

EXTEND YOURSELF

As an incoming freshman I wish I'd known I didn't need to know everything! I was so wrapped up in the idea that I had to know my major, how to navigate campus and the social scene, even how to do laundry. Sometimes the beauty is in figuring these things out organically. To be a successful freshman, you just have to be willing to learn as you go. — *Grace Carita, Bucknell University, '18*



The first day of college I was a ball of nerves and I remember walking into my first class and running to the first seat I found, thinking everyone would be staring at me. But nobody seemed to notice and then it hit me: The fact that nobody knew me meant nobody would judge, which, upon reflection, was what I was scared of the most. I told myself to let go. I began to force myself into situations that were uncomfortable for me — for example, auditioning for a dance piece — and the performance was a highlight of my freshman year. Challenge yourself to try something new, something you couldn't have done in high school. — *Ria Jagasia, Vanderbilt University, '18*

DO THE WORK

Go to class! Seriously, unless you are half dead, go! — *Megan Taylor, Salem College, '15*

If you ever feel like your classes are too difficult to handle, don't worry, there is always help out there. Most schools offer tutoring. Also, most professors are more than happy to help you during office hours. If that doesn't work, there are places to go, free on YouTube. — *Asad Mirza, Florida International University, '18*

UNDERSTAND THE SYSTEM, AND WORK IT

Professors can be your greatest allies, so link up with a few. They want to help you do the very thing you're there for, learn! — *Krista Cohen, Brooklyn College, '18*

The important people to develop relationships with? Department secretaries. One of them just might become your life counselor, spare mom and cheerleader. Guess who's going to give you the best directions for getting to class? Help you reserve that classroom for a club movie night? Let you use the office phone "just this once" when your iPhone dies from Snapchat overuse? These people may be your first real adult friends. They don't think they're ancient or disconnected from today's youth and neither should you. — *Victoria Zencak, Central Washington University, '16*

BE YOURSELF

Don't compare yourself to other students. It is easy to feel lost, especially when it comes to academics. Remember that everyone has unique talents, and you have four years to cultivate yours. — *Shivani Dixit, University of Chicago, '17*

I still struggle with feelings of inadequacy and social incompatibility specific to my experiences as a low-income, first-generation student, and you might face similar challenges. Your more fortunate peers will frustrate you with their well-meaning suggestion to just "buy a new one" after you lose your coat, textbook, or laptop; they may sadden you when they ask where your parents went to school, where your siblings want to go, why you seem so different from your entire family. Sometimes, you might feel you just don't belong on campus. I implore you to extend grace to yourself and have confidence in the fact that you were chosen not only for your academic competency but also for the perspective you have to offer your peers and professors. You are now part of a conversation that would be lacking without your voice. Speak even louder, and help others understand a life story they may not have considered before they met you. — *Brittanie Lewis, Amherst College, '17*

Throughout high school, I had been relentlessly bullied and criticized for who I was and what I believed in. Eager to prevent my problems from following me into college, I kept my hard exterior, overcompensating for my fear of being rejected. It took me an entire semester to realize this was the exact opposite of the approach I should have taken. What I hadn't taken into account was that everyone I was surrounded by was in the same boat. Shed your inhibitions and prior conceptions of who people can be. College provides an environment that fosters creativity, friendship and acceptance. Don't waste time trying to prove others wrong who doubted you, but push yourself to prove yourself wrong of who you think you need to be. — *Tom Diehl, University of Pittsburgh, '15*

TEND TO YOURSELF

Sometimes a mental health day is in order. If you don't have class after 10am or until 4pm, enjoy your favorite book, feel like a rebel and go walk the city. College is the last time in your life when you'll be able to shirk off a large part of a day – with no responsibilities. Do it – (but just not too often). — *Michaela Eby, St. Mary's College, '15*

Some of you may face a difficult time during college. Whether it be failing where you've previously only succeeded or facing a family health crisis. Know you are not alone and that the road to graduation does not have to be a constant path. It is far better to take the time you need now than to push yourself to the edge of unraveling in order to stay on an arbitrary schedule. I took a semester off to deal with the death of a friend, and I was able to return a stronger student. I know it's considered taboo, but I am not sure who I would be today if I hadn't taken time to heal. — *Shelby Larkin, Purdue University, '14*

I have a few pieces of advice that helped me two years ago when I started school:

1. Feeling too stressed to take a break is a sign you need to take a break!
2. Schedule a regular time to call loved ones.
3. Sleep cannot be overemphasized.
4. It's impossible to focus in class if you are "taking notes" on a laptop.
5. Talk through ground rules and personal living preferences with your roommates at the very beginning of the year. It will be a useful conversation to refer back to if/when issues come up. — *Annalisa Galgano, New York University Abu Dhabi, '17*

I wrote this list — a compilation of things I wish I had known at the start of college three years ago — for my sister, an incoming freshman...

1. When you are stressed, take a shower. You will feel productive and you will be clean.
2. Your grade in one class does not define you.
3. Make sure you check in with yourself now and then. How are you doing? If the answer is not so great, treat yourself. Prioritize your well being.
4. Some readings are more important than others. It's O.K. to skim sometimes.
5. Don't be afraid to call campus security if you or a friend is sick or feels unsafe.
6. Take naps. Preschool and college are the only times when napping is socially acceptable.
7. If you always have enough clean socks/underwear, your life will be so much easier. — *Justine Goode, Oberlin College, '16*

DEVELOP PEOPLE SKILLS

It is taboo almost everywhere to talk about your academic/athletic/social achievements back in high school. There's a term for it: peaking too early. Someone who peaks early is on the decline after high school. To put it frankly, no one cares about your high school "accomplishments." — *Mohamed Sharaf, Texas Christian University, '17*

Most students arriving at orientation have just left everyone they know behind. This sudden independence creates a mad scramble to replace the high school group they have left behind. As a result, freshmen quickly

form close groups that disastrously fall apart in the coming weeks. Instead, I recommend getting to know lots of people and slowly and naturally form close friendships. — *Grace Blackmon, Hendrix College, '17*

Don't hook up with the boy across the hall from you on the first night of college. — *Clare Gilroy, Binghamton University, '16*

Think about where you want to set your boundaries sexually. There will be lots of opportunities for casual hookups and one-night stands. Don't let your standards slip just because you're unprepared. — *Madeleine Rowell, Stanford, '18*

DON'T GET STUCK

If you're like me — meaning fairly driven and self-assured — you're coming into college with a strong idea of what you'd like to do with the rest of your life. At 18, I was set on medical school, with the hopes of becoming a neurobiologist. When I got to college, however, a single freshman seminar showed me that both my academic talents and interests lay with political science and Spanish. At first, I was hesitant to pursue these fields because they didn't fit the image I had of what would lead to success. With time, I learned that *interest* and *success* are highly correlated — do what you love, and you'll be good at what you do. Don't be afraid to take classes that challenge your suppositions. A single course could be a game-changer. — *Sasha Ward, University of Virginia, '15, University of Oxford, '17*

I met a fifth-year senior in my first class and judged him. I finished in three and a half years. I wish I had spent five years in college. I wish I had taken my time, worked more maybe, joined a club. College is goal-oriented, but your career can wait a year or two. — *Jay S. Raadt, University of North Texas, '12*

Having a set agenda for four years of your life does not usually go according to plan. If you find you are not having an exciting college experience, change something. Do not let the pressures or judgment of others keep you in a situation that isn't ideal for you. The change might be challenging at first, but it will be worth it. — *Claudia Siqueiros, Northern Illinois University, '16*