Misunderstand One Another*. Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 2009. Print.