

## CHAPTER 1

# Welcome to College

“**W**elcome to” is a message we are all familiar with. Most of us see these words on signposts around our hometowns and don’t pay much attention. However, when we embark on a journey, these signs take on new meaning and indicate we are entering a foreign land filled with new culture, new customs, new ideas, and new vocabulary. As most travelers know, even the most ordinary necessities can be hard to find in a new location if you don’t know how to ask or where to look. These disconcerting situations can range from silly and embarrassing to dangerous or life threatening. Luckily, most of them can be avoided with a little help or guidance.

College is also a destination to which we travel. For most new students, it’s like traveling to a foreign land. The same problems that afflict most new travelers in a foreign land can be seen in the experiences of new students on campus. Unfamiliar terrain, foreign culture, and unknown rules and customs can make a new student stand out on a campus like a stereotypical backpack-wearing, camera-holding tourist in a foreign city. Even the most confident educational travelers need a guidebook to help make sense of this new world they are entering.

Unfortunately, most colleges don’t have a simple guidebook that explains the real “do’s and taboos” of college life. New students are left to fend for themselves as they are immersed in this new world. Sometimes lack of information can get new students into trouble that could have been avoided if they’d had a little help. One saving grace for most new students is their numerous fellow students; they are not alone in their struggles.

The plight of the new student is not hidden from view or unknown; even the words used to describe them illuminate their situation: “freshmen,” “underclassmen.” These anxious new educational travelers are fresh and ripe for picking if someone wants to take advantage of them, just like a traveler in a foreign land. For many of us who have experienced this awkward vulnerability, it is like a rite of passage. We tell ourselves that we went through it ourselves, so it can’t be that bad.

A little help and guidance can go a long way to make your transition to this new land a much happier, safer, and more successful journey. Ask for help from some of the “locals,” who always are good guides, and after asking, don’t forget to listen.

A description of the terrain is much different from the experience of the culture, but seasoned educational travelers have already paved the way.

This book is an attempt to give you some useful suggestions and advice from people just like you who are experiencing college for the wonderful, trying, and transformative part of life that it is. Listen to some of these “travel guides” in the pages that follow, and then map a course for yourself.

## Transition

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### A SENIOR'S ADVICE

Before I graduated from high school, I had this sudden realization: In a couple of short months I will be in college! What will it be like? Will I make new friends? Will the classes be too hard? I had a million questions that, it seemed, no one could answer. I had a few friends who were already in college, so I decided to ask for some advice. The best advice came from one of my best friends, who was attending UCI's undergraduate school at the time. He told me not to be afraid or intimidated by anything. He opened my eyes to the fact that each of us was in the same boat, especially as incoming freshmen. It doesn't matter if you were valedictorian or a mediocre student in your high school, when you get to college, you start from square one. Professors don't know whether you were a stellar student in high school or not. Their opinions of you are based entirely on your performance from the first day of class onward.

Also, my friend told me to be aggressive and ask a lot of questions. Sometimes it can be intimidating to raise your hand in a room of 100 students in order to clarify a point. Am I asking a dumb question? Are people going to laugh at me and think I am stupid? No way. He told me that what I had to say was important and that, most likely, the people sitting next to me had the same questions on the tips of their tongues; they were just too scared to ask. I found this to be true as I dove headfirst into my freshman year. It was amazing. I could almost see neighboring students thanking me with their eyes as I asked the professor to reiterate a point. Plus, I built my confidence and my communication skills and ensured that I fully understood the lesson being taught.

Friendships come with time if you embrace them. Chances are, your two best buddies in high school are off to life in the real world or college in another city. For probably the first time in your life, you are removed from your comfort zone and submerged in a world of strangers. This can be scary, but before you make friends with anybody you need to make friends with yourself. This time of independence encourages a lot of soul searching and testing of your morals. If you were an angel in high school, you can rebel at any moment and explore a whole new world of trouble (or vice versa). Because you're not assigned to a set of required classes, you might find yourself spending a lot of time alone. This alone time may be a first for you, and it can be weird initially. Even if you live on campus with a roommate, you won't have a 24-hour companion. During these times, it is great to look inside yourself and get to know who you are. All kinds of questions come up if you allow yourself to embrace these thoughts. What makes you happy? What do you look for in a friend? What kind of food do you like? What is God? You never stop learning about yourself, but college is a great place to start this healthy habit. Once this exploration had begun, I became much more comfortable with myself; as a result, I became more comfortable around others. It was only natural that I later made some great friendships that have brought me much happiness.

I really feel that my friend's words of advice were what gave me the confidence to begin the journey through college that had intimidated me for so long. Now I am about to graduate, and I find that I have grown in so many ways and made so many new friends. College was a wonderful experience during which I learned a lot about people, the world, and most important, myself.

—Sara Kalawi

### THE FALSE IMAGE HIGH SCHOOL GIVES YOU OF COLLEGE

I can honestly say that I must have been blind when I entered college, or at least tremendously naïve. My take on life was that I would graduate from high school, go on to pursue higher education in college for about four years, graduate, and then start working and have a family. Let's just say that I was in for a rude awakening. Somewhere in the middle of my freshman year, I was informed that it would be very difficult for me to make a "decent living" (whatever that may be) with only a B.A. in psychology. My belief was that I would get my B.A. and begin practicing clinical psychology. Little did I know.

I realize how foolish I was now that I look back on all this, but the truth is that most college students enter college with a completely distorted picture of where their lives are headed. High schools today are more or less prep schools to get you into college, but that's about it. They don't bother teaching students to step back from the high school and college bubbles and look at where they want to be in the end. High schools paint a picture of college as the end of your education, but the truth is that it is only the beginning. It is only after you enter college that you realize you are doing this for you and nobody else (at least, if you're lucky enough).

