

Transition advice... From those who know

The transition from secondary school to university is a huge leap that comes with a lot of new and exciting experiences, as well as a lot more independence and responsibility. Going off to university is often the first glimpse of what being an adult is like, especially if you're moving out of your parent's house and living on your own.

Many people will give advice on this transition, all very well intentioned. But the best advice is often from people who have experienced this firsthand. So here are a few pieces of advice from recent university graduates who responded to the survey question "What do you know now that you wish you knew when you started university?"

1. Hollywood Lied

Apologies for bursting any bubbles, but the idyllic college scenarios portrayed in movies and TV shows are not real. Don't get me wrong, your experience at university will be amazing, but it won't be without its share of challenges. Expecting grand gestures like flash mobs on move-in day or unknown admirers leaving love notes on your desk in class or an immediate group of best friends might lead to disappointment. In reality, you might find yourself lost campus, late for your 8am class or having to eat lunch alone as no one else you know has an open lunch period at the same time. You may misjudge the amount of time to complete an assignment or pull an all-nighter only to find out you're too tired to recall the information needed for the exam. However, don't be disheartened. Your university journey will encompass both amazing moments and challenging ones that test your determination, excellence, and thirst for knowledge, which you so eloquently expressed in your application essay. Embrace the ups and downs, for it is within them that you'll discover your true strength and capabilities and prove to yourself that you can conquer every goal that you set out to achieve.

2. Nobody Cares Unless You Do

In secondary school, most of us are fortunate to have teachers who remind us about homework and parents who make sure that the homework is complete, that we get to lessons and activities on time, and even pack food that will keep us satisfied throughout the day. University is an extreme wakeup call from this. Whether or not you pass or fail a class, eat meals or even wash your clothes is dependent **solely on you**. This is the pivotal time in life where your destiny is truly in your hands. Although independence can feel exhilarating at times, it can also be stressful. Luckily, universities are staffed with people who are there to help you be successful. The important thing to remember is that in order for them to help you, you have to be willing to help yourself and reach out for help – no shame in the game!

3. Time Management is the Key To Success

I'm sure that you've heard this a thousand times, but at university is when it gets real. I have watched countless students get caught up in everything **but** class and have to come home. It is easy to get caught up in the "hype" during your first year away. Every day is an excuse to party. How can you miss Tequila Tuesdays for \$1 shots and dance the night away with your new



“besties.” Weekends start on Wednesday night – that message comes loud and clear. And, heck, most classes don’t take attendance. You can easily rationalize going out every night. However, you must remember that this is NOT why you are here. You’re here to get an education enhanced by lots of new experiences (not just partying). Excessive hanging out and/or partying and not doing your work **will** get you kicked out. No one wants to pay for a semester and then be asked to leave. Attending university is a big expense, you don’t want to waste that money. Whether your parents are helping you out or it’s coming out of your own pockets, someone is putting thousands of dollars on the line for your success and it’s NOT that cute boy/girl you were drinking with last night. It’s okay to go out and have a good time, but it’s more fun when you can go out knowing that all your work is done for the day. Plan your work and work your plan. Going off plan can create chaos in your life. This never ends well.

4. (Most) Professors Are Cooler Than You Think

Professor’s office hours exist for a reason. Part of the role of professors and Teaching Assistants (TA’s) is to spend time with students, so take full advantage of this. Some of the most valuable relationships that could last throughout your lives may be with a professor. You may gain valuable information that changes your career trajectory. For most professors, the best part of their job isn’t teaching in front of hundreds of students, it’s the one-on-one time they get to spend with students helping them learn and grow. Often professors can not only support you in their class, but they can provide job/research/career advice. If you need a recommendation letter for a job or grad school, you want to have a relationship with the professor before you ask. It’s not the best choice to ask a professor you’ve never had a one-on-one meeting with for this important reference, so get to know your professors each semester. And not just when you’re struggling in class. Be proactive and let them see you’re taking an interest. Go and introduce yourself and let them know what aspect of this class you’re excited about (you can always find something!)

