

# Getting Started Speaking at Community Colleges

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## **Section I: Why Community College?**

### **CC's offer an excellent "proving ground" for you to perfect your material before moving out on your own.**

You can work on your material so that when you get out in "public" speaking to bigger audiences, your material has been well proven.

### **CC's will pay you an hourly fee so you will "Earn while you learn."**

When you pitch your course idea to a community college, they will want to know how many hours you need to teach your class. They will have to buy off on the time frame you give them, so don't try to fudge it. You should know from practicing your presentation exactly how many hours you will need. For example;

My class is two hours on two different nights for a total of four hours.

My local community college pays \$20 an hour so I make \$80 for the class, not exactly a princely sum, but then again, I'm not there for the money.

### **CC's will provide a venue and any equipment you might need.**

You're getting started in the speaking/teaching business. The last thing you need is to spend a lot of money renting a hotel ballroom or other expensive space only to have 7 or 8 people show up to your event. Community colleges will provide projectors, screens and most other audio/video equipment you may need so there's no need for you to spend thousands on equipment. (You can save that for later when you have thousands of raving fans and an entourage.)

### **CC's will handle duplicating materials for workbooks. CC's will also charge students a materials fee and reimburse for materials such as binders etc.**

One of the best things about teaching at community colleges! I drop off my original workbooks/sheets and my college's duplicating department has them ready for me when I need them. They're great! (This may be limited to black & white copies only depending on your school)

I use Staples to produce the high gloss workbook covers and other materials that are specialized. (More about that later) I front the money for this, but I get reimbursed thanks to the materials fee. (You tell the college how much you need, they charge the students and after submitting receipts, you will get reimbursed.)

### **You will be able to use the fact that you teach at the local community college as instant credibility!**

This goes a long way posted on your website or mentioned to clients! Whenever I meet with a prospective client, I usually mention that I teach at the community college.

### **You may get extra benefits as a teacher at a community college.**

My local CC has a fitness center. I can also use the college library and get teacher discounts at some stores/museums, etc.

### **Most importantly, you get to practice in front of a live (Paying!) audience!**

## Section II: How do I get to teach at the local Community College?

### **I don't have a teaching certificate or a degree.**

The good news is that you do not necessarily have to have a teaching certificate or a degree to teach at your community college! You will be teaching non-credit courses that can include any topic you are an expert on. Typical areas of instruction can be music, exercise classes, cake decorating, finance & investing.. Literally anything! Course directors are always looking for new ideas for classes. More classes = more students signing up and more dollars coming into their programs!

### **What types of people are course directors looking for?**

Non-credit course directors are looking for people who are experts, people that have experience in the area they want to teach in.

Directors want instructors who:

Are enthusiastic about the subject and can share that passion with their students.

Can engage with students – Get a dialogue going.

Are Conscientious – Not people trying to make a quick buck.

Have a good sense of humor.

Are reliable – They're spending money telling hundreds or thousands of people you're going to teach. The college is counting on you to follow through!

Responsive to their audience – People who are willing to constantly improve their program using feedback from the students to make the program better.

Community colleges do **NOT** want people coming in to prospect for clients under the guise of teaching! Most colleges will tell you **NOT** to hand out business cards. (Or even leave them out on the table.) That is not to say that you cannot make it known that you can be hired outside of the classroom. (I make sure this is known!) You can still put up your contact information on the board in case students have questions.. For example, I place [Coach@Shererfinancialcoaching.com](mailto:Coach@Shererfinancialcoaching.com) on the board and tell them to Email me with questions they have. Students see that I have a website and will usually go check it out. We'll talk more about getting around restrictions placed on you in the materials section. (To be clear, I am *not* prospecting for clients under the guise of teaching! I teach because I love teaching and I am passionate about my subject area.. But, if someone wants to engage me further, I'd sure like to let them know that's OK.)

### **What's the easiest place to find the contact information for the person who can hire you to teach at the CC?**

The easiest place to find contact information for the person that can hire you to teach at the community college is to pick up a course catalog. There is usually an ad in the catalog that will say something like "Got an idea for a class?" The contact information to get started will be contained in the ad. You may also see ads in newspapers. Community colleges find instructors everywhere! The director for community programs at my local CC told me she gets instructors from referrals, even parties. If you have trouble finding someone to talk to about your class idea, simply call your local community college, tell them you have a class idea and they will connect you to the proper department.