I believe that this is when you should realize the worth of your education. Everything just begins to make more sense after you enter college: Why you were in school to begin with, why you're taking the classes you are taking, and how you see yourself applying your education to your life in the future. I now understand that I will have to go to grad school for about another two to four years after I finish college, but this is not something that I dread. To be honest, I do not feel as though I would be even remotely prepared to go out and practice psychology once I graduate with my B.A. I actually want to go on and learn as much as I possibly can so that I may one day be the best psychologist that I am capable of being. However, when I compare the way I am thinking now to the way I was thinking two years ago when I was a senior in high school, my point of view has made a 180-degree turn. Don't get me wrong, I still want to graduate soon so that I can go on with the rest of my life, but I have now realized that learning psychology is more or less what I will be doing with my life, so there is no need to rush through it. Many students want a college degree more than a college education. I suggest you understand your relationship to your education and what you are doing and don't just do it for the sake of getting the degree and getting out.

So basically, my advice is that you should be open to new things when you enter college. The impression that you get of life when you are in high school is not a very accurate one, so you have to be willing to be open-minded when you enter college.

—Sheyda Bogosyan with John Chuidian

## REJECTED BY A COLLEGE

One of the hardest reality checks that I have ever had to deal with was receiving a letter of denial from the college that I had dreamed of attending since I was in junior high. Everything that had constituted my reality for such a long period of time had suddenly come crashing down, and I had no clue what to do. For all of my high school life, my hope of getting into that university was what gave me the drive to push harder and take one more AP course, but now it seemed as though all that I had based my motivation upon had been stolen from me. I had reached the end of the rainbow and the pot of gold that I had hoped to find there was missing. The unexpected rejection I faced at the end of my senior year of high school forced me to reevaluate my entire reality: the present, my future, and everything that I had endured in the past.

I had attended private school all my life, and whether we liked it or not, the whole class knew everything about each other because we were a group of about 45 students who had been together for 12 years. We all had expectations for one another, and we more or less knew what we would do with our lives (or at least we thought we did). Even our teachers knew us on a one-to-one basis and had certain expectations for each of us. Basically, if one of us screwed up, there were a lot of people there to let us know, from our parents, to our teachers, to our friends. For this reason, when I got rejected by the school that I was hoping to get into, I felt that everyone was really disappointed in me. This might have been a complete distortion of reality. However, I had put so much emphasis on getting into that school that I had let it define who I was, and once I was rejected, I was afraid that everyone would be disappointed in me. I interpreted people's actions as negatively as possible and felt as though I didn't matter anymore. I was a failure. That one letter of rejection made me reevaluate myself from head to toe. I began to wonder whether I really deserved to go to that school or whether I had what it takes. Maybe I really wasn't good enough for them. Was it that my grades weren't good enough? Or maybe it was my SAT score. But that wouldn't make sense because I had friends from other schools who had lower scores than I but had gotten in.

I knew that I had to pick another school, so I chose the University of California, Irvine and enrolled there in the fall. I was closing one chapter in the book of my life and opening another. All I could hope for was that this new chapter wouldn't be as disappointing as the previous one.

No matter how much I told myself that this was a whole new beginning for me, the rejection I had faced had been embedded in the back of my mind. I felt as though I wasn't good enough and that everyone was much smarter than I. Also, I had lost a great deal of confidence in my writing abilities because I was convinced that my personal statement was the main reason I hadn't gotten into my first choice school. Regardless of all this, I gave my schoolwork my all. I took the hardest classes that I could and was determined to get A's in them, even if it meant that I had to be in my TA's office every other day. I was determined to make the admissions committee that had rejected me kick themselves later on for doing so.

A few quarters passed and I began getting used to UC Irvine. Although I had not really wanted to attend the school, it grew on me. I felt as though I was in a different world when I was there. I was away from home and did not have to explain myself to anyone. This gave me a sense of responsibility that I probably would not have attained had I stayed home and gone to that other school. On the flip side, though, I really missed home. I have always been attached to my family, so moving away was, and still is, a very difficult process for me. But this was positive for me because it kept me motivated to get through school faster so that I could move back home as soon as possible.

I was very focused and knew exactly what I had to do to get where I wanted to be. My bitterness slowly faded, and I realized that I was no longer doing all this to show the other school what a mistake they had made, but I was doing it for me. I had declared a major in psychology and really loved what I was studying. I was at a school where I actually had the opportunity to go and could talk to my professors and get their opinions about certain issues or even have discussions with them. I could actually get the classes that I wanted to take, instead of having to wait until my senior year because there was no room. Even the little things, like being able to find parking in a matter of 15 minutes, made my life a lot easier than that of my friends who were going to the school that I had hoped to get into. I felt as though I had my life under control and I knew what I was doing with it. Because going to school was not as big an ordeal for me as it was for my friends who were in the other school, I even had time to get a job that was directly related to my field and that I loved doing. Everything just seemed to fit together, and I felt as though I was one step ahead of everyone else, even though my original plans had been disrupted. It was a great feeling to know, for the first time in my life, that I was doing all this for myself and not to satisfy everyone else or to meet everyone else's expectations for me.

Although the rejection that I had to face after high school was a very difficult thing for me to deal with, it worked out for the best. I cannot say that I am completely over it and that it doesn't bother me at all. The truth is that I do not think I will ever forget how I felt after receiving that letter and during the months that followed, but the important thing is now I see the big picture. The main solution for me was time. There was nothing anyone could have told me at the time that would have made me feel it wasn't my fault that I didn't get in. I had to prove it to myself.

