



Pieces of Advice for College Freshmen

by Kristen Carter

College can be a wonderful experience. Students have a chance to expand their horizons, learn valuable life lessons, and meet people from diverse backgrounds. However, as fun as that first year can be, it also can be a very stressful time. Professors have different expectations for their students than do high school teachers. College requires a higher level of self-motivation, and it can be hard to find the perfect balance among academics, social activities, and sleep. However, there are a few things incoming freshmen can do during their first semester that will make the transition much easier.

1. Talk to Your Advisor

Advisors are an invaluable resource in college. They help students streamline their schedules, get into the right classes, and maintain their grades. Academic advisors are there to make college less stressful by offering their own experience. Listening to an advisor is especially important for students who are taking double majors and do not want to accidentally end up spending two extra years in college. Advisors are well-versed in their college's course catalog and are trained to help their students make the most of their time and money. They are a vital resource that should not be ignored.

2. Talk to Your Professors

Like advisors, professors have an inside track on college life. They can offer a wealth of information to students on everything from which paper topics to pick to which employers to contact after graduating. It always helps to have good relationships with your



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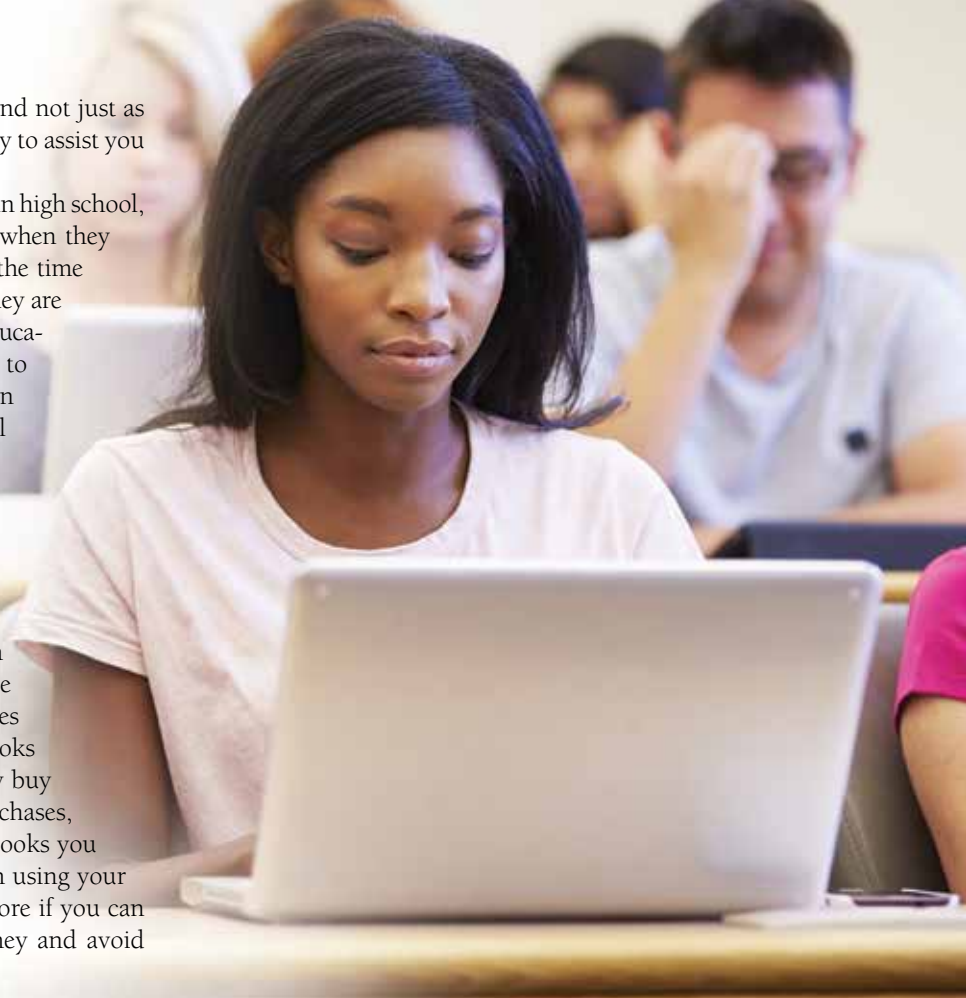


professors. If you show interest in them as people and not just as faceless imparters of wisdom, they will be more likely to assist you in your academic pursuits.

