Success in Transitioning to College

A Resource for Seniors from the Deans at Harvard-Westlake School 2016
Dear Members of the Class of 2016

May the years ahead be challenging, exciting, fun, and filled with happiness, as well as academic and personal growth. We enjoyed being a part of your high school experience.

Good luck in college!

[Signatures]
Introduction

You probably have many thoughts and feelings running through your head about embarking on this new adventure. Everything from “Will I be able to make it academically?” to “What will my roommate be like?” to “How will I pack all my stuff in the car?” Remember that you’re not the only one wondering these things. That’s the beauty of being a college freshman. Everyone is starting off as a newcomer.

ADJUSTING

Keys to getting along with your roommate: (The Three C’s) Communication, Compromise, Consideration.

Being homesick is natural. It can mean missing a family member, pet, friend, neighborhood, or room of your own.

Stay in touch with friends and family. Write, call, and e-mail. They need to hear from you as much as you need to hear from them.

Your high school friends who are also beginning college will also be going through an adjustment as well. Be patient and supportive.

Understand thoroughly the distinction between a good friend and an acquaintance. Quality friendship takes time.

Browse the college handbook: the rules, regulations, ethics code. You are responsible for adhering to college policies. “Ignorance is no excuse.”

Ask questions rather than wasting precious time. When speaking with college staff, make sure you get the name of the person you spoke with.

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Whenever you get the chance, eat healthy food. Especially snacks. Consider taking a multi-vitamin.

Try to get 7 to 8 hours of sleep each night. This pays off in the long run.

Do laundry on a regular basis and remember to separate the colors!

Safety on campus = simple common sense. Go in groups; leave a situation if you feel it is getting out of control; don’t feel the need to continue in an uncomfortable situation; use the buddy system; and trust your gut instinct. Set sexual limits. Trust your feelings. Be assertive.

Alcohol and drugs can lower inhibitions and thus help us speak more freely, take more risks, be more outgoing, dance more outrageously, feel more comfortable, and/or “make the first move.” But with lowered inhibitions often come increased vulnerability, intensified emotions, and impaired judgment. It’s no surprise that in the vast majority of incidents of sexual abuse (and sexual encounters regretted after the fact) on campus, some or all of the people involved were “under the influence.” Drugs impair one’s ability to reason, to accurately assess risk, and to make well-thought-out decisions, and they make us more likely to engage in activities we wouldn’t ordinarily consent to.

If you bring expensive things with you, make sure you and your roommate lock the door. Find a good hiding place to keep valuable or lock your desk drawer if you can. You are the most precious valuable in the room so also lock your door while sleeping.

Investigate available health care services. Find out if you are still covered under your parents’ medical insurance policy. Some universities offer inexpensive or free health care service.

Don’t put problems off. (It is the single worst things you can do.) Don’t be above using the counseling services. It is a sign of strength. We all need help occasionally even beyond friends. At most schools, it is free.

Make sure you give your body the rest, nutrients and exercise it needs on a regular basis. With a busy schedule, these basics sometimes fall to the bottom of the priority list. Try to maintain a healthy daily routine.
Introduction (cont’d)

Sometimes taking some time away from the hectic college routine and doing something different or relaxing can re-energize you. Hike in the woods, volunteer in town, tour the local historic sites, or write in your journal. Find your own method of stress relief, be it listening to music; meditating, playing sports; reading; whatever relaxes you and gives you an attitude adjustment. Find your center.

SEEKING GUIDANCE & DIRECTION

Making your own choices is part of college independence. You are ultimately the one who will make your own decisions, but it doesn’t mean you have to go it alone.

When the going gets a little tough, be willing to ask for help as soon as you need it. Communicate with your friends and family, and don’t forget to use the resources on your campus. After all, you’re paying for them! Information desks, libraries, computer labs, athletic centers, student unions, career placements centers, health centers, counseling centers, residence hall staff, dean of students offices, learning centers, writing labs, academic advisors... they’re all there for you!

A few resources to check out if you’re having a little difficulty:

Residential Advisors. Your RA will be an upperclassman who lives on your floor and is there to help you. Most schools have a rigorous RA application process and intense training so your RA should know how to help you or at least where to send you to get help. You will have several meetings with your RA during your first semester.

Academic Advisor. Do you have problems scheduling your classes? Still confused about what courses to take? This is the person to see about academic problems.

Personal Counselors. At some point we all get the blues; sometimes we can pinpoint a reason and other times we just feel down without knowing why. But if you just can’t seem to get out of the slump, do yourself a favor and see a counselor. It is a sign of strength and not weakness to recognize that you need a little help and encouragement to get going again.