However, some of the questions that I asked myself made me feel better about all this. Why am I in school? If I'm here because I am truly interested in the field that I'm pursuing, does it matter which school I'm in? I could get the same education in any school as long as I make the effort and I keep in close contact with my professors. Also, will I go to graduate school, and if I do, isn't learning the material my priority? As long as you truly have a passion for what you are doing, you will be the best at it regardless of any obstacles that you may face in life.

You can't let one rejection keep you from being what you want to be. Instead, let it make you a stronger person. Do everything you can to make it work in your favor. Never let anyone or any institution tell you who you are or what you can achieve.

—Sheyda Bogosyan

## Facing the Unknown

### WE EARN A MASTER'S IN DOING WHILE FORGETTING TO MASTER LIVING

We could compile an endless list of everything that you could experience after you graduate from high school. You will go on vacation, say goodbye to friends, leave family behind, shop for new clothes, buy supplies for the dorm, and hope that you will be ready by the time school starts. The problem is that we all too often forget the changes around us. We will make new friends, but we will leave others.

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Perhaps we will attend a relative's wedding over the summer, only to resume packing the next day. We are so busy getting ready that we miss and fail to deal with the deep, profound change that we are about to experience.

Universities will not offer classes in slowing down and being present to change, but it is the change that we undergo that will have the greatest impact on our lives. Marriage and divorce. New friends made, others to whom we bid farewell. Excitement for something new, sadness over leaving the "known" of our life behind. Birth and death. Indeed, our diploma marks a completion and a stepping stone to that which lies ahead. But our diploma in life details something more profound: We shed the high school self and awaken to the college self. The body remains static, the person subconsciously adapts to change.

Some of the changes will be wonderful; others will be painful. You might fall in love and find a soul mate. The next day, a beloved grandfather may die. You'll party the night away with new-found college friends in pure, unadulterated excitement because finals are over, then awaken to the reality that alcohol really does cause hangovers. You cannot fully prepare for change, but you can welcome it when it comes by being fully present to it. You can learn to live and not merely to do.

After four, five, or maybe even six years, you might earn a diploma for your efforts. But you will never receive an award for the most important classes you take in your college career. The classes in life, learned by waking up each day, will teach you more about yourself and about others than any novel or scientific proof ever can. Mark Twain said, "I never let my schooling get in the way of my education." Before graduating as a master of your discipline, graduate first with a mastery of the self.

—Christopher Patrick King

## FIRST COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

It was the first Saturday of the quarter before classes started, and I was still adjusting to living in the dorms. As I was walking down the hall, I overheard some of my floormates talking about the biggest frat party of the year. It was going to happen on Sunday. I took this into consideration but kept walking. The frat party didn't particularly interest me. I didn't think it would be too much fun going someplace with a bunch of strangers and lots of alcohol. But as the day progressed, the idea seemed to get even more popular among my floormates until everyone was talking about going. Even my roommate, a biochemistry major addicted to studying, was planning to go, so this convinced me.

With the biggest party of the year only a night away, people from my floor decided to go to a frat party on Saturday to see what it would be like. So we gathered our new acquaintances and headed down to frat row to find a party. Soon we were on a patio looking onto a dance floor in a room filled with black light. Before we began dancing, my new friends headed over to the bar and were greeted with hard liquor; apparently, the frat had run out of beer. My roommate and I didn't get anything, but there was one in our group who seemed determined to get drunk as soon as possible.

After alcohol was obtained, we danced until we became tired. Then we went out onto the patio for some fresh air, where we were greeted by a frat boy trying to give us more alcohol. We already had some and refused his request to give us more, but I couldn't help thinking how desperately they wanted us drunk.

A couple of our floormates weren't having a good time and decided to leave, and my roommate and I followed them after a couple of hours. We danced for the remainder of the time, in a pretty mellow atmosphere of glowing objects and music. We headed back up the large hill to our dorms with our drunken colleagues in hand, literally. To keep them from falling into the gutter, we had to hold them. We went back up to our rooms, where two drunken boys climbed up to my roommate's bed and stayed there for a couple more hours, talking with us about college and high school and general getting-to-know-you things. My roommate talked about our experience.

She liked the party and was glad we went in a group because she felt safer, even though our group was a bunch of strangers who lived on our floor. She told me she drank, and I asked her when because I had never seen her with a drink, and she said she drank from someone else's drink because she didn't want an entire drink to herself. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. What a dangerous decision, but she didn't know it was dangerous. She was new to the party scene and had no idea what precautions to take. Luckily, her friend's drink wasn't laced with anything. I proceeded to tell her the rules of safe partying, so that I wouldn't have to worry about her on Sunday.

On the morning of the big day, I was excited about what the biggest party of the year could hold, but I was a little scared at first because I had heard rumors of fraternity life, and I didn't want to get myself into a situation that I couldn't escape from. If the previous night's party was only a fraction of what was to come, then I might be in trouble. Rumors were floating around that the police would have to shut it down and fire hoses would drench spectators. Every frat would participate in the event, and there would be an overwhelming crowd, and we would have to arrive early to get in. And so we did.

Before we even reached the party, the visual we got was insane: All of the frats were filled to the brim and long lines of students snaked through the streets, with large crowds just wandering around looking for a potential frat. Frat brothers were shouting for us to leave so that they wouldn't be shut down. That didn't stop us. We had been thinking about this party for two days, and we weren't about to leave without a fight. So we pushed and shoved to get to the front of the line of a frat that would let our guy friends in. Apparently they aren't too strict about girls, but they don't want a lot of guys. Maybe they think they have a better chance if the male to female ratio is tampered with. This is rather ironic anyway because they are supposed to be recruiting for their frats.

Finally we found a suitable party and waited in line with the rest of the freshmen to try to get in. But there was a list, and apparently we weren't on it. Still determined, we pushed our way through the crowd and somehow past security into the party. Three floors of dancing and drinking! Oh joy! But the pushing didn't stop there. It was really crowded and disorienting. Loud music shook the floors as we worked our way to the top of the stairs. We made it, and I found myself again among strangers. I didn't feel comfortable, and after all the work we did to get in the frat, I left and went back to the dorm.

