The 2009 Revised Edition

Guide to College Success

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Introduction

We have designed this guide as an aid to your college experience. All the advice we offer should be taken as merely opinion. People differ in personality, disposition, and beliefs, and in all likelihood these ideas may not work for everyone. But, by sharing our experiences and ideas we think that most college experiences can be improved. You don’t have to abide by our lessons, we only hope that we can familiarize you with what a true undergraduate life entails…

College Classes

The first mistake I made as a freshman in college was to register for classes that started at 9:30 A.M. The class was calculus and I found myself, as well as half the other students, dozing off five minutes into the professor’s lesson. 9:30 may sound quite late for some students who are used to getting up at 7:30 A.M. for high school, but in college it’s a different story. You’ll find after only a few days that students generally go to sleep after midnight. This means that whether or not you are used to going to sleep at this time, you’ll find yourself on a completely different time clock. Before long, getting up before 10:30 could be more dificult than one would expect (unless you’re a morning person, which is almost impossible to come by at college). So, if you can, register for classes that take place in the afternoon or evenings and steer away from those early morning classes.

GPA Conversion Table

A = 4.000

A- = 3.667

B+ = 3.333

B = 3.000

C+ = 2.333

C = 2.000

C- = 1.667

D = 1.000

D- = .667

F = .0000

Another thing to keep in mind is that there is no babysitting in colledge- for most classes attendance is not mandatory and your professor won’t be standing at a podium reciting a last name roll call. This new-found freedom means that some students will choose to sleep an extra hour hoping that one of their friends would be kind enough to hand over their class notes. Don’t let this happen to you- avoid getting into the habit of skipping class. An inevitable snowball effect will follow, where actually going to class becomes out of the norm for many students. These unfortunate souls often find themselves with GPA’s (Grade Point Averages) towards the shallow end of the grade pool.

Note On Smaller Classes

Participation is a must. Not only will it play a role in determining your grade (sometimes up to 25%), but it will strengthen your student/teacher relationship. Participating will also help you learn the material better- an active participator will retain material better than a passive observer.

College classes are different from high school classes because in most universities, large amounts of material are presented in a lecture format. For most people their first venture into a lecture hall will be like landing on a different planet. Fortunately, if you are armed with the right tools lectures can be an enormously valuable and enjoyable experience.

College Writing

There are a few main differences between writing a paper in high school than in college. Most high school teachers focus on the elementary portions of your papers such as structure, grammar, and whether you have a clearly defined thesis. College professors assume that most students have already mastered these basic aspects of writing. Professors, therefore, usually look beyond these points and focus on the content of your paper. To ensure the best grade on papers, make sure you do the following:

Back up arguments not only with your opinion, but with studies and other references done by others. But, be careful not to plagiarize! Plagiarism is usually considered the copying of someone else’s material. That doesn’t mean that you have to copy an entire book to be caught for plagiarism. Using only a string of words that another author has already written could be enough to warrant a trip to the dean.

If you are using another author’s material, cite any and all of the information you are borrowing.

College professors are almost always willing to read through rough drafts of your paper. Take advantage of this and bring your paper in during his/her office hours. It can only improve your chances of getting a higher grade.

College professors are not impressed with a big vocabulary. Experienczeed students learn that it is better to write clearly and to the point with words that are easy to understand. Fifty dollar words can skew the message you’re trying to get across and usually wind up cluttering your writing. Here are two sentences with the same general meaning, but written very differently:

CLUTTERED: The post-revolutionary government found it contrary to their best interest to ameliorate the enigmatic dichotomy between England and the United States.

NON-CLUTTERED: The post-revolutionary government did not want to solve the mysterious differences between England and the United States.

The first sentence sounds like something a college professor might have written, but its meaning is a bit ambiguous. The second sentence, however, is easier to read and understand.

Keep in mind that college writing also differs from class to class. A research paper required for an economics class is completely different from a creative writing assignment required for an English class. Therefore, be prepared to vary your writing techniques.

Studying for Exams

A phrase you will undoubtedly come to know in your undergraduate education is “Pulling an all-nighter.” This is the common term for students who do little or no work throughout the semester and find that the night before an exam, the workload is too heavy to bear. These students wind up forsaking a good night’s rest so that they can cram in as much information as possible in the few hours before exam time. Wake up call: All- Nighters Do Not Work! Successful students take a different approach to studying.

It took me three years to realize that without an organized study schedule I was lost and without direction. Once I got organized, things seemed to fall in place. Some simple advice is to pick up a calendar or daily planner from your college book store and pencil in all your major exam and paper due dates.

Every time a new lesson is taught in class, make sure you understand the material. Don’t wait until the night before to learn material you assumed you grasped. Keep up with your work weekly at worst and better yet even daily. The best methods for studying vary from person to person, but there are a few scientific theories that may help. People learn more information when they break down studying into a few short sessions as opposed to one long session of review. It has also been documented that the information absorbed while studying follows another distinct pattern: Students retain information best from the beginning and end of a study session and absorb less information during the middle.