Unlike your friends and family, this person can offer a professional, objective ear.

From: Looking Forward to College– Complied by Deans at Scarsdale School

WHAT WE’LL EXPECT OF YOU

A Professor’s-Eye View of College

by Richard E. Ferry

Students tell me that attending classes for the first time in our private university is scary, somewhat awesome, but absolutely exciting.

The excitement includes all the freedom that comes with away-from-class time along with professors who may not be strict attendance takers. Just what are the expectations of these trusting professors in this freedom-filled environment?

I tell students that their professors’ greatest expectations will be that they become actively involved in their own learning. This means that they become as enthused as they can with the texts and readings assigned.

I want my students in attendance at all class meetings. I want them doing assignments and readings on time. I want them to become as enthused with the texts and readings assigned.

On the personal side, I like it when students come up after class to share an insight, or ask an honest question about a topic we’ve discussed. I like it when they let me know beforehand that they’re going to be absent from class and why. (I tell them honestly that I don’t want to be in it when they let me know that something we’re doing is interfering with their career.

This sort of involvement comes easily for the non-traditional student who knows it’s a privilege to be on campus and who has fairly small class sizes and who make themselves available to students – expect you to be much more than a passive learner.

My daughter will be a junior next year at a private college about three hours north of home. She has had one professor there who says he will give an “A” grade to anyone who does not volunteer to talk during discussions.

Sometimes I introduce a participation chart and ask a student who knows other class members’ names to check off names of those who take part during our class session. Toward the end of the period I ask, “Who do you think gained the most from our class today?” Then, I tell them that I think the following students gained the most and read the names with check marks.
A Professor’s Eye View of College (cont’d)

Not trusting my own expectations entirely, I sought out the opinion of six other colleagues who are experienced professors from a full-time faculty of 115. We are members of a university with a strong liberal arts curriculum for general education requirements in four schools, including arts and sciences, business, fine arts, and nursing.

“I want a student who is active; not a sponge,” said a veteran accounting professor. A psychology professor said he wants students to get so involved that they become able to express alternate ways of thinking about work, discover different ways to seek “truth” and share diverse perspectives on what it takes to acquire knowledge.

“Students who come to college only to get a job are extremely naïve,” said an effective education instructor. She expects students to come to college to want to learn, to grow, and to change as human beings. “I want them to be more responsible and self-sufficient; to be less dependent on parents and others for ideas and support.” Most professors, even those who are overly helpful and who usually tell you more than you really want to know, still expect students to be responsible for their own learning. Students can’t expect the professor to do all the work – to fill up an “empty-jar” student, so to speak.

“May I tell you what I don’t expect?” asked another colleague. “I don’t want students who know exactly what they want to do in life. I want students to feel it’s OK to change their majors, to take risks, and to enroll in new courses.” Also, he values initiative in students: those who show they are interested in more than earning a grade, those who have intellectual curiosity beyond their major or course work. Interesting questions for students to ask him would be, “Why is it that things are as they appear?” and “Why is it that things are not as they appear?” Instead, too many students ask, “Will this be on the test?” and “What extra work can I do to improve my grade?”

High on your professors’ expectations will be keeping up on assignments. This brings “shared intelligence” instead of “shared ignorance” to class discussions. Too many upperclass students would have neophytes believe that the best time to study for an exam is the night before. We used to have a printed caveat in a lower hall which inspired me both as a student and as an instructor. It read, “It is better to keep up than it is to catch up.” The significant contribution you will be expected to make to your classes goes much beyond excelling on a test.

Of course, you’ll have expectations of professors, too. Just be sure you don’t expect the professor to do all the work: to entertain you and fill you up with all the important things you will ever need to know, as if you were an empty jar and the professor, an open fire hydrant. And, yes, your involvement in your learning and your contributions in classes will be on the test that evaluates you as a successful student and as an active, lifetime learner.

Richard E. Ferry is a professor of education at Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois.

Charging Those Sky-High Expenses

The one (and perhaps only) good thing about the high cost of college is that if you charge your tuition on one of those credit cards that gives you frequent-flier miles for every dollar you spend, you may very well get a free round-trip ticket each year. And if you charge your loan payments, books, and room and board, you’ll be able to pop in on your grandma in Sydney, Taiwan, or Bali. But be sure to pay off your balance in full as soon as you get the bill—otherwise, high interest rates will make the cost of school even more astronomical. In some cases you can pay by credit and then use loan money to pay the bill immediately. Talk to the school bursar’s office for more information.

