

## Everything Else You Need to Know about College

*From commuting to scheduling and from group projects to parents, there are many other aspects of college you might want to learn about. Feeling stressed or homesick? Perhaps my advice here can help you through other nitty-gritty parts of university life.*

### **1.) Schedule your classes in a way that will meet your college's requirements while balancing your workload.**

\* When scheduling classes for your next semester, have a clear plan for the exact courses you'll take and how they'll bring you closer to your graduation requirements. This is especially important if your college has a meaty core curriculum.

- Scheduling is often a stressful process, so it helps if you've done your research and you're prepared for a few surprises along the way.

\* Before signing up for a class, be sure you have the right requirements to take it. Some classes will only let you in if you're a major in a certain subject or have taken certain courses already.

\* Make sure your classes don't overlap in terms of time, and make sure you aren't overloading yourself on certain days. More than three classes a day is too many.

\* In your earlier semesters, focus on getting required courses into your schedule. If you reach your final semester and a certain required course can't fit in your schedule or has too many students, you're doomed to graduate late. This problem is especially common at smaller colleges.

\* Do not count on your academic advisor to come up with good schedules for you.

- All of my advisors were useless at best, and I haven't heard good things from other people at different colleges either.

- Sometimes, their advice might be downright wrong, so be sure to do some fact-checking for yourself. For instance, one of my advisors told me that a certain class counted as a fine arts credit, but I learned a few weeks into the course that it didn't. Don't let that happen to you.

\* As I mentioned in the section "Interacting with Professors," talking to professors about their classes while you're trying to figure out your schedule can help you get a good feel for what you can expect from their courses.

\* Some people love working in groups. Others hate it. If you're firmly rooted on one end of the spectrum, you might want to find out which classes have lots of group work and which ones don't.

- Use RateMyProfessors.com, past students you know personally, or the professor themselves to find out.

- Keep this in mind when you're scheduling. You probably don't want to juggle too many group projects in one semester.

\* You're only at college for so long, so if a class sounds interesting or helpful, then take it!

- For example, if you're horrible at public speaking, why not change that by taking a public speaking course?

- Classes can be very helpful for enhancing your strengths and mending your weaknesses. As you sign up for various classes, consider what you can get out of them.

- Don't run from any *useful* class that sounds difficult. Ultimately, learning a certain skill will be far more helpful than a GPA that's 0.1 higher. Returning to my previous example, stressing out over public speaking can hurt your job prospects and just plain make life harder for you in the long run. So while a public speaking course might be difficult, the benefits would probably outweigh the costs.

- On the flip side of the coin, if you're required to take a class on a subject you have no need for or interest in, then you may as well seek out an easy course with a laidback professor.

\* Keep practical concerns in mind when scheduling your classes.

- When are you going to eat every day?

- What time of day are you the most focused? Is that time of day best spent studying or taking a class?

- How many classes do you have in a day? I wouldn't recommend trying to go over three hours of class time a day, especially since the studying and homework afterwards are even more taxing.

- Some classes your college offers will meet on weekends. Personally, I couldn't survive without my break every weekend, but that's an option to consider as well.

- Needless to say, you should try balancing the difficulty level of each semester. If you take a bunch of easy classes one semester, you might be stuck taking a bunch of hard classes another semester. So, I'd suggest having a blend of easy and hard courses each semester.

\* Only a certain number of students can be in each class. So, be sure to have plenty of back-up classes ready in case a class fills up before you can sign up for it. I had to use my back-ups a number of times.

- At larger colleges, this probably won't be a huge issue until you get into higher-level classes. They tend to be offered less often, so they fill up more quickly.

\* With your desired schedule and back-up classes in mind, you should sign up for classes *the moment* you're allowed to.

- Most schools do scheduling online and let you know exactly when your sign-up time begins.

- Most schools allow seniors to schedule first, then juniors, then sophomores, then freshmen. So the newer you are to college, the more likely it is for people to fill up your classes before you can schedule. Back-up classes are therefore especially important for freshmen and sophomores.

- If you try to take a higher-level course earlier than usual, don't be surprised if it fills up quickly. Lots of students who have been at college longer than you've been will be taking the course.

- You might want to ask a professor who teaches a certain class how quickly it fills up during the scheduling rush.

- If your window of opportunity for scheduling begins in the middle of a class, then ask your professor in advance if it would be okay to take a quick break to register on your laptop. They should understand that scheduling is very important to a student.

- If the professor doesn't understand, then you might need to consider leaving the class temporarily, leaving it early, or skipping it altogether if there are classes you absolutely need to take next semester. How likely the classes are to fill up fast may also influence how you go about the task.