TA’s- Who Are These Guys?

T.A. stands for Teacher Assistant, but at times he/she may represent much more than that. At many larger universities, the duties of a TA may be to give a lecture, head review sessions, and lead group activities. Students often find that they come in contact with TAs more than their professors. A TA’s impression of you can be very important when computing grades, therefore:

Computers/Email/Internet

Suggested Minimum Computer Requirements As Of Fall 2009

RAM- 4GB Ram

Processor 1.6 GHz

High Speed Internet Connection

500GB Hard Drive

Recommended Company: Dell: http://www.dell.com/

If you’ve been keeping up with today’s technology-dominated era, then you or your Having your own computer and/or printer will prove to be a very convenient and necessary tool for success those four years. If you don’t have a computer, don’t feel at a loss. There are usually several computer labs on campus solely intended for students’ use. E-mail is another reason why having your own computer will prove useful and convenient. Most schools provide e-mail accounts and Internet servers to all their students, and are accessible through dorm hook-ups. So you can look for books at the library, check your e-mail and browse the Web all from your dorm room at any hour of the day. Also, not only do students check e-mail daily, but professors are big fans of this service as well. Everyone loves to get mail, and professors are no exception

You should also take advantage of the Internet. It provides an endless source of information for you to use for papers, personal questions, etc. The downside to the Internet is that it can become a very time-consuming activity. Surfing the web or talking on-line in chat rooms can be a fun and entertaining experience, but be careful and avoid the lure of chat rooms. Many students get drawn in and spend hours on end over the Internet, which takes away from time you could be spending studying. It’s easy to forget about classes and homework when people are willing to chat with you at any hour of the day. While the Internet can be a useful resource, it can also be a huge distracter. Be aware of how much time you’re spending on-line and make sure it doesn’t become your life.

-Alcohol and Drugs-

Never get into the routine of drinking alcohol night after night. The day after a night of heavy drinking is usually the time students set aside for studying (i.e., Sturday or Sunday). However, after heavy alcohol consumption, your productivity with the books will be extremely low. After a night of boozing studying is usually far from a student’s mind. Bottom line- If you choose to drink, moderation is the key. Know your body’s limits and stay far within those bounds.

A distinction should also be made between alcohol (which is a drug itself) and other drugs. Getting caught in the dorm with a beer in your hand may result with a slap on the wrist from a Residence Advisor (R.A.). But, if you’re found with marijuana, cocaine, or other similar drugs, you can be expelled from school permanently, or worse, you could be sent to jail. Don’t be stupid and end your college years before they even start- use common sense and stay away from these types of drugs!

-Fraternities and Sororities-

Most people go away to school and find that they are in a strange new world without the comfort or familiarity of their high school friends and peers. Fraternities and sororities seem an obvious choice for people looking to establish new friendships. In this aspect, these organizations are great, but one also has to be cautious. Fraternities and sororities require a substantial time, emotional and financial commitment. Rush, pledging, formals, and a myriad of other events often take place within these organizations. Keep in mind that with these new friends comes added responsibilities, and there are other easier ways to going about finding friends (i.e., in classes, by joining a club, etc.) that don’t require the same kind of commitment.

Fraternity/Sorority Lingo

Rush- usually a week-long process with theme parties to get acquainted with the members of the fraternities/ sororities on campus.

Bid- An offer to Pledge the organization.

Pledging- Usually a semester- long process to join a fraternity/sorority, where at the end of this semester you become an active brother/sister.

Roommates

Unlike what you’re probably used to at home, college freshmen do not get a room entirely to themselves. Yep, that means you share your room with an assigned roommate. Two beds in one small square room is the typical setup. What does it matter? Well, it means you’ll be in contact with this person virtually every day and every time you’re hanging out, studying, or sleeping. Remember, this roommate will be with you for an entire year. Your relationship with your roommate can be an important factor in your enjoyment of college.

* Start your relationship off on the right foot. Go out of your way to make your roommate comfortable, and odds are he/she will do the same in return. It’s a bad idea to give your roommate the impression that you could care less about him/her.
* Choose some activities or courses that are DIFFERENT from your roommate. You’ll be spending a large amount of time with your roommate no matter what, so it’s a good idea to branch off and do some things on your own. If you and your roommate have different activities, this puts less strain on the relationship, and you’ll find him/her easier to get along with.
* Problems and controversy will undoubtedly occur between you and your roommate. It’s important to again stress that you’ll be living with this person for an entire year. Avoid a roommate fallout to the best of your ability. Remember, a good roommate doesn’t necessarily mean a good friend. It’s not important that you two are the best of friends, but it is critical that you both can live together.

Mental and Physical Health

The main inhibitor of mental health in college relates to stress. Stress, in this context, is defined as emotional or intellectual strain or tension. This strain occurs in college from classes, countless exams, schedules to keep, social events, and so forth. At times, your stress level may seem overwhelming. There are a few things however, that you can do to limit or reduce your stress:

Stress can be reduced through physical exercise.

