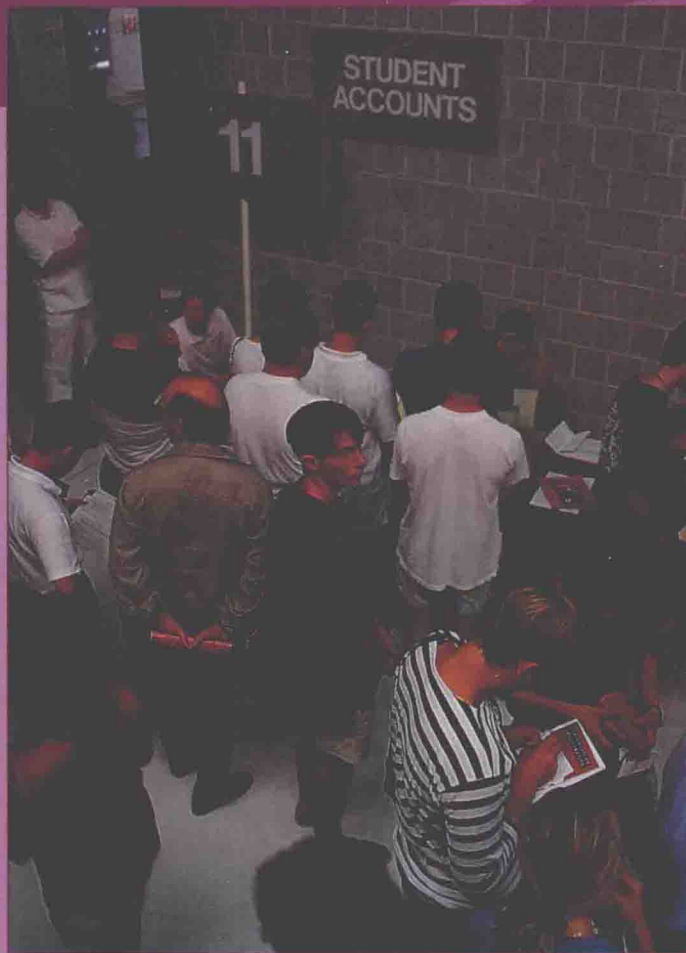


# GETTING ORIENTED



**Rhonda Holt Atkinson**  
**Debbie Guice Longman**

# *Getting Oriented*

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**Rhonda Holt Atkinson**  
Louisiana State University

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**Debbie Guice Longman**  
Southeastern Louisiana University

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**To my parents, Edward and Yvonne Holt,**  
*whose love and support got me going in post-secondary education,*  
**to my husband, Tom Atkinson,**  
*who kept me going in post-secondary education,*  
**and to my daughter, Rachel Atkinson,**  
*who simply keeps me going.*

*Rhonda Holt Atkinson*

*I dedicate my work on Getting Oriented*  
*to my brother,*  
**Larry Keith Guice**  
*a "Bubba" only in the fraternal*  
*and best sense of the word,*  
*with love, respect, and admiration.*

*Debbie Guice Longman*

# Preface

Since 1984, we have written a variety of textbooks which focused on reading development (*Reading Enhancement and Development; Vocabulary for College and Beyond*) and learning strategies (*College Learning and Study Skills; Study Methods and Reading Techniques*). Still, something seemed to be missing.

At our institutions, we encountered the full range of students—from the Honors Division to the developmental student, from the traditional, just-graduated-from-high-school student to the nontraditional, been-working-for-twenty-years student, from new freshmen to seasoned graduate students, and everything in between. Early in our post-secondary teaching careers, we thought we could predict who might succeed and who might not. And, we were right . . . but only some of the time. We saw students who possessed every indicator of academic potential—good grades, high ACT/SAT scores and, yet, they failed to academically live up to that potential and left the institution. We saw other students who came to the post-secondary campus with little but their dreams ultimately graduate. What made the difference?