**Is this like a job interview? Do they have to have an opening?**

Yes and no. When you get in touch with the person who does the hiring, they will probably do a short phone interview and then have you come in to meet with them. (That's good.. it means they're interested!)

When you meet with the interviewer, be prepared to answer questions about why your class is different from others on the same subject.

I planned to teach a financial class at my local community college, specifically one about how to get out of debt and build wealth. When asked how my class was different, I told the director that my class not only dealt with the subject of money, but also the emotions behind the money, why we do the things that we do and how we set ourselves up for failure. I also stressed that we use a lot of humor in our classes to make a serious subject fun for the students. During my interview, the director saw how passionate I was about my subject, that helped a lot.

Be sure to have a class outline with you when you go for an interview, the interviewer may want to keep a copy. A suit is not required, but be sure to dress neatly!

**Class size**

The typical community college class can range from 10 – 30 students. My college would hold a class if as few as four students signed up. (You may not know if your class will be held until the close of business the day before the scheduled class date.)

**Time****I always ensure I start and end on time.**

I also tell students that I am there for them and that I will stay after class as long as anyone needs me to answer any questions or concerns. I also tell them I will be in early the following week.

I run a two night class with each class usually a week apart. Each class consists of roughly two hours of instruction. I offer a 10 - 15 minute break after the first hour.

**What is the difference between an OK presentation and a WOW presentation?**

People learn better when they're enjoying the experience, they're in your class to be educated, but they like to be entertained, I give 'em both! It's called "Edutainment."

**Keep 'em awake & happy!**

Keep in mind that your class will probably be in the evening. Your students likely got up early, spent the majority of their day at work, came home exhausted and made dinner and are now coming to see you. You want to keep them awake and happy.

Smile and greet them as they come in!

I learned a great trick from someone who taught a class at my church. I buy a couple of bags of Jolly Rancher candies and put a small pile of them on the tables for the students to grab during class.

I also play music on my PC as they are coming in. (You must of course be careful with music selection.) I play smooth jazz using my computer's media player.

**Relevance** - I use a LOT of humor in my classes. If you use humor, make sure it's relevant!

**Attention getting devices** - I try to go no more than 7 minutes between humor spots or other attention getting devices.

**Segues** - I have cute financial videos I show at the end of each section of the class to break the tension of the serious subject. I also tell a joke as I begin the second hour of the night.

**Be careful with videos!** They'd better be short and interesting. A nice cozy dark environment may be all your students need to be lulled off to sleep! Remember they're tired!

**Temperature** - Make sure you have the ability to keep the room from getting too warm. I had no control of the temperature in the room I taught in, but I made sure to put it down on the critique if it got uncomfortable.

## Sect IV: **How do I prepare for my class to ensure success?**

### **Prepare and practice *great* written material!**

How do you know if it's great? Have family/friends preview it.

### **Develop a good Power Point presentation to emphasize & support your material.**

Do NOT use slides with lots of text and read the text while you teach!

I have minimal text, most of my power Point consists of pictures to reinforce my material or provoke a laugh. Use text sparingly to highlight major points.

**Develop workbook materials.** *Here's where you can promote your brand!* I use an inexpensive view binder (\$1.88@Wal-Mart) with a color workbook cover inserted. (Staples.. nice and glossy! Submitted on-line.) As a bonus, you can include a CD ROM the class will continue to use after they leave, preferably printed with artwork promoting your brand. This is not hard to do. I had 100 discs printed for about \$250 including having the printer adapt my artwork.

### **Put it all together and practice it until you can do it in your sleep!**

(And you *will* do it in your sleep) Find a private place you can feel comfortable performing your presentation.. Mine is in the laundry room.. My wife loves it when I have a gig.. She gets more laundry done than ever without even having to set foot in the laundry room!

If you need to switch programs during a presentation, bring up a video etc.. practice doing it in your program until it is seamless.