Sleeping well and eating well also play a vital role in keeping your body and mind healthy. Why not eat a salad or sandwich instead of an entire pizza and get at least seven hours of sleep the night before a big exam?

And remember if the stress or pressure ever gets to be too much and you need to talk to someone about it, almost every college has a counseling center to provide confidential help. Don’t ever feel like you’re alone in this- adjusting to college is harder for some than others and there are numerous deans and counselors there to make the transition that much easier.

Dealing with Homesickness

It happens to everyone at one point or another- getting homesick. Those who tell you it’s never happened to them, are either lying or denying this basic fact of college life. It’s only natural to get a bit homesick after having lived at home, probably in the same neighborhood in the same house, and growing up with a network of family and friends for almost twenty years. Life as you knew it for almost two decades comes to a screeching halt, and it’s time to start anew in a different place with different people.

Don’t get me wrong- this change is refreshing and the idea of leaving high school behind is very appealing to most people. However, there’s a trade-off. In order to move forward, you have to leave a few things behind: the comfort of your own home and room, the familiarity of your high school, friends, etc. While this is usually a difficult transition, there are programs at college and helpful tips to help you get through this and any feelings of homesickness you may have.

Note on Homesickness

The first couple of weeks are usually the most difficult. This is usually when feelings of “I want to transfer to another school” are the strongest. Chances are, it’s not the school that’s making you miserable, it’s just your own unhappiness. The best thing to do is to keep yourself busy with activities and work. You’ll be feeling better in no time and will thank yourself in the long run for not transferring.

Once orientation ends and classes start, the next step to nipping homesickness in the bud, is to GET INVOLVED. This can range from helping out with dorm events, joining the Wilderness Club, playing intramural volleyball, writing an article for the campus newspaper- you name it. Doing so will not only allow you to partake in activities outside

Motivation

Academic success depends on your motivation. The best way to stay motivated is to form goals. For some new college students a goal may be to become a lawyer, doctor, or musician. These goals are considered long term and really help to give someone direction and meaning when going through four years of undergraduate work. But, as any seasoned college student knows, when up at four o’clock in the morning studying, these long term goals often get fuzzy, and offer little in the way of motivational support. This is where short term goals come in.

The best students supplement long term goals with short term goals. Short term goals include anything that can motivate you to achieve for a specific exam, class, or even semester. A student may want to set a goal of raising his/her GPA beyond a 3.0, may wish to prove to him/herself that an A in Calculus is possible, or may even want to prove to a particular professor that he/she is no dummy. These examples all fall under the categories of short term goals.

Conclusion

For some new college students an undergraduate education seems like four years of hard work, for others, it sounds more like four years of partying and fun. Remember that a good mix between work and play makes for the most enjoyable experience. College is a challenge, so treat it as such. Living up to your potential makes for a happy student and person.

People say college will be the best four years of your life- and it will. But also remember, that time sure does fly when you’re having fun. So it will also be the fastest four years of your life. You’ll be alumni before you know it- so enjoy it and Good Luck!

College Success In A Nutshell

If you can, register for classes that take place in the afternoon or evenings and steer away from those morning classes if you’re not a morning person.

Don’t fall into the trap of registering for an upper level class without first mastering the introductory level class.

The most knowledgeable students always sit about ten rows back in the middle of the lecture hall.

The best way to take notes is to listen to what a professor says and then summarize in your own words the main idea she/he is trying to get across.

Be careful not to plagiarize when writing papers!

College professors are not impressed with a big vocabulary.

All-nighters Do Not Work!

Some simple advice is to pick up a calendar or daily planner from your college book store and pencil in all your major exam and paper due dates.

Students retain information best from the beginning and end of a study session and absorb less information during the middle.

Develop a solid relationship with TAs.

It’s a HUGE advantage to have your own computer while at college.

If you’re too shy initially or unable to attend a professor’s office hours, use e-mail to your advantage and e-mail teachers or TAs with questions to set up an interaction with them this way.

Avoid the lure of Internet chat rooms.

We recommend desktops over laptops.

If you choose to drink, moderation is the key.

Being caught with marijuana, cocaine or other similar drugs can warrant expulsion or even jail time.

Fraternities and sororities require a substantial time, emotional and financial commitment.

Start your roommate relationship off on the right foot.

Choose some activities or courses that are DIFFERENT from your roommate.

Avoid a roommate fallout to the best of your ability.

The best conflict resolution occurs with an open dialogue between two parties.

Stress can be reduced through physical exercise.

Sleeping well and eating well also play a vital role in keeping your body and mind healthy.

The quality of college food lies somewhere in between this cuisine spectrum.

The next pitfall to watch out for- the Freshman 15.

GET INVOLVED- being active in school and extra-curriculars is the best way to go.

The best students supplement long term goals with short term goals.

Career preparation needs to start as early as possible.

References

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