We believe two factors contribute to your college success. First, you, as a student, need to operate from a position of strength and we believe that knowledge—of yourself, your coursework, and the post-secondary environment—gives you that strength. Thus, this text provides you with the information and techniques you need to make sense of yourself, your coursework, and your institution. Second, you need to decide what to do with that knowledge. That is the premise of this text. Everything you do as a college student—and, indeed, everything you do in life—is a decision. The better you become at decision-making, the more control you have over your successes and failures. This text presents you with *SOLVE*, a process for decision-making. In the first three steps of *SOLVE*, you identify situations which require decisions, generate available options and determine the logical consequences of each option. Making a decision, however, involves more than knowing what to do; you must act on a choice and venture a risk (Step 4). In the final step of *SOLVE* you evaluate your decision and determine if your choice needs rethinking.

Every chapter of *Getting Oriented (GO)* helps you look at yourself and your institution from this decision-making perspective. Each chapter begins with an assessment—questions to help you focus on your decision-making process for that area. We hope that the content of each chapter and the activities within it help analyze you and your post-secondary situations more fully and that you become more cognizant of the choices before you and the decisions to be made. Group activities provide you with occasions to discuss ideas with others. Journal options

provide you with opportunities to record your ideas for further consideration and for future reference. A reassessment at the end of each chapter refocuses your attention on your decision-making strategy in a specific area and on ways in which your thinking may have changed as a result of the content of the chapter or your discussions with others in the class.

As authors, we relied on a number of individuals who helped us SOLVE our writing problems and make decisions about this text. First, we want to thank the following individuals who served as reviewers for *GO*:

Karen C. Catalano	New York Military Academy
Donald C. Frament	Hudson Valley Community College
Suzy Hampton	University of Montana
Mary Kay Matisheck	Iowa Central Community College
Virginia Mears	Youngstown State University
Faye Z. Ross	Philadelphia College of Textiles & Science
Kitty Slover	Garden City Community College
Dr. Karen G. Smith	Rutgers University
Beverly D. Whitaker	Maple Woods Community College
Karen P. Williams	West Virginia State College

We especially thank Karen Coltharp Catalano, who agreed to review this text at our request and whose dedication to a project inspires us and whose understanding of the post-secondary student enlightens us.

Second, we gratefully acknowledge our many colleagues at Louisiana State University and Southeastern Louisiana University who supported and encouraged throughout this process. We especially recognize Julie Breeden for her unfailing enthusiasm, professional expertise, and creative efforts in the development of an instructor's manual and Tommy and Eileen Lacour for their efforts in helping us secure permissions for materials within the text. Eileen was a friend whose smile now graces God's heaven. We miss her here.

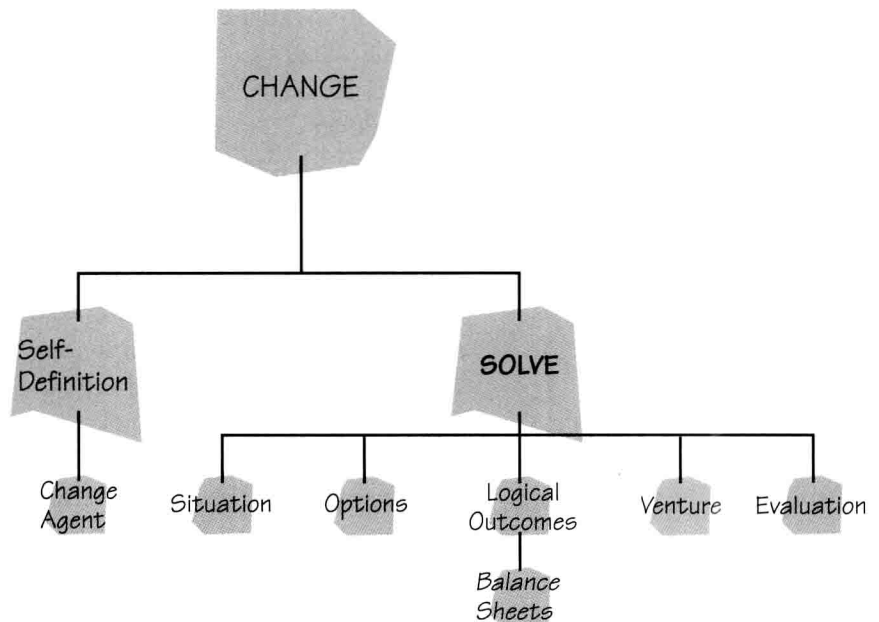
Third, we thank our families and friends for their understanding and patience as we worked on this project. We would not have been able to complete *GO* without their assistance and support.