As I entered my floor, I saw people playing cards in the study lounge. One of them was a fellow partier from the night before. I regaled him with a tale of the chaos I had just seen, and he seemed really eager to go. Being easily swayed, I went back for the second time, to see whether we could

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get into a party. I thought maybe I could find one I liked better. A huge mass of people had accumulated in that short time, and now it was impossible to get in. So we sat down on a giant university sign and watched havoc ensue. The people were all in the middle of the street, which had to be shut down. This tightly packed group swayed back and forth as if trying to get somewhere. Pushing and bottle throwing started, and we watched from a safe distance, remarking on how crazy it all was. Tomorrow everyone would go back to their normal lives, but some would end up in the hospital instead. Firefighters and police were waiting on the edge of the mass for a cue that they should exercise their authority.

As midnight struck, they shut the party down. With fire hoses in hand, the firefighters threatened the crowd as loudspeakers announced the end of the party. We would all have to go home. The crowd wasn't happy, but my friend and I didn't stick around to get hosed. We went back up to our dorm and told everyone we had been to the biggest party of the year and survived.

What happened to my roommate, you ask? She ended up freak dancing with a guy on our floor and felt guilty about it afterward. Later on, she was in a long line with him for the bathroom, and someone asked whether they were together. She said they weren't, and he asked whether she was drunk. She said no and asked why. The stranger said he wanted her to go in the bathroom with her freak-dancing partner to make the line go faster. Go figure. What a wonderful way to start your first year of college!

This is what many of us face when we go to college. Books and tests will follow, but partying will always be there for us, even when we least expect it. We all hear about college parties, but not all of us expect to go to one of this magnitude as soon as we move in!

—Shawna Wood

## Instructions and Suggestions

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### ORIENTATION IS REQUIRED

I highly recommend going to orientations. This is where I met some of the most interesting people who are now my friends; one has been my roommate for two years. When I first stepped into the big university in the big city I was scared. I had no friends. I didn't know my way around. After orientation I knew my way around this large campus almost as well as I know the town I grew up in. Next, living in the dorms is awesome. If you live near campus, you should still live in the dorms. This place helped me socially and intellectually. Everything was there! First I became friends with my roommates, then neighbors, and soon the whole floor. It helps to leave the room door open, and also living in front of the elevators helps. You should also participate in floor activities organized by the floor's Program Assistant or Residential Advisors. I'm not saying it's a must to go to all of the events, but go to as many as you can, at least for the first five weeks. Networking is very important in college, not to mention essential for life once you're out of school. Clubs and fraternities or sororities are also good places to meet people. But beware; don't fall into the segregated cliques or groups.

I opted to stay out of the fraternity system, but this doesn't mean I can never communicate or party with them. You just need to know one or two of the members in the Greek house to reap the benefits. This includes getting into parties with those long lines that don't seem to move because only the girls are being let in. Basically, the strategy is to start with whatever you feel comfortable with; start small. I started small and branched out; it's better that way and plus it feels good to know people almost everywhere you go.

—Kenneth W. Chow, Jr.

### TOP 10 THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOU GET OUT OF COLLEGE

1. *Live in the dorms.* You may have to live in a room the size of a closet, and you may have to live with a terrible roommate, but the dorms are still one of the best places to meet the student population.
2. *Meet with a counselor.* A counselor will help you plan your classes, inform you about programs you may be interested in, and let you in on some wisdom. Counselors are here to help, and you may not know it yet, but you do need the help.
3. *Study abroad.* Escape the familiar and explore the unknown. You'll discover so much about the world and yourself.
4. *Commit to community service.* Whether you volunteer to build houses for the underserved or become an activist, your community needs your energy, talent, enthusiasm, and fresh perspective.
5. *Find a part-time job.* College doesn't have to be vocational training. Find a part-time job that will help you gain the experience and build the skills necessary for a career so that you can also major in something you truly love studying. Plus, it doesn't hurt to have some extra spending money!
6. *Go to office hours.* Get to know a professor. This is important to your understanding of the material and your grade in the class, and it will make it easier to get the recommendation letters you may need in the future. Professors can give you internships, open up opportunities for academic and scholarly growth, and let you in on some priceless wisdom that you definitely need. Be nice to them because whether you believe it or not, they were once in your shoes.
7. *Attend a school rally.* Whether you're a biology major, mathematics major, or performing arts major, everybody comes together as one at a school rally. It's a powerful experience to share in the spirit, excitement, and energy of the student body during a school cheer. So put on your school colors and wear them proudly!
8. *Have your heart broken.* "Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." Don't neglect your heart in college. It is just as important to experience the joys and pains of love as it is to study. Take a risk, follow your heart, and fall in love!
9. *Explore your spiritual self.* College will overwhelm you. Your friends will upset you. And life will challenge you. Taking a step outside your everyday routine and exploring the spiritual realm

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through yoga or meditation can serve as an outlet for your stress. Slow down, calm your mind, and take a deep breath.

10. *Take a class outside of your requirements.* You may learn to love it.

—Steven Truong, Neil Poria, Aggie Wong

## GROCERY STORE ANALOGY

You are about to register for classes. Imagine that the university is like a large grocery store. You walk in, and because you are a biology major or sociology major or a computer engineering major or are undeclared, you are guided to a particular aisle. You wheel your cart over to that aisle and you begin walking down it. You see this item is "required," that you can select one of these three items, two of these 12 items are necessary, and over there is a shelf of electives. So you methodically go down the aisle taking all the items you are supposed to take.