### **Get to the college early to set up**

It never fails that something *will* go wrong..

One time I showed up to find the cable that connects the computer to the projector missing. I called the help desk, they were no help. I had to run to Radio Shack to buy one. Good thing I got there early!

I arrive an hour early to set up. If I get set up quickly, I have time to relax and listen to music before people start showing up.

To save time and ensure I don't forget things, I use a dedicated plastic box. It has all the material I need to do a presentation.. I bring extra sets of materials, some scotch tape and extra workbook covers. You can tape one outside your door to help people find your class.

### **What do I do when I goof it up?**

And you *will* goof it up! Unfortunately, I can provide examples..

The first time I taught, I forgot to plug my laptop into the power outlet. Halfway through the presentation I started to hear a beeping noise.. I realized with horror it was my laptop telling everyone it was dying. I had to rush over to my laptop case, fish out the cord, and get it plugged in. The important thing is to *keep going!*

I once got to the point in my presentation where I use a couple of credit cards as props and realized they were still in my lap top case. I just walked over to the case, got them out and went on as if nothing happened. The audience will stay with you if you keep on going. It will happen, so just accept it.

### **When you are finished.**

When the class is over and you've done a great job you say goodbye and they leave right? NO! They love you!

Now you tell them they need to stay motivated.. and you can help! You have an Email newsletter they can sign up for.. (You *do* have a newsletter, right?) It will help them stay on track.. You will be passing around a clip-board with a great looking sign-up sheet (Reflecting your brand) that they can use to give you their email addresses and you'll see that they get your newsletter every month. (I have about a 100% sign up rate with this.) This is how you drip information to your potential clients and keep your name in front of them on a regular basis. My newsletter goes out monthly. I do hear from people long after my classes because of my newsletters.

### **How do I make sure my customers tell me they loved it or what I did wrong?**

The college charges \$35 for my class..How do I know if the students felt they got what they paid for or even *more* than they paid for?

Critiques! **Very important!**

The college gives us a critique in their instructor packet, it covers not only the class, the materials and me the instructor, but also the registration process, the room etc..

I also have my own critique that asks very detailed questions about whether I accomplished everything they wanted me to. So they're getting two critiques. After they fill one out, how much of a critique filling out mood are folks in? Well.. less of one than when they started. So guess who's critique they get first!

I always asked whether the students felt they received less than they paid for, just what they paid for, or more than they paid for. I strive to give my students much more than they paid for and my surveys showed that I was able to do that. This is important! One thing I learned from a professional speaker was to always teach every class as if it were your last, so I wanted to knock their socks off.

### **Branching out**

So you're teaching at the local CC, and it's great, they always ask you back. It's been a couple of years.. Now it's time to branch out.

The local CC was a great proving ground.. You know your program works.. You've worked the bugs out of it.. **But!**

The local CC pays you by the hour! You're not looking for a part-time job. You're in business! You're ready now to learn to market, to move out into the community, get your own gig, market it and get paid for every person who shows up! You get the reward for all your hard work.. Not the college!

Where are the places you might do this? I have worked with churches, insurance agents in large offices and am looking for other venues I might teach and get my name out. Use your imagination! How can you market without driving yourself crazy? Churches are good for this because they have a ready-made audience.. They can easily let a few hundred folks know about your event.

**What sorts of differences in income can I expect?** 500 - 600% increase! When you get paid the \$35 - \$40 a head instead of \$20 an hour, your income will increase dramatically and you'll be on your way!

### **Never give up!!**

Thomas Edison said "Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up."You will have times when it feels like you're fighting and not getting where you want to go.. Especially in the time frame you have in mind. Keep working towards your dreams!

### **About the author:**



**Eric Sherer** truly has the heart of a teacher and has been teaching Pilots and Air Traffic Controllers for over 20 years. Eric has been teaching and counseling in the area of personal finance since 2005. He has personally faced and learned to overcome many of the challenges faced by his clients. As the owner of Sherer Financial Coaching, Eric has a true passion to see people overcome financial hardship and become all that they were meant to be. Eric has been teaching the class he authored "Dump Debt! Build Wealth! Live Free!" at community colleges and churches for the last three years.