Finally, last but certainly not least, we thank our West "family." They include Clark Baxter, whose support encourages us, Stacy Lenzen, whose expertise awes us, and Linda Poirier whose pitch-hitting saved the game. While we don't always work directly with many of the other West staff, we know a project like this is impossible without their assistance, and we appreciate their efforts.

While your success as a post-secondary student is our immediate goal, we hope that the strategies you learn from this text and this course help you *Get Oriented* to the decisions you make now and all the decisions you will make in the future. Good luck and *GO!*

# The Adventure of Change: Introduction to Decision Making

## MAP OF CONCEPTS



## GET GOING

A. L. Kitselman once said, *"The words 'I am . . . ' are potent words; be careful what you hitch them to. The thing you're claiming has a way of reaching back and claiming you."* What words do you use to describe yourself? "I am a high school graduate?" "I am a son or daughter?" "I am a parent?" "I am an employee?" "I am a college student?" Chapter 1, "The Adventure of Change: Introduction to Decision Making," is designed to help you **Get Oriented** as your college experience reaches out and claims you. It focuses on change and your role in the decisions you make.

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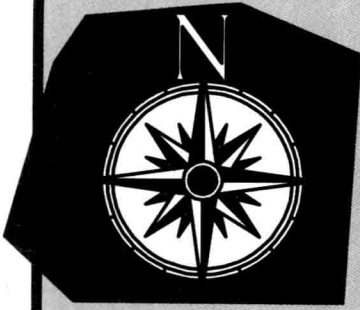
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## GETTING ORIENTED TO CHANGE: SELF-ASSESSMENT

Respond to the following on a separate sheet of paper. Then share your answers to the Self-Assessment with your group. What similarities and differences do you discover among your group's answers? What factors might contribute to these similarities?

1. What changes do you think you face or will face as a college student? How do you plan to adjust to those changes?
2. Describe a change you made as the result of your adjustment to college life. How satisfied were you with the outcome of that change? Did you make the change based on a conscious decision? If so, describe the process you used to make that decision.



## CHAPTER OUTLINE

- I. Change agent responsibilities
- II. Thinking about decisions:  
*SOLVE*
  - A. **S:** *Identify situations*
  - B. **O:** *Generate options*
  - C. **L:** *Hypothesize logical consequences*
  - D. **V:** *Venture into risk taking*
  - E. **E:** *Evaluate your decision*

## OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to do the following:

- Identify the responsibilities you assume as a change agent in postsecondary education.
- Use *SOLVE* to make decisions.



## FYI

### *Welcome to Postsecondary Education!*

Freshmen, transfer students, returning students, and all others making a new start, I want to tell you three things: First, the undergraduate college or university is a strange place. Second, there is a reason why it has to be the way it is. Last, you can graduate, or leave, different than you are today.

The strangeness of undergraduate education becomes clear when you consider your life before postsecondary education and your life after you leave. Until now, if you've just finished high school, your parents and teachers probably directed your life and learning. Even though you've grown more independent over the last few years, you often remained accountable to others for what you have done, to parents and siblings, teachers and coaches, classmates and teammates. If you've been out of school for some time—either by choice or necessity—you've probably been working or raising a family. You, too, to some degree, were responsible to others: employers, co-workers, customers, spouses, children, and, yes, sometimes parents. No matter the case, all this discipline by others and responsibility to others has given your lives order, shape, and direction.