You get to the end of the aisle and you stop. You stop and you turn around and you leave. Of course you stop at the cash register and you pay. And then you leave. You *leave!* All this while you have been subconsciously operating on the high school model of "have to" behavior, the conveyor belt model of education.

Meanwhile, one aisle over there was a class that would have rocked your mind and changed your life. One aisle. Or two aisles over there was a professor who you would have profoundly connected with. But you missed it! And you missed it because you didn't look! You didn't look because you thought you were just "supposed to" go down your aisle and select. The point of this analogy is to get you to increase your freedom and awareness regarding this university education you are about to undertake for many years. Be a smart consumer. Go down all the aisles. See what is in this giant supermarket.

I have often asked my classes, "How many of you have had the experience of being in a class in third week, fifth week, or sixth week and had the sinking feeling, 'Oh shit... I hate this class!'" Usually many hands go up. It is an all-too-common experience. Being a smart shopper in advance can almost eliminate this depressing experience. So go down the aisles. Practically speaking, this may mean first going to the bookstore to see which books are being used by different courses. See which ones excite and interest you. Look at the teacher evaluations that are often publicized at many universities. Above all, that first week of classes, go and sit in on as many classes as you possibly can. Go shop down all the aisles. No one knows who's who or what is going on the first week or two of classes. No one is going to throw you out for not being officially registered. It is, after all, your education. You have the right—and responsibility—to shop and see which courses appeal to you.

I've worked at approximately 12 universities in my career, and every one of them was very good at processing students. As a professor, and hence part of the university system, I too have become skilled at processing students. Cha-ching, cha-ching, cha-ching. No problem. A factory, a post office, a line of customers at the movie theater. Ba-boom, ba-boom, ba-boom. Unless you take some creative control of your education, some personal, energetic co-creative stances, you will be processed. That is just the nature of institutions.

—Bernard McGrane

## Discovering Your Passion

### PASSION

In the philosophy of existentialism, to exist is to be passionate. Passion gives us the motivation to take control of our lives and gives us a reason to live. According to this philosophy, no matter how many oppressive forces we have in our lives holding us back, we all ultimately have the power to make our own decisions in our lives. College is the first time in your life that you become mentally and physically independent from your parents. When you move into the dorms, nobody constantly looks after you, telling you what to do. You get to choose whether you want to wake up in the mornings and go to your lectures, whether you want to study or hang out with your friends, and even what time you go to sleep. You are endowed with this freedom to do all of these things without the constant nagging of your parents.

In college, you are also allowed to choose what classes you want to take and what majors you want to study. This freedom empowers you to shape the context of your own education, but it can also create stress. Although you may not live with your parents while you are in school, there can be constant family pressure to pursue a certain major or field of study. You are often told to choose a practical major that will give you a high-paying, prestigious job, such as medicine, law, or engineering.

However, you must choose a major that you are passionate about. You cannot let your parents dictate what you study. When I started college, my parents wanted me to be a doctor. I chose biology as my major, but only a few weeks into the curriculum, I found that I genuinely despised the material and didn't feel that I was getting anything fulfilling from it. I told my parents, but they told me to simply "suck it up" and continue. I tried to stick it out, but the further I delved into the subject material, the more depressed I became. I knew that I had to switch to another major that I was truly passionate about to find meaning and satisfaction.

I soon stumbled upon sociology, which sounded interesting, as it addressed many aspects of society. With my interest piqued, I made the plunge, took a leap of faith, and changed my major. After a quarter of studying sociology, I knew that I had made the right decision. For the first time in my life, I actually wanted to go to class, and I enthusiastically immersed myself in the class materials and readings. Empowered by the knowledge that I was learning, my world view started to change. I started to see things for the way they truly were, rather than what I was taught to believe by society. Three years later, I find myself wanting to continue my passion for sociology with a master's and a PhD in the field.

Family pressure can often be a very difficult obstacle to overcome, but you must realize that in the end, you are the only one who can make the ultimate decision. Regardless of how much pressure you face, you are the only one able to choose your major. Sure, your parents may even threaten to disown you if you decide not to become that world-famous doctor they wanted you to be, but don't worry; those are all bluffs. Your parents have dedicated the last 18 years or so raising you with love and support, and they will continue to support you regardless of your academic decisions.

Pursue what you are truly passionate about, not just what makes a lot of money or sounds practical. College is not job training; it is life training. In college you learn about the world around you, and

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you learn how to see it in a different way while developing the critical skills of an independent thinker. You will also learn how to better interact with other people and create some of the deepest bonds in your life. You have only one life to live, so live it to the fullest without regrets. After all, if you fail to pursue your passion, you will always feel empty and longing for more. And, so the existentialist would say, when you fail to pursue your passion, you fail to even exist.

—Eric Kim

### BE AVAILABLE FOR CHANGE

For many, college will be a time and place where you will find out who you are—or who you are not. The college experience is not cookie cutter, but due to the pressures of society and the media's portrayal of college, freshmen enter with unrealistic, limitless expectations.

I entered college right after high school with an undeniable faith that I was taking my first steps to becoming an oncologist. I was sure that taking life science courses and partaking in all of the medical school preparation activities would gain me an advantage over others pursuing medicine. But after living this life for more than two years, my passion for becoming a doctor faded. My introduction to internships, volunteer work, and science courses should have reinforced my faith, but it instead pulled me away. My body shuddered every time I inhaled the air of the medical center at the start of my hospital shifts. The classroom environment didn't help either. I was often surrounded by people who were viciously inhospitable and many whom I would never want as a personal physician. Exposure to medicine gave me reason to focus elsewhere.

When junior year rolled around, I was still denying my disinterest in medicine. Becoming an oncologist had been the only option I gave myself. At last, I opened up to other choices, and it was like a breath of fresh air that I had been longing for. As painful as it was to admit that I was no longer going to be an oncologist, I found the reason I had initially wanted to pursue oncology: to serve others.