Read the Mouse Type

The fine print on the back of your monthly credit card statements lays out your rights as a cardholder. You’ll find information about how to report a missing card; refuse payment to places that did not provide you with the goods and/or services for which you’ve been charged; obtain a refund for merchandise you purchased with the card and then returned; take advantage of the extended warranty and protection against lost, stolen, or defective merchandise that many card companies offer; and report and rectify a possible billing error. You are entitled to have the payments you make credited to your account properly.
Avoiding the Credit Card Blues

If used responsibly, credit cards can offer convenience, consumer protection, and an opportunity to build your credit rating. However, between the fees, the deceptively low interest rates, and “benefits” with strings attached, they can send you into debt faster than you can say “compounded interest.” Below are some tips and tricks for escaping being crushed under a plastic avalanche.

- Beware of deals and options that seem too good to be true—they usually are. For example, many card companies “allow” you to defer payments for a month or two (most often right after the winter holidays).
- Don’t be fooled by what appear to be low monthly interest rates. You pay compounded interest on credit cards. Every month interest will be computed and added to your monthly balance. The next month interest will be computed on the principal plus the interest already accrued, and so on. In effect, you’ll be paying interest on your interest.
- Beware of the minimum payment option. Aim to pay the entire bill each month, or at least as much as you can.
- You don’t necessarily have to wait until you get a statement to pay. Make ghost payments (money given between the specified due dates) to save on interest if your card has no grace period or if you have an outstanding balance on your card. In other words, because interest rates are so high, making payments to reduce your debt, no matter how small, can go a long way toward saving you money.
- Read the fine print. Seemingly insignificant differences in grade periods, interest rates, and fees can add up to a pretty penny over the course of a year or so.
- If you can’t manage your debt, get help ASAP.

So Many Classes...So Little Time

Overwhelmed by the tome that is your course catalog? Doubtful that there’s enough time in the world to check out all the classes you’re interested in during the shopping period at the beginning of the term? Below are things to consider when choosing classes to help you pare down your list into a fairly reasonable semester’s schedule.

- Subject matter that interests you
- Recommendations from peers, professors, advisors, and alums
- General and major requirements/credits
- When the class meets (Know thyself: Not being a “morning person” is certainly not the best reason to can a 9:00am course, but it may be a consideration.)
- Professor (Check out the teaching assistant as well. You’re likely to spend more time with her than the prof, anyway.)
- Workload
- Good prep for later life, or current life
- How a particular class will fill out/balance your transcript
- The classroom environment (is it a discussion or lecture class? Do the students give presentations or only the prof? Does everyone sit in a circle or face front?)
- Grading options
- Costs (Factor in lab fees, materials fees for visual arts classes, books you’ll have to buy, transportation if it’s off campus.)
- Level of other students in the class (Will the discussions be boring, insipid, inspiring, or completely over your head?)
- Provides a challenge
Here I am—halfway through my first year at college. Though these last few months haven’t been easy, they’ve been a lot of fun. I “survived” the trip here with my family, Freshman Orientation, class registration, my first writing assignments and tests, homesickness, the food, the newness of everything, Greek rush, my opening varsity soccer game, two all-nighters, shopping for myself, paying my own bills, and much more. I can say that I’ve finally “settled in”—it feels like home here.

Now I can look back on my first semester at college and see things in perspective. I’ve grown up a lot and I’ve learned a lot—in class and out of class. More and more, I find myself saying: “I wish I had known about college.” What do I wish I had known? Well, I wish I had known that...

