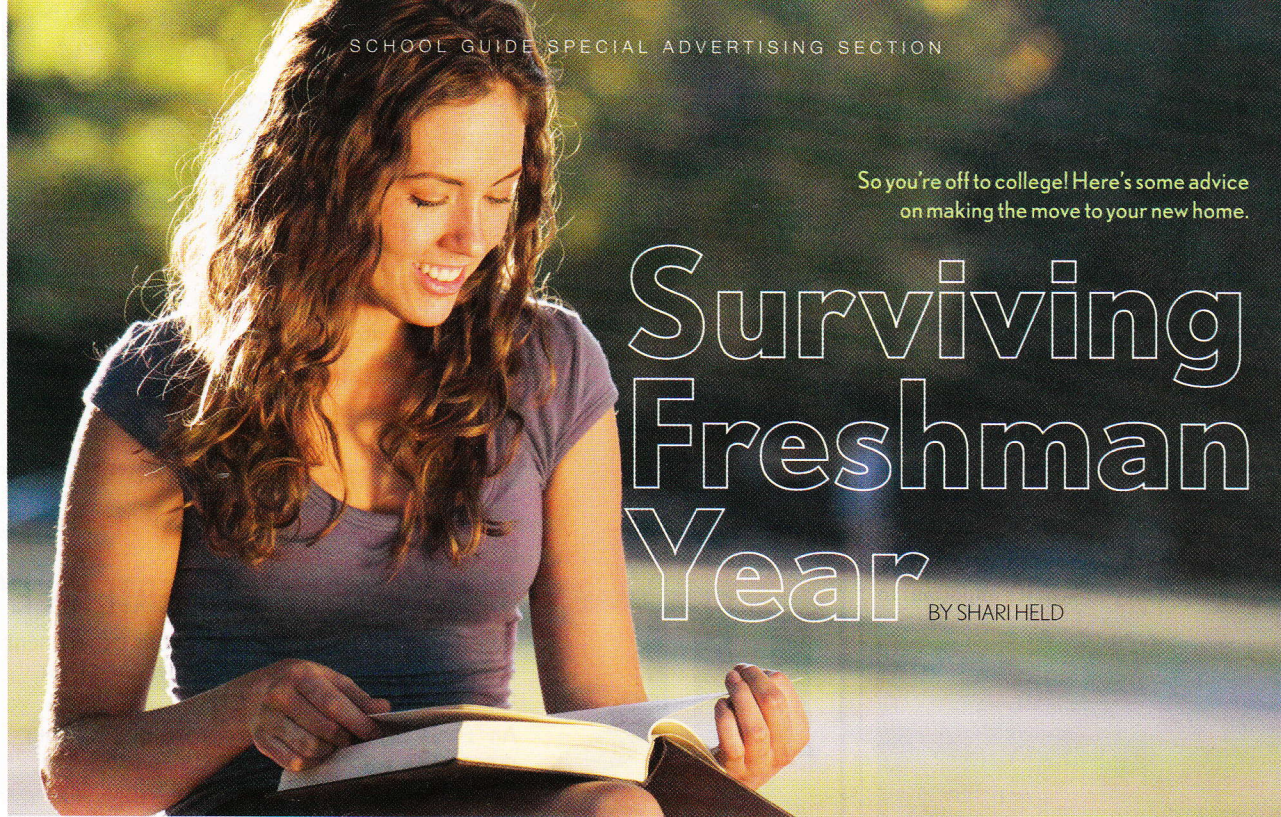


So you're off to college! Here's some advice on making the move to your new home.

Surviving Freshman Year

BY SHARI HELD



Taking on the first year of college can be an ordeal—you're probably away from home for the first time, thrown together with roommates who may not exactly be BFF material, and facing a nightly study workload that's far beyond anything you had to deal with in high school. But by making some smart preparations, keeping an open mind, and looking for ways to make your new environment feel more like a home, you can get through—and have fun doing it.

Consider this advice from school administrators who've seen it all and students who have not only survived, but thrived during their first year at college.

Think ahead.

The freshman-year journey begins at home, typically during the senior year of high school. Some areas for planning:

CLASSES. "My number-one advice for incoming freshmen would be to finish high school strong," says Cody Adams, a freshman at Ball State University. "If you are involved in Advanced Placement classes, try to get your AP credits."

COLLEGE STRESS. Advance preparation for dealing with day-to-day stress is one way students can stay on track once they arrive at campus. Getting overwhelmed

can lead to inertia—not good during that all-important first semester.