When you either enter or reenter the world of full-time work, you will be supervised by and accountable to others. Marriage and families also will increase your duties. Your life will be ordered by the demands of these duties, and those duties will give your life shape and direction. But here, in postsecondary education, in many ways, you are without any close supervision. Oh, plenty of work will be assigned to you, but no one will make you do it. The consequences of letting your work slide are often months away, so why worry now? No one will be watching over the hours you keep, the food you eat, the alcohol you consume, or even whether or not you go to class. You have an almost absolute freedom to shape your life, free from the interference of others. For the first time in your life, and perhaps the last, you are responsible only to yourself for the decisions you make.

Sounds great, doesn't it? And it is great, but there is a downside. Such freedom can be a terrible thing, and being responsible only to yourself can be

*continued*

**Just because everything is different doesn't mean anything has changed.**

—Irene Peter

**Your education at your institution is an adventure of discovery simultaneously outward and inward. . . . In any adventure, you never know what is ahead. There is only one thing you can know, and it is not in your mind but in your will. You can decide to grow and not to shrink.**

—Robert McMahon  
College Professor

**W**ill postsecondary education leave you different but unchanged? Or will you grow as the result of your adventure? Learning results in a fundamental change in who you are. To maximize the effects of change and minimize the stress that comes with it, you must make choices. To do so, you think about your feelings toward change, identify options available to you, predict the consequences of selecting an option, and make decisions accordingly.

*Letting Go* (Coburn & Treeger, 1988), a book for parents of students entering postsecondary education, describes college life as an adjustment

the loneliest task in the world. For if no one worries about what you eat and drink, no one cares if you ruin your health. If no one watches over the hours you keep as you juggle an active social life with studies or balance work and family with academics, no one cares if your life falls apart. If no one demands your attendance in class, no one cares whether you pass or fail.

The undergraduate college or university is a strange institution because it accepts people who were directed all their lives and gives them a freedom few can handle. You are, of course, supposed to use this freedom to learn and to grow. But you should know this: national studies tell us that the average American college graduate has not grown as the result of postsecondary education, but has actually shrunk. These average college graduates, we find, possess vocabularies as small as ever, reason as poorly as ever, and write less well than they did as freshmen.

Your institution deliberately exposes you to freedom and its dangers. Why? Because the learning your institution offers requires you to choose it freely and pursue it with a will. It opens to you a whole new universe for exploration. Almost anything you might want to learn—anything—someone knows and can teach. All the mysteries of Being are here for your contemplation; that contemplation requires both great freedom and hard work. Some of these mysteries you can learn to solve, like calculus or Latin grammar. Some are too profound ever to be solved, like the beauty of Bach's music or the truth in Plato's love of wisdom. But you can enter them, experience them, and explore them. And at the heart of your education there is a mystery of the latter sort, the strangest mystery of all—the mystery of yourself.

Everything you learn, in classes and out of them, reveals not only the world outside you but also the world of yourself. You don't just study subjects. You study what is real and true as it can be understood through various subjects. The world you will experience, in class and out, is wide and deep, but only as wide and deep as your willingness to explore it. Every book you read, class you take, movie you see, friend you make, conversation you have, everything you do can open the real life of the world to you, if you will open the real life of yourself to the world. Everything you learn about other

*continued*

process whose theme is **self-definition**. Such self-definition results from the college process, not the age at which you begin the process. No matter your age or experience, you should expect to change as the result of that process. You do, however, control how some of those changes occur. In this adjustment, your identity is no longer driven by your school, your family, your church or synagogue, your employers, or even your peers. For example, perhaps your former teachers praised you for writing and encouraged you to take additional English classes, but science and math interested you more. Or, maybe your employer kept you in a position because of your technical expertise in that area when

people and other things should give you insight into yourself if, and only if, you will decide to reflect upon it.