Despite society's teachings of quick and easy fixes to things, my personal experience proved that college does not always guarantee a set and narrow path for the rest of your life. Frustrations and doubt will always be a part of the agenda, something that is largely neglected by the media.

Although I am still in the process of finding a brighter path, progressively achieving peace with myself has slowly produced genuine joy for others and their successes. Most of the successful people that I admire in my life have struggled over imperfections and have learned to appreciate the things that they have gained and let go of the things that have been lost.

Sights should still be set high in college. If things don't meet your expectations, don't be too hard on yourself. College and the rest of your life can be a process of discovering who you are and what you can offer yourself and the rest of society.

—Moo Young Kim

## Nontraditional Students

### DON'T GIVE UP

In every student's life there comes a time when he or she says, "Why am I doing this? A college degree doesn't really matter and I have a job offer anyway." You become tired of the schedule, papers, and midterms. You begin to think the grass is greener on the "working side." At that point, it is so easy to just drop out of school and say, "I'll take a quarter off and come back in the fall," or "I'll just work this quarter and save some money to come back." Most of us, once we're out of the habit of taking classes, do not come back. Time goes by so quickly that we suddenly realize, years down the road, that we were so close but didn't cross the finish line. We forget that we were tired, broke, or just sick of the routine. All we remember is that we were close to fulfilling the degree but gave up.

I made that mistake 25 years ago, and it has bothered me constantly since I left college. I left college because I had a great job offer. I had convinced myself to just earn some money for a year, at which point I could easily go back. That job led to another one, which led to a great career, marriage, and children. Time moved quickly by. Suddenly, 25 years later, as I was preparing my oldest son to go to college, I realized it still haunted me that I hadn't finished the last year of my undergraduate degree and was still considered "a high school graduate." All my friends and associates had degrees, and although they did not judge me by my lack of a degree, I judged myself by that measure. Once I left college, my schedule became so busy that I couldn't see how I could go back for even one class.

It took an immense amount of work and commitment to finally go back to college and finish what I started 25 years ago. How would I fit in? How would the other students accept me since I was the age of their mothers? These fears were unfounded once I just jumped in and did it. I found that the classes are much more meaningful to me after living the very topics I only studied years ago. But I can see that finishing the work is indeed more demanding now because I have the added responsibilities of family and work. Do not give up, no matter how difficult you find the work or what else sounds interesting. Finish the college degree and do whatever it takes to make it happen at this stage in your life, while you can devote all your energy to achieving that goal.

—Christine Hazy

### THE STUDENT ATHLETE EXPERIENCE

Ask college students to list their favorite experiences at school, and college sports are likely to make an appearance somewhere. Who doesn't love cheering their team on to victory? Marveling at the athletes on the field or court, it's easy to think of them as professionals there to provide that night's entertainment. But this isn't the case. Those athletes, who are so good at what they do, are also students just like their peers in the stands; they're student athletes. Why is it so difficult to envision them as both? Maybe it's because this part of college sports is seldom publicized.

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How many times do you see the whole student-athlete story told on ESPN? Not too often, I'm afraid, which brings me to why I'm here. I am a student athlete, a senior guard on the UCLA women's basketball team.

Although getting used to the physical rigors of being on the basketball team as a freshman was difficult, the totality of my life as a student athlete presented a slew of unanticipated challenges. Being an athlete is quite an honor, and I began college looking forward to walking around campus looking the part. During my first week in class, however, I was rudely awakened by the reality that living life as a student athlete was not going to be as glamorous as it seemed.

The first incident occurred when I attended one of my professor's office hours to simply introduce myself. "Hi, my name is Allison . . ." I began, entering his office. My professor took one look at me before cutting me off. "Hello Allison," he said. "Well, let's just get this over with, shall we? I don't accept late homework or do make-up tests. If you can't handle these requirements, then I suggest you find another class because you probably won't succeed otherwise." I stared at him incredulously, wondering, "What is he talking about?" Glancing down at what I was wearing, I had my answer. I was dressed head to toe in my issued athletic gear, which boldly proclaimed my membership on the UCLA basketball team. My professor had automatically assumed that I was there to try to sidestep some of his class rules or get special treatment because of my athlete status. This was the first of many incidents when I realized that being an athlete was not looked upon fondly in the classroom.

I was also introduced to the stereotype that many regular students held about athletes being dumb. In a heated classroom debate about UCLA's acceptance process, one student shouted out, "So many people are being turned down who deserve to get in. I mean, look at all these athletes who get in just because they can run around a field or something. It's not fair that they get a free pass when they don't deserve it." Most of the class nodded their heads and murmured their agreement. I was shocked and a little embarrassed. "Do people really think I'm a dumb jock too, just because I'm on the basketball team?" I wondered. I sank in my chair as I tried to nonchalantly remove my bright blue athletic jacket.

Being a part of the athletics program was something I was proud of, but I also took great pride in my academics. Once I realized that being an athlete actually put me at a disadvantage in the classroom, I did my best to rid myself of that image. I stopped wearing my athletic gear around campus and tried to blend in as a regular student as much as I could, thinking that it would give me a better chance of getting good grades and being respected by my classmates. I was almost ashamed of who I was and what I loved to do.

I've learned how to cope with these things over the years. Not all professors are anti-athlete, and not all of the student body thinks that we're incompetent. And if I encounter those who do think this way, I just smile and enjoy proving them wrong. I wear my UCLA athletic gear proudly now, and I don't care what others think. You think I'm a dumb jock, Professor so-and-so? That's okay. I'll let my grades and my play on the court speak for themselves.

