
Advice for College Freshman

Contributed by Seth Hadenfeldt
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As a junior in college, there are many things I wish I would have known before I came to school all those years ago. Also, there are some things that I did know, but wish I had paid more attention to. If you really want your first year to go smoothly, you should do your best to follow the advice that people will be giving you before you go; a little bit of listening can go a long ways. That being said, here is my advice for soon-to-be freshmen.

- Don't sign contracts for the dorms right away.

If you plan on living in the residence halls your first year at school, then you are making a wise decision. It's a great way to meet people, make new friends, get involved, and learn a lot about how your college community works. However, there are colleges out there which offer a 2-year contract that freezes your rate for two years if you commit to living in the dorms during that time (incentive is keeping your rate the same since it goes up every year). You should only sign the contract if you know for a fact that you are going to be in the dorms for those two years.

For many people, after a year in the dorms, they want to move out and get an apartment with a few friends instead. This option is often cheaper than the dorms, but your school will pitch the convenience factor of the dorms as being worth it. Also, if you want to join a fraternity or sorority, these options are often cheaper than living on campus, even with the dues. Make an effort to check out Greek housing as an option to go to school for cheap, or if you don't think you want to be Greek, then find out how much the apartment complexes cost. You should always compare prices and costs so you know where you will get the best deal.

- Don't live with your best friend in the dorms.

If you're going to school, chances are that you will be going with a friend or at least someone you know from school. While it might be easy to stick with your comfort zone and sign up to room with a friend, just be cautious about making that decision and really think through it. While some people can handle it, others can't. I lost my best friend from high school because we roomed together in the dorms and our different personalities, goals, and ideas started to clash in the dorm setting. It might be better for the sake of your friendship to make the same hall choices so you can at least live in the same building, but the point of college is to expand your mind and yourself as a person. If you do decide to live with your friend, and even if you have an assigned roommate, you should always discuss problems and have a back and forth conversation about how you both feel.

- Get into a schedule/routine.

While you're going to school there will probably be a lot of things on your plate. You will learn, early on, that you need to master the art of time management. If you can't manage or budget your time properly, you will fall behind very quickly and become frustrated with your life.

By getting into a routine and committing to it, it will be easier for you to get work done and stay on top of projects and assignment. You will need to budget time for school work and assignments, friends, exercising (if you choose to...), organizations, work, and whatever else you choose to do.

- Keep control over your finances.

There are plenty of students you will see going out almost every night, partying way too much, or spending lots of money on things they don't really need. The allure of no parents watching your every move or controlling your financial decisions can make it very tempting to make bad decisions. But it is important to realize that every dollar you spend adds up and maintaining a sound money management policy, whatever it may be (I track my incomes & expenses using a custom

Excel spreadsheet), keep a level head, and don't always give in to impulse decisions that will require your money to be spent, you should be able to make it.

- Keep in touch with campus and local news/events.

I can't even begin to tell you the number of students who go to a school, but don't break out of their own personal bubble of a few friends, can only be found at their apartment, class, or bar, and have never really experienced the local area and have no idea what is going on around them. If you are part of a community, you would be doing yourself a service by staying up to date with the news and events going on in your area. As a college student, that means reading the campus and local newspapers, looking through the student government meeting minutes, keeping up to date with your university's event calendar, visiting the city's website and seeing what they have planned, etc. Don't be a shut-in and only go to school and your room. There are so many things to explore and do while you are in college, and you don't want to look back and realize you wasted all that time doing nothing and being unaware to the world around you.

- Join organizations, clubs, or causes that you are passionate about.

As you go through school, you will find not only people different from yourself, but people similar to you. And chances are, others have already started a student organization that allows you to get together and discuss the goings-on of whatever it may be. You can join professional clubs, spiritual/religious organizations, political groups, special interest, Greek chapters, etc. As long as you find a way to get involved and are expanding your leadership ability and group-work skills, you can't go wrong. An organization or club should be something that you will be passionate about and has a mission or goal that you are willing to give up time for. Chances are that you will have to move around to different organizations for a bit and do some different things before you find one or two that really get you fired up and have something to offer you on many different levels.