\* Failing to get into a required course on time could jeopardize your chances of graduating when you're supposed to. If this happens to you, explain the situation to the professor who's offering the required course and see if they'll let you into the class even if it's full. At the very least, they should say they'll notify you if a student decides not to take the class after all.

- If you put off taking a mandatory low-level class until your last semester, then the professor might not be so sympathetic.

\* There are some people who will tell you that you might as well plan on graduating in five years since that's so common nowadays. Don't listen to them. If you schedule wisely and don't drop more than a class or two, you can usually get out on time. My college got about 70% of its students out in four years.

- A timely escape can be difficult for certain majors, though. In particular, I've heard pre-med majors have a tough time wrapping things up in four years.

- An extra year of college is costly. You're paying money to attend the extra year, and you're *not* making the money you could have been if you had graduated on time and gotten a job. So don't let it happen to you. College is ludicrously expensive as is.

## **2.) Be a cautious commuter.**

\* Should you commute? It depends.

- Commuting to and from school can save thousands and thousands of dollars. Plus, it can let you stay home with your parents or guardians if you don't feel ready to be out on your own. Or you can live somewhere else off-campus if you'd like.

- But keep in mind that every minute you spend driving to and from school is a minute *not* spent studying or having fun. Driving eats up your time, so you should probably live in the dorms if your commute's forty minutes or more. After all, that's eighty or more minutes to and from school every day.

- Also be sure to ask yourself how safe your college and the area around it are. This is especially important if you plan on taking a number of classes in the evening. You may not want to be in campus parking lots in the dark. Ask your university if it has a shuttle service to get you to and from different locations on campus safely.

\* If you do decide to commute, I'd recommend making a few dry runs to and from the school to make sure you understand the route well before your first classes begin.

\* How long should you give yourself to commute? Plenty and plenty of time, that's for sure.

- Open Google Maps or anything else that gives directions. See how long it takes to drive to your school. Take that amount and add one hour to it. That's how long you should leave before your first class begins.

- I'm serious: I had a thirty-minute commute, so I always left one hour and thirty minutes before my first class. Terrible traffic jams never made me late, nor did the one rear-end accident I was in.

- If a little mishap would make you late, then you're not leaving soon enough.

- Having plenty of extra time will save you a lot of stress. You won't need to be looking at a clock and sweating whenever you hit a red light. Remember, a stressful start to the day is more draining than waking up a tad earlier than you'd like.

- Your professors all commute, but they're on time, so you should be too.

- Remember that if the professor gives a short quiz at the beginning of class, the type to see if you did the reading, and you're too late to take it, they might just flunk you on it.

- Being late to an exam gives you less time to take it. Some professors may not even let students in late!

\* You'll usually be quite early if you follow my extra-hour rule. But don't you worry: there should be plenty of things you can do on campus. You can go to the library to read and study. You could hang

out with cool people. You could hang out with weirdos. You could take a walk. There are tons of possibilities!

\* Sorry, but if there's a big event going on at your school, especially something sports-related, then you may need to leave even earlier. Parking could be at a premium depending on how your college handles it.

\* If there are any roads that are prone to accidents or closures, plot out alternate routes.  
- If your usual path has any steep hills or narrow, twisty roads, see if there are any paths that would be safer in severe weather.

\* Use Google Maps or whatever GPS program you like to see if there are any good restaurants or stores near your route. You could stop by those places on the way home to save some time.

\* Make sure you're familiar with all your college's parking rules.  
- There are often different permits for different parking lots, so make sure your permit is the right one for that lot.  
- Also, some lots are open only at certain times of the day. Always have this information in your glove compartment, and look it over if you're ever unsure about the timeframes. Remember, the campus police love giving tickets.  
- Keep in mind that the permitted parking areas and timeframes may change between semesters, so whenever you get your new permit, ask if there are any new rules.  
- The college may have special rules for parking during big events, especially the sporty ones, so be prepared.

\* If you have *tons* of studying to do, here's one crazy tip for doing it while you drive. Use a computer or smartphone to record yourself reading your notes out loud. Save the file and listen to it while you drive.

- Since you should be concentrating on your driving, this probably won't help too much, but it can give you a little boost. The very act of reading notes aloud might help in and of itself.

\* But usually, driving is just a chance to relax. Keep your eyes on the road, stay ready for anything, and enjoy the ride. Quiet times during your college years are good times.

\* Since commuters aren't forced to be around people in the dorms, meeting others might be more difficult for you. Remember, you have to put in effort to meet your fellow students and make friends. Relationships usually don't appear out of nowhere.