"Students can discuss different situations with their family and how they might handle them," says Kristi Deetz, senior director of external relations for Vincennes University. "Perhaps they weren't able to select their roommate. How will they deal with the stress if they don't get along with the roommate? They should discuss both the good ways to handle situations when they are upset as well as ways that aren't so productive."

Deetz points out that stress eating—living on French fries, pizza, and ice cream—can help lead to the infamous "Freshman 15," supposedly the typical amount of weight gained during the freshman year. "That can actually add to the stress," she says.

MONEY. Managing the financial aspects of attending a university can be daunting for both parents and incoming freshmen, but it's a critical part of the process. They need to research the cost of tuition, room and board, and assorted mandatory fees, but they can't stop there.

"Parents need to ask what's not covered," says Dr. Levester Johnson, vice president of student affairs for Butler University. "What's my student going to need to really fit in with the culture of that campus environment?"

Johnson suggests you create a budget and put funds in a local bank. "Funds should be divided between semesters," he says. "Sometimes a family will give a student a lump sum and expect the student to get through the school year on that. That's difficult even for people who have been managing money for a long time. There also needs to be an understanding between the parents and the student as to the spending of those funds."

Creating a budget well in advance of the first semester will highlight potential shortfalls and indicate whether students might need to consider working during school to earn additional cash. Job fairs and opportunities are typically offered at the beginning of each semester. Finding a job mid-semester may be more difficult, and the selection may not be as robust.

Get acclimated to the campus—and the people you'll want to know.

Studying all the handouts and checking out pertinent, informative Web sites may seem about as exciting as reading the phone book, but knowing when and where there are tutoring services available could be a lifesaver some day.

"The first thing that is extremely important, especially that first year, is for students to take advantage of whatever early-arrival or orientation programs

are established for the campus community, regardless of whether they are at a commuter-type campus or a residential campus,” says Johnson. “That’s where they will pick up those extra tips, the not-written-down rules about how to get involved, how to be successful, and how to find their place.” That goes for parents, too—more colleges and universities are offering orientation programs specifically for them.

Students need to be proactive about finding and using available resources, says Deetz. “They need to familiarize themselves with those resources and not be afraid to use them,” she says. “It’s okay to say, ‘I’m having trouble with math,’ and then go to see the math tutor.”

Students should take the initiative to meet with their professors. Developing relationships with faculty members can be extremely helpful later in their college career and beyond. “I was surprised by how willing the teachers were to help me out,” says Adams. “My professors all have office hours, and if I need help I can go there and get it. I’ve taken advantage of that this year.”

Get involved.

Katrena Thompson, a freshman at Ball State University, thought she’d be a loner at college because she didn’t know anyone. She credits her work with Student Voluntary Services as helping break the ice. “I got to know some really awesome people through that experience,” she says. “That’s what helped me the most. I thought there wouldn’t be anyone that would match me, but when I got here I realized there were so many different people that I could easily find a friend.”

You can find your place by joining clubs, organizations, or a fraternity or sorority; getting involved in your residence hall or intramural sports; or just showing up to campus events. The idea is to develop a circle of friends who have similar interests and who can provide support throughout your college experience.

“Our mantra here is that it’s extremely important for students to get involved,” says Johnson, citing studies that link campus involvement with a successful college experience. “It’s all about students finding their niche. Sometimes it’s formal and sometimes it’s very informal.”

Students should think about what they’re really passionate about and follow that interest, says Johnson, and not sign up for activities indiscriminately. Maybe the fellow freshmen you sat with at orientation are all joining the Glee Club, but singing really isn’t your thing. There are probably countless clubs and programs available at your campus, so consider what you’ll really want to spend those precious free hours doing.

“Students that are involved are more successful socially, and they learn skills that can help them be successful academically as well,” says Lynda Wiley, assistant vice president for student affairs and director of student life for Ball State University. “They should keep their friends back home and be in touch with their family, but really look at this as a new step and become involved and immersed within their college community.”

Participation in many campus organizations and events is at no or low cost. “Where else will someone find a chance to go to a concert or hear a national or world-renowned speaker...right in their own backyard,” says Johnson.

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**Get used to the R word:
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"The first few weeks of college will be hard," says Scott Nemeth, a freshman at Butler University. "You will get homesick, but as long as you stay with it, you'll be all right."

Young adults of this generation often find adjusting to college difficult because they've counted on Mom and Dad to take care of so much for them, says Cindy Beaman, manager of parent and family services for Vincennes University. "They have not actually had the opportunity to go seek answers themselves," she says. "We want parents to give them guidance, but the student ultimately has to cross the line and do it himself."