...college is not as hard as everyone says it is.
...the professors are not all trying to ruin our lives—they’re on our side!
...it is really not as hard to make friends as I thought.
...sometimes I would have classes in which I wouldn’t know what was going on.
...my freshman year would be so stressful—and it wouldn’t be just in academics.
...even at a “nice” college, there would be kids who drink and use drugs.
...some nights I would have to sleep with the lights on while my roommate studied.
...there are so many things going on at one time.
...you don’t have to try to change to fit in because when you are yourself, then you fit in.
...you don’t have to worry about what people think about you: they don’t think about you!
...at times my roommate and I would argue.
...I should spend more time studying than socializing.
...no one would be around to tell me to study, eat right, or clean my room.
...I should have learned how to balance a check book.
...I would miss home and my friends.
...people would borrow my clothes without asking.
...there is always something going on and I must say “no” to some things that are unimportant.
...when I got sick, I would have to take care of myself.
...I would spend so little time in class and so much time studying after class.
...people love to play tricks in the dorm.
...tests always seem to come in threes.
...I should have some idea of what classes to take and how to read a schedule.
...People who are worth knowing—in college and later in life—will accept you for what you are, rather than how you look.
...time flies in college.
...you have to learn to deal with a whole hall of people 24 hours a day—and often there is no privacy.
...my underwear will turn pink if I wash them with my red shirt.
...growing up is so hard to do!
...I would have a lot of friends, but only a few close ones.
...people are as friendly to you as you are to them.
...what I’ve done in the past doesn’t matter—everyone has a chance to “make it” in college.
...I could study for hours for a test and still do poorly.
...I should not judge people on first impressions.
...I’m responsible for whatever happens in my dorm room.
...even though I wasn’t Miss _______ in high school, I could still be somebody in college (and vice versa).
...only brochures have perfect weather!
...(how) to wash my own clothes.
...some girls are really anorexic.
...my parents would have withdrawal symptoms.
...if I studied all night for a test, I might be too tired to wake up the next morning—or too tired to do well on the test.
...when I have problems with my roommate, I should tell my roommate and not everyone else.
...I should keep up with reading assignments daily.
...there would be times when I would miss my family and wish I were home.
...dorm rooms are not self cleaning.
...I would gain 10 pounds from junk food and late night pizza.
...every time I called home, my parents would ask, “how much now?”
...I would miss my mom’s cooking.

Our thanks to Jennifer Trussell, Director of Admissions at Mississippi College, who collected the responses above from students at the college.
Dr. Mom’s Guide to College

Things We Wish You Didn’t Have to Know

1. As much as campus officials try, no environment is completely safe. Know what the risks are and how to minimize them – then do it!

2. Most colleges provide at least basic escort services for students after dark. Know what they are and how to contact them. Better yet, use a buddy system and don’t wander around dark, deserted parts of campus alone or with a relative stranger.

3. Invest in a good basic self defense course, then be sure to practice the skills you’ve learned.

4. Remember that most women are in more danger from people they know than from strangers – so take the precautions you already know about to avoid date rape and similar kinds of assaults.

5. If something happens, know how to report it and to whom. Remember that victims are never to blame, and that no matter the outcome, you always did your very best. Take advantage of all available resources to assist in the recovery process and try to give yourself the gift of patience with the process.

6. Sexual harassment is less of a problem than it once was, but certainly hasn’t been eliminated. The good news is that your college should have published policies on what constitutes sexual harassment and how to deal with it. The bad news is that for a student to confront a faculty member or other campus official can be difficult at best. If you feel you’ve been harassed by anyone on campus, you may want to start by talking it over with a trusted, but “neutral” faculty member or counselor.

7. You’ve heard more than you want to about the problems of binge drinking, drug abuse, and eating disorders. Unfortunately, what you’ve heard is probably true, so try to pay at least a little attention and exercise more caution than you think necessary (it’ll still be less than your parents would like).

8. If you or someone you know is in trouble, get help. Believe it or not, there is a whole community of folks out there who want nothing more than to give it to you. Start with the folks in your Student Services office; they should be able to direct you to the right person in the right place to take care of you.

http://www.lions.odu.edu/~kkilburn/dr_mom/dr_mom_wish.htm

4/21/2010
What to Bring
(things you might not think of)

- Milk crates
- Extra desk lamp
- Poster putty
- Large laundry bag (for transporting home)
- Loud alarm clock (beware the snooze button)
- Hangers
- Full length mirror
- Extension cords/ computer cords/
- USB cables
- Outlet power strips
- Hammer and nails
- Screwdriver (Philips and flat-head)
- Vornado® fan
- Quarters for laundry
- Small vacuum

From: Student Survival Guide Clark University by Valerie Garfield.

Tips for the end of the year….

- Look into housing options for the following year
  If housing is hard to come by where you go to school, start hunting for housing by the second semester of your first year.

- Explore internship opportunities
  If you feel your academic schedule can handle it, think about applying for an internship in a field that interests you. An internship can help you choose a major and a prospective career, in addition to giving you valuable contacts and real-world experience.

- Balance work and play
  All work and no play is a sure recipe for unhappiness but so is all play and no work. It all catches up to you eventually. Learn to balance school work with a healthy social life. Try to set aside some time each day to rest and relax.

- Start planning for life after college
  What do you want to get out of college? What do you want to do after college? How will you achieve your goals? Ask yourself these questions and see if you can’t come up with a rough plan to achieve your goals for the next few years.
The materials contained in this Guide were complied by the Deans of Harvard-Westlake High School from the following sources:


*Looking Forward to College*, Complied by the Deans of Scarsdale High School.

*Student Survival Guide Clark University* by Valerie Garfield.