\* Schedule your classes carefully.

- You want to keep your classes close together so that you don't have *too* much time between them.  
- If you need a lunch break between your classes, then it's up to you to give yourself plenty of time for that.

- Also, don't schedule more than three classes in a day. You'll probably burn yourself out if you do.  
- If you have one class early in the day but one much later, keep in mind that commuting back home and then returning to school is *a lot* of lost time and can be downright exhausting. Unless absolutely necessary, stay at school from the beginning of your first class to the end of your final class each day.

### 3.) Here are some other tips for surviving the emotional and academic struggles of college.

\* Contact your parents or guardians on a regular basis.

- You wouldn't exist if it weren't for your parents, so you might as well do them a little favor by speaking to them.

- Note that phone calls with your voice are far more enjoyable than e-mails, particularly for concerned parents.

- Before heading out for college, specifically establish how often they want to hear from you. Avoid using vague terms like "every so often" since those could mean different things to different people.

- As time goes on, they'll probably be comfortable hearing from you less often. They'll probably be most worried about you when you first begin your time in the wild. It's a major adjustment for everybody, so try to be patient with them.

- Don't call your parents only when you need them. They're people, not tools. (Don't worry: I forget that sometimes too.) They want to chat about the little things too, not just your dilemmas. Plus, be sure to ask them about how they're doing, how things back home are, and that sort of thing. No conversation should be all about you.

- While you should feel free to discuss your problems with your parents, remember that one part of college is developing some independence. Don't whine about *everything* that happens to you. Try to be open about your concerns, but don't put unnecessary stress on your parents.

- While homesickness is very common among college students, trying to go home as often as possible might just make you yearn for it even more while you're on campus. So, stay close to your parents without clinging to your parents.

\* Speaking of homesickness, don't be ashamed of it: it's a common illness on college campuses.

- Be willing to share your feelings with others who will listen.

- Call your family about once a week, decorate your dorm with some memorabilia from home, and plan trips to go home every so often.

- Setting a routine for yourself in college can help you adapt, as can making new friends.

- If your feelings of homesickness are severe, don't be afraid to seek counseling.

\* Dropping a class might not lower your GPA, but it means you've wasted time and money while reducing your chances of graduating on time. While it's sometimes necessary to drop a troublesome class, make sure laziness is never the cause of your retreat.

\* Even if you're taking an easy course just for the credit, remember that you might as well learn something from it. I've learned lots of interesting trivia and helpful facts from my side classes, especially psychology-related ones. You might be surprised what interests you.

\* If you're stuck with a lazy group for a certain project, remember that your grade will live on longer than anything else.

- It's better to take the brunt of the work and get a good grade than it is to sit around frustrated with slackers and hurt your GPA.

- On the flip side of things, even in a less-than-stellar group, try to include others in the project whenever you can. Specifically dividing up tasks can go a long way. Sometimes, showing people that you expect good things from them helps them to actually do well.

- If you're stuck with a bossy person, offer to do whatever you can and try to be polite while you give suggestions.

- Ultimately, always be polite: sometimes, people act lazy, rude, or bossy without knowing it.

- Oh, and if someone is bringing the whole group down, to the point you're thinking of kicking them out, confront the person as a group before you notify the professor about it. You might still be able to work things out, so at least voice your grievances openly but calmly before throwing their fate into the professor's hands.

\* Of course, effective communication is essential even with groups of students who want to work hard. Many people have busy schedules at college, so the "divide and conquer" strategy works well with groups of people who are reliable. For instance, divvy up the work based on the topics your group needs to tackle.

- Share contact information such as e-mail addresses and phone numbers immediately.

- Make sure everyone's clear on what's expected of them.

\* Keep important phone numbers in your cell phone. Look up the phone numbers of various college services and nearby places *before* you need them rather than scramble for them in a panic when trouble comes.

- If the campus police has its own phone number, then put that in your speed dial. I'd recommend using 9, the first number of 911, so that it's easy to remember.

\* I heard one person claim that bringing a video game console to your dorm is a stupid idea because you'll never focus. Personally, I think you should learn how to enjoy your entertainment without it becoming a mere distraction, especially since you'll definitely need to relieve stress at college. I sure as heck needed my video game breaks! But I thought I should throw that opinion out there in case you're prone to video game addiction.

\* Melatonin is an over-the-counter sleep supplement that can help you fall asleep and stay asleep if you take it right before bed.