Your education is an adventure of discovery simultaneously outward and inward. It is an adventure in the literal sense of the word. Even if you think you know what subject you want to major in, you have no real idea of where you will end. Although you may know what courses you will take, you have no idea of how they will affect your life. You don't know what you're going to learn until after you've learned it. You have no idea what or who you will encounter on the way. You don't know what persons, ideas, or subjects you'll fall in love with. You don't know whether, like St. George, you'll slay a dragon, or like Monty Python, you'll get knocked off your horse by the branch of a tree. In any adventure, you never know what is ahead. There is only one thing you can know, and it is not in your mind but in your will. You can decide to grow and not to shrink.

For those of you determined to grow, there are a few words of advice, but be forewarned: This advice protects you from nothing. No one, and certainly no words, can protect you from the anguish of deciding what to do with the rest of your life. Nobody protects you from the wonderful and terrible freedom offered to you here. No place shelters you from the pressures and anxiety that come with that freedom. Nothing prevents the endless temptations to self-centeredness, self-deception, self-indulgence, and self-destruction. This advice protects you from none of this, but it does prepare you for it all.

First, your institution cannot give you an education, although it may grant you a degree. Don't assume that your college or university, for all its requirements, can make you learn. It cannot. Only you determine that. If you want an education, here or anywhere, you must pursue it with a will. You must learn to ask questions of what you study, and if you can't answer them, then ask your professors. Learning what you are taught is not enough. You also must learn how to work through it and think around its edges and between its lines. You must learn how you learn, so that you can learn to learn better. Your success in life depends on your ability always to learn new things: to assimilate them quickly, retain them firmly, and understand them well. Start now.

*continued*

you felt you were ready for management opportunities. Whatever the case, you now control the way in which you define yourself. You have the capacity to change past images and develop new interests and strengths. No one course or curriculum will help you define yourself. Instead, your entire college experience will be devoted to self-definition as you grapple with issues of identity and your place in the world. Whatever the case, you will exit postsecondary education much differently than you entered it. *Getting Oriented (GO)* assists you in this process.



Second, if you don't have a major, don't worry about it. A major will come in its own good time. Majors have always come that way, and they always will. Even if you do have a major in mind or an academic goal to pursue, you may find yourself drawn to other topics or areas of interest as the result of your exposure to new ideas. No matter the case, your primary task for now is to develop your powers of mind: to reason carefully, to write clearly, to speak well, to develop your memory. Your courses will not do these things for you. You use your courses to do them for yourself. You may succeed in cramming your way to decent grades, but cramming won't strengthen your long-term memory or develop your powers of understanding.

If you want to learn how to think, seek out courses that develop your powers of analysis. If you want to learn how to write, seek out teachers who work students hard on their prose. Not all courses set out to do these, and not all professors are good at it. Talk to students whose judgment you respect; find out which courses and teachers will help you the most. And seek out demanding teachers. Those of you who have played sports know that the coach who goes easy on you is not really your friend. The coach who drives you crazy with drills and runs you weary on wind sprints is often the one who really cares about you and your teammates.

Above all, here in college where you are most accountable to yourself, you must seize responsibility for yourself, for your growth, for your learning, for your life. Seize it, wield it, and never let it go. If you seize responsibility for yourself, you will learn from everything you do at your institution, even from your failures. And most of you, during your adventure in postsecondary education, will be knocked off your horse at least once. But if you decide to grow and not to shrink, you will learn from your falls, get up, and ride on more successfully. And when you finish here, whether in two years, four years, or even seven years, you will have changed. You will not only be older but greater than you are now, stronger in mind and stronger in will, ready to go forward in life and keep learning, not merely to live, but to live well.

Adapted from Fall Convocation speech, 1991, Dr. Robert McMahon, Louisiana State University, Permission granted.

## *Change Agent Responsibilities*

At first glance, postsecondary education may seem like more high school—some sort of grade thirteen and beyond. It may seem like a way to obtain the credentials you need in the profession you've already chosen or want to have. However, postsecondary education is much more. Your college coursework represents more than an accumulation of credits and knowledge. It represents an integration of thinking—a