Trouble with professors and classmates was not the only challenge I faced in my freshman year. During this time, I also went through a crash course about the importance of time management skills. I entered college confident in my time management skills, thinking that I was ready to tackle everything. I was going to excel in my sport, get good grades, and experience the

once-in-a-lifetime college student life. Right away, though, I found out that this was not going to be as easy as I had thought. From the start I was overwhelmed with everything that was thrown at me. We had three hours of practice six days a week, an hour of weight training three days a week, a full load of classes, and mandatory tutoring sessions, not to mention hours upon hours spent playing games at home and traveling to play at different colleges all over the country. This left me with very little free time. I began my first quarter devoting every single free minute to studying, which earned me the reputation of being the “nerd” on our team. Shutting myself in my dorm room right after practice resulted in great grades but basically left me with no life outside of basketball. Wanting to prevent “loner” from joining my nerd label, I decided to use my free time the next quarter to go to events on campus and hang out with friends. I loved living the college life, but I became so involved in these activities that I was left with no time to study or put in extra basketball practice.

Since that disastrous freshman year, I’ve come to learn that it is possible to get the best of both worlds if I just prioritize and manage my time wisely. This means giving up some things in order to accomplish the things that absolutely must get done. As a student athlete, I have an obligation to my teammates and coaches to show up every day ready to give them my all. I definitely have to put aside extra time for shooting and ball handling practice to ensure that I am at my best, but I also have obligations to myself to do well in school and have fun outside of basketball. I have to make time for studying, going out to group meetings, and hanging out with friends. Sacrifices have to be made, such as giving up watching the television shows I like and shortening the extra hours I spend in the gym to perfect my game, but the result is a well-rounded, enjoyable college experience.

Being a student athlete is more than throwing a ball in a hoop and going to take a test in class. It isn’t the easiest way to live your college life; you have a lot more on your plate than most other people. With everything that is being asked of you—to be an excellent student, a top athlete, a son or daughter, and a good friend— it is easy to feel overwhelmed. I admit that there are times when I wish that I could just be a normal college student, leading a normal college life. But those moments are fleeting and have become fewer as I have completed each year of school. I have come to appreciate the unique situation that I have been fortunate enough to live. As a student athlete, I have been able to experience things that only an athlete can, in addition to also being able to take part in a few things outside of the athletic world. It’s like I have had two different lives in college, each amazing in its own way, and it’s something that I will always cherish and never forget.

—Allison Taka

### THE REAL COLLEGE EXPERIENCE: WHAT EVERY TRANSFER SHOULD KNOW

If freshman students have worries, woe to the transfer student; the minute students transfer in they already have to start thinking about leaving. One minute we are at our community college stressing to finish our university application and revise our personal statements and the next minute we need to repeat the same laborious task for grad school. Grad school deadlines start dropping on

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us like ten ton bricks by the end of our first year in the university system. In addition, it wasn't too long ago that we decided on a major, and now we have to decide on a career! There are several obstacles and disadvantages that transfer students encounter that faculty may attempt to help with, yet cannot give any solutions for. The typical response I receive from faculty is, "Yes, I know it's hard," followed by a sympathetic face. I'm left thinking, "Yes, it's hard, so what can I do about it?" Universities are not transfer friendly; transfer students must fend for themselves. Perhaps universities don't see the obstacles that transfer students confront, or maybe we're second-class citizens in a land that doesn't care to accommodate us.

The problem that most would-be transfer students encounter is that all we've known for the past two, maybe three, years in community college is that higher education has been somehow out of reach. Community college students have one major goal: to transfer out of there as soon as possible and move on with our lives. The problem is that in our hurried state we become so overwhelmed by fulfilling requirements and starting the paperwork for the next level that we forget that there will be new priorities, requirements, and deadlines awaiting us on the other side. Making the transition from community college student to university student is a gradual process; it takes time to get the hang of it.

Whether this transition is a smooth one or not depends on the institution that you transfer into; for instance, private universities may have fewer students, which means intimate class settings and more interaction with professors. Another advantage to attending a small university is that counselors, T.A.s, and other personnel will not be so overwhelmed and constantly in a rush to move you along. Information also travels quicker in smaller universities, making it easier to be aware of upcoming events and deadlines. Of course, not all private universities offer these advantages, so it's important to research potential universities.

This is not to say that transferring into a public university is a horrific experience. It isn't. I am at UCLA, which I love. It does, however, require more effort on your part. Public universities usually have a large student body, which makes it nearly impossible to have intimate class settings. In addition, the possibility of getting to know your professors is also pretty slim, unless you make the effort to see them during office hours and try to stand out in class by frequently asking questions and sitting in the front rows. It may sound corny, but in huge lecture halls students can become faceless numbers; therefore, sitting in the front in the professors' sight and asking questions can get them to eventually notice you.

As transfer students, we already have a lot of experience taking charge of our education; we wouldn't be able to transfer if not for a lot of hard work and vigilance on our part. The effort required is worth mentioning because in university, the workload increases substantially within a shorter period of time. It can become difficult to keep up with papers, readings, and exams while at the same time trying to keep an eye on the road ahead.

With such a fast pace, it is easy to get caught up in the moment and never notice deadlines flying right by you: "Oops, I was supposed to start applying for grad school when?" Time is a transfer student's worst enemy. The majority of community colleges use the semester system, but once you transfer you need to adapt, and fast, to the quarter system. At a community college, procrastination doesn't have consequences as severe as in a university that uses the quarter system. We had five long months in which to get things done; therefore, the workload was manageable. In contrast, in the ten-week quarter system, we are given more work and less time. How's that fair? You once had to worry about reading three or four chapters, and you now have to worry about reading three or four books, and actually I'm being kind in this example. Now, before we work ourselves into a frenzy,

the situation isn't as dim as it appears. After all, everything's possible if we manage our time properly. Only by managing our time and avoiding procrastination can we reach our goals and fulfill our expectations.