- It's very useful if you're having trouble sleeping due to various stress factors, such as upcoming tests. Since sleep is essential to your physical and mental health, you should do whatever you can to sleep well.

- Adjusting to college might not be easy, so I'd bring some right off the bat.

- Unless you're a chronic insomniac like me, you should only use the pills or dissolvable tablets as needed.

- Just a milligram or three milligrams should be enough. Going too high is a terrible idea.

- Versions of it that dissolve under the tongue act the most quickly.

- Your body naturally produces melatonin, so it's pretty darn safe to take. But keep in mind I'm no medical expert, so be sure to consult your doctor before taking it. I'm in no way legally liable for damage that could be caused by taking this supplement. This all is my opinion, not binding medical advice. So please don't conjure up some excuse to sue me over these bullet points.

\* Start planning for post-graduation life at least a year before you graduate.

- Nobody at your university will force you into the career center or make you decide what to do once you leave. That's up to you.

- Finding out what job you want and how to pursue it can be difficult, so have a solid, detailed strategy in mind. It's better to start planning a bit too soon than a bit too late.

- Picking the correct grad school and applying for it can also take a while.

- This advice is much easier said than done, especially when all your classes are giving you lots of work to contend with. Try to spend some time over your summer vacations planning for the future.

\* Wear a watch or have some other discreet way of seeing what time it is so you don't have to look at the room's clock in desperation as your professor rambles on. They don't want to see you checking your cell phone during class for any reason either.

\* Throughout your college years, you will hear many opinions that are different from yours. These opinions will come from professors, books, and other students.

- Be open to such opinions, but don't accept them blindly just because you heard them somewhere academic!

- Make sure you're also open to the sides that oppose what you've heard at college. If one professor has an agenda in their class (and many do when talking politics), you may want to check sources that disagree with them if it's a topic you care about. That way, you'll get a more balanced perspective.

- Otherwise, don't be afraid if you find some of your opinions or interests changing: that's natural.

- Please remember that taking one class on a subject doesn't make you an expert in it. Please don't psychoanalyze everyone you meet after Psychology 101 or pretend you have all the answers to our world's economic woes after Economics 101.

\* Many colleges have negative views of religion.

- I want to warn religious people that, especially in secular colleges, there tends to be a strong bias toward skepticism over faith. Remember that there are plenty of accessible, well-researched books out there designed to defend the faith if you find yourself up against a one-sided, atheistic agenda.

- Be willing to listen to your professors, but also remember that you don't need to agree with everything they say.

- The skeptical bias can also be found at so-called Christian universities, so proceed with caution. Stick close to your faith community and be willing to voice any concerns you have with those you trust.

\* Absolutely never put up with harassment.

- Nobody should have to contend with others criticizing them for their sexuality, religion, nationality, or anything of that sort.

- Get help from various resources your college offers if you feel like you're being targeted.

- If it's a professor who's harassing you, then don't be afraid to alert the higher-ups at the college. Professors should treat their students with respect, not make them uncomfortable.

- Harassment's a crime, not just a nuisance, so if the culprit refuses to stop, or if your college ignores your concerns, get the police involved.

- And of course, never deal out harassment yourself. If someone's offended by your crude comments or actions, apologize and stop immediately rather than keep going with the lame excuse, "I'm just kidding." That won't cut it.

\* I already shared the following stuff with the commuters, but it applies to anyone who gets to drive at college.

- Make sure you know the parking rules inside and out. There are often different permits for different parking lots, so make sure your permit is the right one for that lot.

- Also, some lots are open only at certain times of the day. Always have this information in your glove compartment.

- Keep in mind that the permitted parking times may change each semester, so whenever you get your new permit, ask if there are any new rules with the timeframes.

- Remember, the campus police love giving tickets.

- The college may have special rules for parking during big events, especially the sporty ones, so be prepared. Parking could be at a premium during big events.

\* If you have a bad professor, you can either whine about it or keep plugging away. It's your choice.

- Remember that someone who's arrogant or incompetent as a professor might be a nice person outside the classroom—or at least a tolerable one. You're only seeing them in one setting.

- Treat them with respect.

- But, as I mentioned earlier, if a professor is harassing students, then you should be brave enough to voice your concerns about it.

\* Just because a professor is friendly and laidback in class doesn't mean they're an easy grader.

- For instance, I had an English professor who once let us finger paint pretty pictures and then analyze one another's work. But she was brutal while grading papers.

- Plus, I once had a professor who was super funny, often played video clips during class, and often rambled about off-topic nonsense. Well, if you didn't use his study guides, his exams were super tough.

- So don't let an easy appearance make you think that a class doesn't require hard work.

