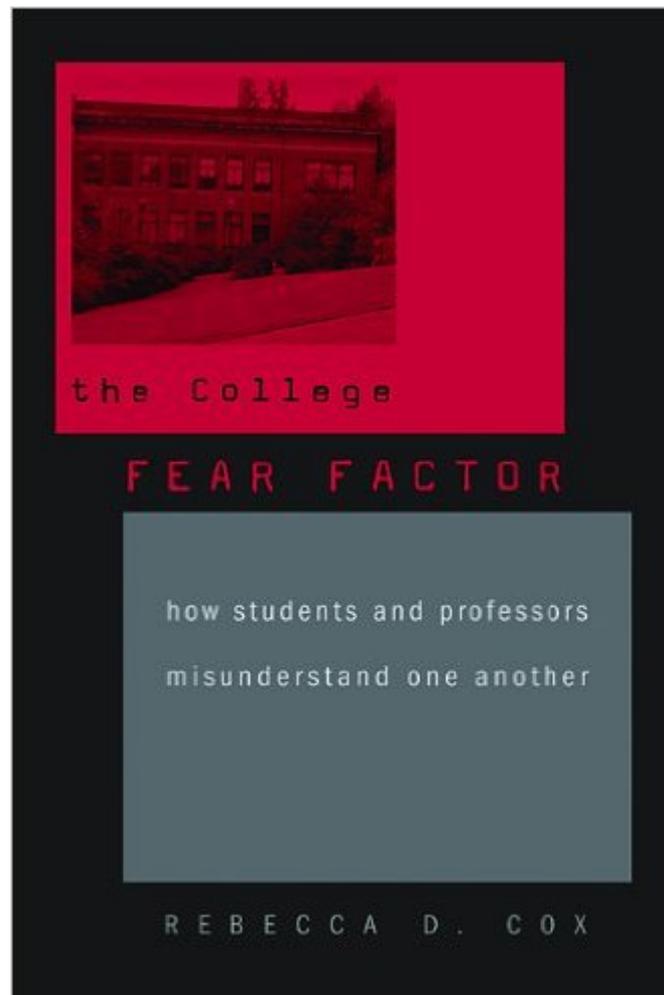


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# The College Fear Factor: How Students And Professors Misunderstand One Another



## Synopsis

They're not the students strolling across the bucolic liberal arts campuses where their grandfathers played football. They are first-generation college students—children of immigrants and blue-collar workers—who know that their hopes for success hinge on a degree. But college is expensive, unfamiliar, and intimidating. Inexperienced students expect tough classes and demanding, remote faculty. They may not know what an assignment means, what a score indicates, or that a single grade is not a definitive measure of ability. And they certainly don't feel entitled to be there. They do not presume success, and if they have a problem, they don't expect to receive help or even a second chance. Rebecca D. Cox draws on five years of interviews and observations at community colleges. She shows how students and their instructors misunderstand and ultimately fail one another, despite good intentions. Most memorably, she describes how easily students can feel defeated—by their real-world responsibilities and by the demands of college—and come to conclude that they just don't belong there after all. Eye-opening even for experienced faculty and administrators, *The College Fear Factor* reveals how the traditional college culture can actually pose obstacles to students' success, and suggests strategies for effectively explaining academic expectations.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book addresses a big gap in our understanding of effective college teaching by examining how students approach teaching. Using qualitative data from four studies, Cox shows how students'

expectations, their fears, the way they interpret instruction, their external commitments and their learning strategies all play a major role in the success of teaching. We teachers focus so much on pedagogical approaches, but the way the students interpret and respond to the pedagogy can undermine any pedagogical approach. The result can be disappointment for both teachers and students. The teacher then blames the pedagogy, the students, or high schools for not preparing students adequately. The student blames the teacher or the subject. In the book, Cox describes a case that I found particularly instructive where both teacher and student were well intentioned and trying hard, but due to how the students misconstrued the teacher's pedagogy, the class failed. Cox's emphasis is on community college students, but there is plenty that applies to all college teaching. The book reminded me of Bain's "What the College Teachers Do" because clearly an effective teacher must know how to communicate the goals of a class and correct student misconceptions about both the content and the pedagogy. It also reminded me of Light's "Making the Most of College: Students Speak their Minds" because it examines the student perspective, but this goes much more into depth about teaching. Although the book examines the student perspective on teaching, it really isn't a book for college students to read who want to overcome their fears and anxieties. There are better books for that. The book doesn't offer easy answers, but it does raise many important questions relevant to teaching. I recommend this book to teachers and administrators who care about effective teaching and student retention.

The College Fear Factor is very well written and provocative. The book is obviously a product of countless hours of field research in which extensive classroom observations and interviews reveal previously unexplored teaching and learning interactions between students and their professors. The author provides a clear and persuasive analysis of how underlying student fears lead to self-destructive behavior, and how professors' misunderstandings of these fears lead to frustration and less than optimal student outcomes. Clear prose and the author's success in weaving students' personalities throughout the analysis provide "story lines" that make for captivating reading! The book would give any educator interested in honing their craft a deeper understanding of the importance of their students' perceptions in the learning process. As importantly, higher education practitioners involved in retention related work would glean important insights from the book regarding the role of relationships in teaching, learning, and student success.

How can community colleges avoid "cooling out the mark" for the millions of students who attend and, far too often, quit? Rebecca Cox has written an effective sequel to Mike Rose's Lives on the

Boundary, explaining what terrifies and discourages students at two-year colleges, students who desperately need to succeed. Working from observations and interviews at a number of community colleges, Cox argues that successful community-college faculty need both to project professional expertise and make encouraging, trusting bonds with students. She also argues that to break the cycle where students buy into education as transmission of facts and undermine their own college experience, colleges must change their orientation.

Since I came up through the public school system and graduated from both a community college and state college there really weren't any great revelations. I teach at a community college and the book was more of a confirmation of the challenges students attending a community college from income, personal issues with family or friends, or trying to make ends meet. This would be more appropriate for the stoic college instructor / professor.

I'll go beyond the other reviewer and say this book offers great insights not just for community college instructors, but for anyone teaching in higher education. This book is written in a bit of an academic tone but still doesn't feel like a chore to read. Tons of good quotes from students and insights that you might not have thought of. For example, you might think students would love pass/fail assignments, but for some, it tends to motivate them less because they aren't going for "A" work, they're just doing enough to get a "pass."

amazing book! I watched Rebecca Cox at a conference and thought her ideas were critical for college teachers. Reading the book reaffirmed my initial impressions. It has changed the way I talk to my students (community college), and the way I approach problems in the classroom. Almost without fail, when I mention students feeling like they don't belong in college, a few heads will gently nod - they hear someone speaking what they feel. We've also used it our college as part of our Growth Mindset (Dweck) programs because it helps teachers address student fear of risk.

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