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Chapter 11: The Transition to College

The college or university environment differs greatly from that of high school. The academic work will be more rigorous and demanding. Residence hall living will be a dramatic change from life at home. And you'll be surrounded by an array of new people—new friends, new classmates, and new professors.

Possibly the most significant difference will be the new independence you find as a college student. What you do, when you do it, and how things get done will be entirely up to you. That means new responsibilities and challenges.

On the Academic Front

Higher education entails what the title implies—higher standards, more difficult subject matter, and greater expectations of you as a student.

Remember, students are admitted to their college or university based upon an appraisal of their ability. If you weren't capable of meeting the academic challenges, you wouldn't be there.

Budgeting time and establishing priorities are among the most difficult challenges new college students face.

College classes follow a different schedule and structure. Some meet every day. Others meet only one, two, or three times a week. You may also have evening or online courses. Depending on the college, some lecture-oriented subjects may be taught in an auditorium setting, with more than a hundred students in attendance. In general, classes are longer and more intensive and the volume of work required by college instructors will likely be greater than what you are accustomed to in high school. Allow several hours outside of class to complete the required readings and other assignments.

Establishing good habits—and arranging your time to allow for study, leisure, and rest—will serve you well throughout your college career.

If you're struggling in a course or have questions about the material, make sure to talk with your professor, teaching assistants, and/or your academic advisor.

Take advantage of your college's support services, academic and otherwise.

Seek the assistance of the professionals in the counseling center, health center, or student services department if you experience any difficulty making the adjustment to school.

Navigating Campus Life

The independence you gain as a college student comes with new responsibilities.

Arranging for housing, managing money, and making new friends are all part of the college experience for students who move away to school.

As a freshman, you will likely live in a dorm or apartment. In most instances, you will share these spaces with a roommate. It is your responsibility to work with your roommate to maintain an environment that is comfortable for both living and studying. Many freshmen go in expecting to become best friends with their roommate. Sometimes it happens; often it doesn't. Try to develop a positive relationship built on open communication, trust, flexibility, and understanding.

You will be extremely fortunate if you find a roommate who shares your philosophy of neatness and taste, and who operates according to a clock and calendar similar to yours. In most cases, you will need to make compromises. Be polite, open-minded, and willing to meet in the middle.

Money management is another responsibility you'll take on. If you've had summer or part-time jobs, you've been exposed to the process of earning, saving, and spending. As a college student, you must manage your spending over time. Make sure you know the items, like books and supplies, which you will need to pay for on a regular basis. Like the monitoring of your time, money management requires discipline.

Get as much practice as you can while still in high school. Learn to handle a checkbook and/or debit or credit card. Practice allocating money for the things you need first, while conserving some for nonessential items and leisure.

Making new friends is another vital part of your transition from high school to college.

You may be going to a college with some high school acquaintances. You may have relatives or friends who are upperclassmen. Or you may be starting from scratch, and have to begin making friends all over again.

It's important to remember that your quest for new friends is one that you share with just about all other freshmen. A little bit of initiative on your part is likely to be appreciated and result in the creation of new relationships.

Student organizations—including sororities; fraternities; and special interest groups such as drama, athletics, music, community service, and more—offer opportunities for you to meet people with similar interests and expand your social contacts beyond your roommate and fellow dorm residents.

Approach your first year of college with enthusiasm, anticipation, and willingness to adapt.

It's an exciting time in your life. By taking charge of the changes that lie ahead, you can eliminate or minimize pressures and go forward with confidence.

Have a great freshman year and a great college career!