Crossing that line can be challenging for incoming freshmen.

"Being on my own for the first time and having so many freedoms was a lot different," says Nemeth. "Back home, my parents...made sure I got everything done. Now I had to figure out how to take care of myself for the first time in my life."

His advice for incoming freshmen: "The first thing you have to do is learn to manage your time. You need to make school your first priority."

Instead of a daily routine with each hour defined for them, freshmen have to adjust to having a sporadic schedule—a class at 8 a.m., with the next one not until mid-afternoon, for example. Once back at the residence hall, it may be tempting to stay there and blow off the afternoon class.

"Students need to set their own schedule to make sure they have ample time to study and that they are going to class," says Wiley. "Because no one is going to be telling them they need to go to class today to make sure they get the material so they can be successful. Ultimately, some students have to learn the hard way, but most students figure it out."

Beaman says the first semester may be a rude awakening for both parents and students. "It usually takes a semester for students to get with the program," she says. "Grades may suffer, but they're not everything. Students are learning to juggle all these other things on their own for the first time. The hardest thing for parents is to understand that they can't fix

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everything. Students need to have teachable moments. They have to do their own life journey just like we did when we were that age."

Study more than you think you need to.

"I went through high school and I wasn't much of a studier," says Thompson. "I could ace a test just by taking in the information. You can't do that in college. You have to study the material or there's no way you are going to do well." Same thing with writing papers. In high school, even after procrastinating until the night before a paper was due, Thompson could still pull an A. "Here, you can't do that," she says. "You have to write the paper and revise it and revise it again."

The difficulty of college classes can throw freshmen for a loop. Even if they've allotted what used to be an ample amount of time for studying, it may not be enough to earn them the grades they expect.

"In high school it's all about worksheets," says Nemeth. "You don't have to study on your own because the teacher

gives you everything you need. In college, you have to make sure that you read all the materials. It was a huge transition for me, and not a fun one."

The first round of tests or projects can be a "wake-up call" for freshmen, says Wiley, but if they buckle down and study—and reach out for help when they need it—they can usually turn it around for a second semester.

Avoid roommate wars.

Personality clashes can be a challenge when you have to live with your arch-nemesis. That's one reason Vincennes University has 24/7 Front Desk Help staffed with a professional and students.

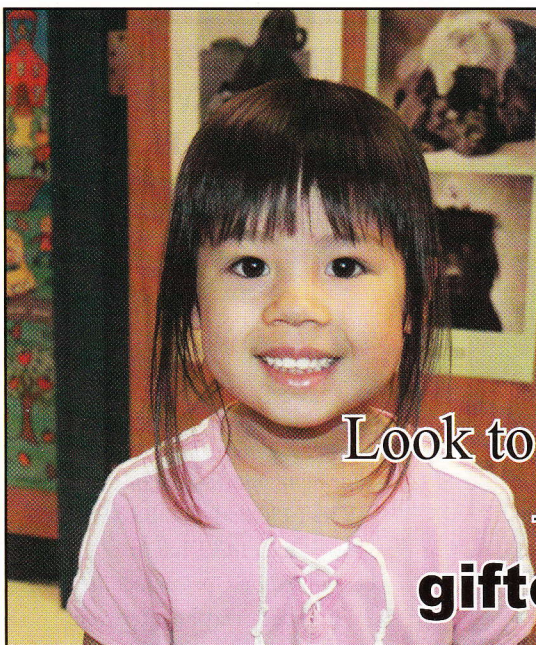
"Issues include loud music versus no music or quiet music, nocturnal people versus people who want to go to bed early, party people versus studious people, messy people versus neat people, using someone's clothes without permission, eating someone's food, or having a boyfriend or girlfriend stay overnight," Beaman says. "Obviously, any of these is going to create a conflict. These are issues that happen at colleges all across the

country."

Schools generally encourage students to work these issues out on their own, says Wiley. "Not only can that potentially salvage the relationship better, but it teaches students the very valuable skills of communication, conflict resolution, sharing, and getting along with others that they are going to need for the rest of their lives."

Johnson suggests students contact their assigned roommate, if they're given that information, and get to know him or her better before the school year starts. Arriving on moving day with an established relationship can be a big plus. Sometimes roommates need to take a more formal approach, such as creating a contract that establishes agreed-upon guidelines and boundaries. Worst case, they can ask residence-hall staff what their options are.

"Living away from home can be a little bit shocking at first, but if you go in with an open mind, you can definitely make things work," Adams says. "If you are willing to make friendships, college will be a great time for you." ♦



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