5. Don’t Spend More Money Than You Have

When you get to university, you’ll see how differently each person lives. Some people are living off ramen and canned food while others are going out or ordering Uber Eats every night. Going out every night will take its toll on your bank account very quickly! It’s important to be mindful of your spending. Create a realistic budget for yourself (and allow for some wiggle room). Make sure you aren’t scraping pennies together at the end of each month to eat or pay your rent. Living within your financial means is an important skill to learn. Also, watch yourself if you get a credit card. They can be helpful since many places don’t take cash and you can see all the transactions you make in real time, but it makes it very easy to overspend (too easy!). The credit card bill must be paid at the end of every month and if you don’t have the money to pay it, you’ll get high interest charges that will just dig you deeper into debt. If you don’t have the cash to pay off the credit card, don’t use it!

6. Don’t Buy Textbooks

Buying books is very expensive. Each semester, at a fraction of the cost, you can rent used textbooks from sites like: Chegg, Campus Book Rentals, Amazon, eCampus and many others. Search online and talk to other students as to the best place to rent from – and it may be multiple



sites for different books. Go online and research this as soon as you get your syllabus. Once you've completed the class, you can simply send them back! Sometimes you can download the PDF version online, but make sure it's the right edition. Additionally, many textbooks are available in the school library – but you won't be able to check it out for the full semester. There are lots of options to save money, but make sure you have the material to read and fully digest. The professors expect you to read what they assign. This is not optional. But you don't need to spend the money on buying the books when you can rent them for less.

7. Take Advantage of School Events and Activities

There are so many exciting clubs, activities, and events at each university! You could do something new every day. However, for some this feels overwhelming. Does the thought of attending a school event or joining a new activity make you feel nervous? If you're a bit more introverted or just feeling overwhelmed, try to go to at least one event and join one new activity per semester – and feel free to do more as there are so many interesting and exciting things to do! School events and activities are a great way to meet new people, expand your horizons, learn new things, explore career options... and they often have free food and drinks. There is no downside! Except you need to talk to people. Sometimes it helps if you go with a friend so you don't feel any way about walking in by yourself (which you shouldn't) Remember why you're at university- not only for your academics, but to try new things and meet new people. Remember, attending university away is about expanding your mind and experiences. By meeting new people, you could be building a network that could potentially help you land an internship or job down the line, or you may just make some amazing new friends that you could have forever.

8. Use All of Your School's Free Resources

It's amazing how many "free" resources your university has available. You can get free printing at the school library. You can get free mental health counseling and often one-on-one tutoring for your courses. You can get your resume professionally written and edited, career advice and job listings. There also may be an amazing athletic facility on campus where you can exercise. Also, many streaming and subscription services give free accounts to university students. You can also get a six-month free trial of Amazon Prime in the United States with your ".edu" address. Many other stores and online services give discounts to university students, so shop around. Make sure you take a look at all the free resources your school offers and ask others what they are finding as well. You're spending a lot of money to be there – take advantage of all the "free stuff" that's included with your tuition payment.

9. Meet With Your Academic Advisor Regularly

Don't be a stranger to your academic advisor. Chances are, they've seen students in all kinds of situations, and they know how to lead you in the right direction. They can help keep you on track for graduation and help you change or declare your major when you need to. Meeting with an academic advisor regularly gets them familiar with you and your path forward. They will help you get the most out of your undergraduate experience. Don't wait until the end of your



university career to meet with your advisor. You could miss out on amazing opportunities. If you meet with your academic advisor and that person is not helpful, request a new one!

10. Keep Your Family in the Loop

When you move away from your family for the first time, the transition may leave you feeling homesick at times. This is normal! Keep your family updated with your all the fun and interesting things you're doing at school. Give them a call and text when you miss them — odds are they're missing you too. You're never too old to have a good talk with mom and dad to perk you up when you feel down. It's easy to get really busy between classes and all the social stuff but stay in touch to share positive experiences and not just call or text when you need something.

11. Apply for Scholarships and Grants

Most students think you only apply for scholarships prior to going to university, but you may be missing out on free money if you don't continue to search for scholarships throughout your tenure at school. Scholarships aren't only merit-based, they're often "opportunity based" and they're offered based on lots of criteria. So go to the financial aid office (or online) and make sure you review all the scholarships that your school offers AND go online and search for non-university-based scholarships that are open to all students in a particular niche. You may be surprised at the funds you may reap along the way.