\* I had some professors who called on students who weren't even raising their hands, but rather just making eye contact. If I learned that a professor had this habit, I kept my head down as I took notes. Whenever I looked up, I never eyed them directly unless I had an answer prepared.

\* This might sound nuts, but be sure to hold on to notes or memos you receive from professors or other authority figures. You never know when you'll need them as a reminder or as evidence of what they said, especially in cases when they dole out favors like extra time to complete a project. You don't want them to claim, "I don't remember ever telling you that!"

- For example, if a professor gives you an extra day to turn in an essay, then be sure to save the e-mail where they told you that!

- Besides, as I once learned myself, looking at a note telling me I could skip one professor's test made me warm and happy inside.

\* Use your college's website to look up the academic schedule and holiday list. This will let you know what days you have off, what days mid-term grades are issued, when your last chance to drop a class is, and that sort of thing.

- If your college's website has a student portal, check it once a day for important announcements.

\* When I'm writing something, I tend to keep a separate Word document called "Discarded Material" in the same folder. Rather than delete a huge, unneeded part of my paper, I cut and paste it to this side document. That way, if I decide to bring any part of it back, it's still accessible.

- You might want to save old drafts as separate documents as well. Just make sure they're clearly labeled as old. Be sure to print out or send in the newest one when the paper's due!

\* Speaking of writing, you might want to ask the English department if there's a certain grammar and style guide it recommends. This could help you keep your writing's formatting and style consistent.

- Even if you're not an English major, being able to write in a clear style with impeccable grammar can help you get your points across. (And that's why you should also read the pages of my website about writing!)



\* When you have a boatload of work to do, perform the hardest tasks first. That way, you'll feel fresh for the tough stuff. Hopefully, you'll be able to handle the easier work even once you're getting tired.

\* The beginning of each semester can be particularly tough since you don't have a feel for the professors or the material yet. Plus, you often have to read dry and confusing introductory material. Don't panic during this time—or any other time, while you're at it. You can adjust.

- Once you figure out which classes you need to read the material carefully in versus the ones you can skim the books in, things will grow more manageable.

\* Remember, you tend to take higher-level classes the further along you are in your college career. These classes are harder... obviously. But I'm pointing this out because it means you should do your best in your early years of college so that your GPA gets off to a good start. Escaping from a low GPA when you're taking the toughest classes in your major is quite a challenge.

\* If you find yourself incredibly busy, still take breaks.

- At the very least, diversify the tedium. That is, try switching up the kinds of tasks you're performing. For instance, if you've been working on a paper for an hour and find yourself withering away, try doing some reading for a while and then return to your writing.

- Always give yourself something to look forward to once you've completed your work.

\* It might help you if you use a countdown timer app to set a work goal for yourself. You could set it for two hours and work until the timer goes off. If you stay focused that whole time, then you can reward yourself with a fun break.

\* Manage your finances carefully. Do not be afraid to ask your parents or guardians for help... not that they're guaranteed to send you cash.

\* Remember this for college and for life: If you don't ask, the answer is always no.

\* Be careful about your health, *both mental and physical*.

- Stress and sudden change can affect both the body and mind.

- If you think something might be wrong with you, don't ignore it just because you're busy with lots of work. The issue will only get worse if you try ignoring it, and having the problem chipping away at you won't help your work.

- Don't wait for a health problem to become severe before addressing it. The sooner you acknowledge it, the easier it will be to take care of it.

- Besides, good health will help you work more efficiently, not to mention enjoy life more!

- Campuses have doctors (including psychologists) that you can visit. They're often less expensive than off-campus doctors—or even free! Find out more on your college's website.

\* If you're having a difficult semester, remember that you need to take breaks. I'd recommend scheduling a good-sized break at least once a day for doing something you really enjoy. That's much more fulfilling than procrastinating by doing stuff just for the sake of doing it, like browsing random websites or pretending to organize things when you're supposed to be working.

\* Don't get so caught up in the busyness of work and the excitement of socializing that you forget to leave some time for yourself. Everyone needs alone time.

- Although your roommate won't always be in your dorm, I think you need to find a location you can visit anytime that's nice and quiet so you can clear your mind whenever you need to.

- Take time to pray, meditate, think, or just enjoy the surroundings.

- For alone time to be truly peaceful, you need to turn your phone off for a while. Don't worry: those messages aren't going anywhere.

- Just ten minutes of uninterrupted peace and quiet can do wonders for you.

**University life can be stressful. But by planning ahead, taking care of your health, and asking for help when you need it, you can make it through these challenging years.**

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