Time also works against transfer students because in order to finish in two years, we miss out on the opportunity to take courses for the mere enjoyment of learning something outside of our major. When time is of the essence, transfer students need to hurry and complete their major's requirements, so there is no time for exploring other classes, especially if we're planning to go to grad school.

The way in which transfer students experience university life is also very different than the way traditional students do. The "college experience" is something that every student often fantasizes about. It is true that we all transferred from colleges; however, most transfers don't consider community college experience to be the "real college experience." Community college was merely the stepping stone that was needed to get us closer to the real thing. Therefore, we have illusions based on preconceptions about student life in a four-year university. Trying to cram four years of "experience" into two is not an easy task. Living either on or near campus is the best bet for students who set out on this mission. Most universities guarantee housing for a year to transfers; where you choose to live is another factor that shapes your college experience. Usually, the dorms are located on campus; the dorms are where the vast majority of first- and second-year students reside. Then there is "transfer housing," which are off-campus apartments. Choosing between the two isn't too difficult. Dorms are more expensive and are usually the size of a shoebox; in addition, because most transfers are older than first- and second-year students, living off campus might be the better way to go.

When I transferred to UCLA, I decided to live off campus at the university housing for transfers. Everyone in my building was a transfer student. For most of the students living there, this was the first time they had moved out of their parents' home and lived with strangers. I'll be the first to say that living on your own for the first time feels liberating; we had a real sense of independence. Although living in your own apartment does entail responsibility; you have to try to get along with your roommates, clean, cook, grocery shop, and pay bills. This is a small price to pay for living on cloud nine. No curfews; no one looking over our shoulder. Yes, we were on our own, but as great as this was, we all felt left out. We felt segregated. We didn't know the campus very well or what activities were going on. We had no information about anything, and worst of all, we didn't know anyone who could guide us.

In this situation, dorms do offer some advantages over apartments. Students who live in dorms get the benefit of resident advisors or program advisors. Resident advisors are those wonderful people who also live in the dorms. Students can seek not only information but counseling from their resident advisors. Some dorms will even provide one resident advisor per floor. Resident advisors are also responsible for enforcing the rules and regulations of the dorms; they restore order if students are getting too crazy. In other words, they are there to hold a student's hand. Well, I wanted someone to hold my hand, too. If that isn't enough assistance to students who live in the dorms, there are also program advisors who sometimes live in the dorms as well. These people are even more wonderful; they coordinate special events and activities for the residents of their dorms. They put together picnics, little field trips, and so on, so not only are students being provided with entertainment, but they are also getting a chance to meet other students who live in their building. These are definitely a few things that students need to consider when the time comes to decide where to live.

Getting to know your new surroundings is also a crucial part of your college experience; when students know their campus, they have a sense of belonging. As we all know, most large universities can be very intimidating. These campuses are huge; therefore, new transfers should make an

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effort to explore their campus and the campus resources. Now in my senior year, I have yet to explore the entire campus and am considering going on a tour before I graduate. It's no joke; I would get a formal tour by a guide along with some history of the university. Besides exploring one's university, it's also a good idea to explore the neighboring cities and their establishments. Venturing out into the new town can be fruitful when it's time to unwind.

Unfortunately, there are other things that transfers won't get to check off their "real college experience" list due to time restrictions. Membership in fraternities or sororities might be out of the question. Rumor has it that some sororities won't accept transfer pledges; certain fraternities might. Taking the time to research organizations that fit our needs or ideologies might also be too time consuming. Being part of your school's sports department is also hard to juggle when you have deadlines to meet in your education and future career decisions. Then there's the experience that every student should have: traveling abroad. The classes we actually need for our major are not always offered to upper division students. Therefore, if we decide to travel abroad, the classes that we would take would only count as electives and would not fulfill the requirements for our major. Transfer students need to get a lot done in a limited time, so traveling would mean delays, and we can't afford that. Because freshmen and sophomores are still taking their general education requirements, they have more to choose from; they could live abroad for a whole year and not worry about running out of required courses. However, if traveling abroad is a "must," it can be done after graduation; speaking to an advisor early in the year can set you on the right path.

In sum, transfer students can feel like second-class citizens, foreigners in a new land. Often transfers, like foreigners, will arrive at their destination and be disappointed when they realize that their expectations will never fully be met. But there is hope; it doesn't have to be this way. In retrospect, I am now able to recognize where I, among other transfers, have gone wrong. You see, it was when I first opened my acceptance letter from UCLA; at this point, I should have already started to think about life after undergraduate school. Instead, I succumbed to the overwhelming demands of being an undergrad, balancing my sanity with schoolwork, oblivious to anything else. I figured that I would gradually find things out when I needed to, but before I knew it one whole year was gone. "Time waits for no one."

So as a word of advice for would-be transfers who are about to embark on the next journey, give yourself plenty of time to look into what lies ahead. Find out what resources your school has available for transfers. Some schools offer programs that are specifically designed for transfer students, such as workshops on how to adapt and "transfer counselors." The Career Center is also another place a student can go to seek guidance on placement exams, graduate schools, and jobs. Ultimately, however, it's important for you to know yourself; know what it is that you want to get out of your time as an undergrad. In order to get the most out of this two-year experience, transfers need to take the initiative to do their own research. At times, I felt like a detective following leads to get the right information I needed. Now, in my second and last year, I finally feel that I have gotten the hang of undergraduate school and the quarter system.

Hopefully, by providing you with my experience I have given you a glimpse into what obstacles may lie ahead for transfers and ways to ease this transition. There will be times when you will feel overwhelmed and discouraged, but you must remember that you have made it this far for a reason: You have earned this.

—Veronica Fematt