12. Work Can Be Amazing

Many students need to take on a job so they have spending money at school. It's unlikely that a work-study (on campus) job will provide enough money to pay tuition and living expenses. It's important to be realistic about the amount of money that can be earned while being a full-time student. That being said, working while being a student can be a great experience! There are so many different types of jobs you can find on campus, and you actually can have a great experience as well as get paid. Many jobs require/cap students to work between 10-20 hours, so it's not overly taxing on your time. Most of us can find 10 hours that we are scrolling online or steaming Netflix, so take the opportunity to find a job. You'll make some money, get work experience, and meet new people. You may begin the path to your professional future.

13. Take a Fun/Random Class

Your university classes are the foundation for your career, but you deserve to take a few fun ones as well. All majors have a set of required courses and then there is room for "electives". Take a look at your school's course catalog to see which electives stand out to you. From photography to yoga to wine tasting, you can expand your horizons while still getting an education. Who knows, one of these random classes could change the course of your university career! If not, at least you got some fun out of it.

14. Get Rejected

Rejection is a huge fear for some people, especially students. But when you decide to put yourself out there and get rejected, you learn how to deal with the disappointment that we all inevitably see along the bumpy road of life. At some point, most people have experienced rejection in their careers, with friends or romantic relationships. This is a normal part of life and unfortunately, the only way to become more resilient is to go through rejection and learn from it.

15. Make the Most of Orientation

Most universities have a mandatory orientation for first-year students. It could be a one-, two-, or three-day event. No matter how long yours is, it's important to attend and make the most of it. It will set you up for success with your housing, class schedule, and placement in your courses and provide other essential bits of information. Also, many students meet their lifelong friends here. The first few weeks of your freshman year is an experience like no other. Most students are there, like you, knowing no one or a few people from home. But everyone is in the same boat, looking for new friends. Keep an open mind and make the most of it.

16. Study Habit Essentials

Did you breeze through secondary school? Are you a procrastinator and scramble to finish papers at the last minute? If yes, you could be in for a rude awakening when you get to university. Most professors expect you to study and be prepared for your class, not just for exams. You can't skip doing the reading. And reading a synopsis likely won't cut it either. Gaining good study habits early will help you succeed. Make sure you create a study plan – know the days/times that work best for you to be quiet and head down in your books. Don't wait until the last minute to write a paper, complete a project or prepare for an exam. Being proactive always has better outcomes. Learning how to plan and have discipline will set you up for success in the future as well.

17. Be Honest With Yourself and Reach Out For Help

It's okay to be nervous about attending university. It's okay not to be a morning person. It's okay to have a hard time in a class or have issues with your roommate. The important part is that you're honest with yourself about whatever you're dealing with. All these issues can be addressed.

If you're nervous about starting university, try talking to a friend who is already living away from home. You may also want to talk to your family about your anxieties or take advantage of your school's mental health program when you arrive. If you're not a morning person, try to work your schedule so you don't have 8am classes every morning (trust me, if you're not a morning person, trying to get up for those 8am classes is going to be *tough*). And if you're having a hard time in class, talk to your professor, meet with a tutor, or set up some extra study time with a classmate. If you're having issues with your roommate that you don't seem able to resolve, talk to your Resident Assistant. RA's are there to help students resolve these issues.



There are solutions to all the problems students face in university – you only have to be honest with yourself and seek support when needed!

18. Treat Your Body Well or It Will Treat You Badly

It's very easy to literally go "hog wild" at university. You've probably heard of the "Freshman 15". That's "a thing" since it's so easy to let your eating get out of control. It's probably the first time you're fully independent – no one to tell you what or when to eat, when to sleep or study, when to get off the phone and when to exercise. It's important to create a schedule and have discipline to stay on it. The "All you can eat meal plan" may sound great. You can eat pizza, burgers and fries all day! No one is telling you to eat your veggies. Then on top of big meals in the dining hall, late night drinks and food at 3am can sound like fun when you're out with new friends. However, these habits will make you feel physically ill – often tired, lethargic, and sluggish and impede your ability to participate in class and study. Do your best to eat healthy and mindfully, exercise regularly and get a good night's sleep. They'll all do you well.

University is a time to embrace who you are in a new place with new people. Before you know it, you'll be giving the same advice on things to know before going to university because you'll have lived it out! Make the most out of your experience and enjoy the ride!