Another reason to talk to professors is that, unlike in high school, professors are not required to track down students when they are absent from class or missing an assignment. By the time students reach college, it is generally assumed that they are responsible enough to take charge of their own education. If you skip a class, the professor does not have to tell you what you missed. You have to ask. Keeping an open line of communication with your professors will drastically improve your college experience.

3. Check Which Books You Actually Need

At the beginning of each semester, college bookstores offer textbooks for all the upcoming classes. They have lists of which books correspond to which classes, and they will gladly help students find the right textbooks. However, their lists are sometimes incredibly inaccurate, and with the prices of textbooks as high as they are, you do not want to accidentally buy books you do not need. Before making any purchases, check in with your professors and find out which books you will actually be using in class. If you do not plan on using your textbooks after the semester is over, ask the bookstore if you can rent them instead of buying them. Save your money and avoid buying new books unless absolutely necessary.



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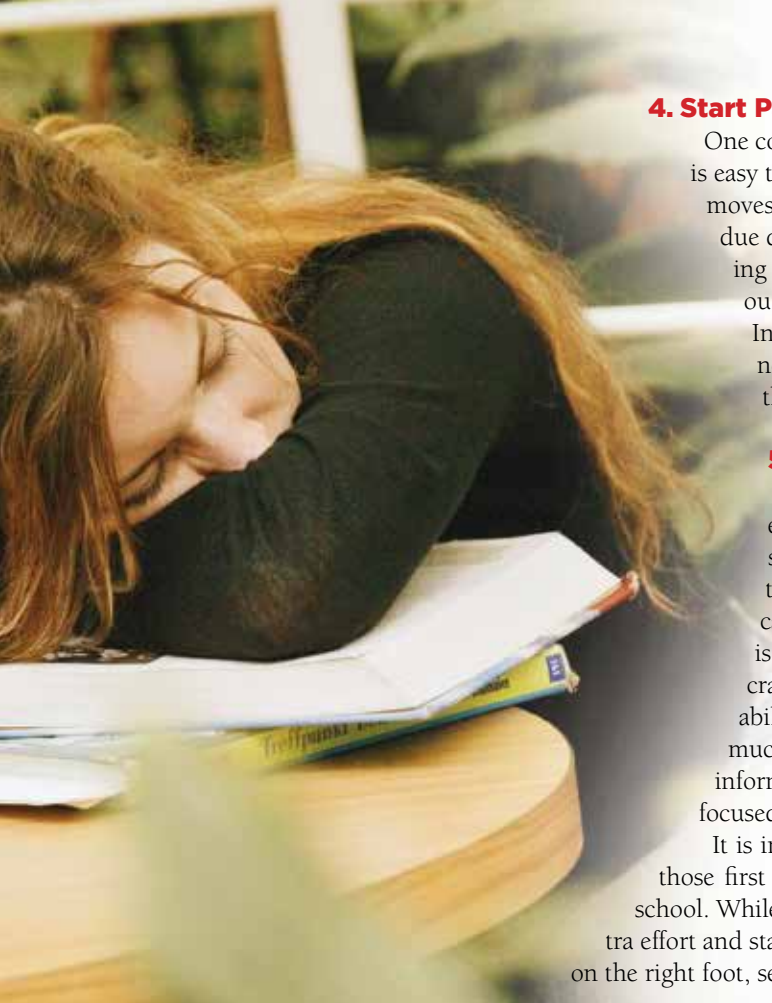
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4. Start Papers Early

One common pitfall for students is waiting too long to start an assignment. It is easy to ignore papers that are due at the end of the semester. However, time moves quickly in college, and, before you know it, it is the night before the due date and you have 10 pages to go. To avoid this nightmare, start working on large assignments as soon as possible. This way, you can spread out the work and get feedback from your professor before turning it in. In college, it is not enough to complete the next day's homework. You need to be looking ahead to the end of the semester. Your future self will thank you.

5. Sleep

This might seem to contradict the last piece of advice, but getting enough sleep is as important as getting another page done on an assignment. Too often, college students are told that they have to sacrifice their health in order to get good grades. In reality, sleep deprivation can damage your grades as effectively as skipping assignments. This is especially true if you have a test the next day. If you stay up all night cramming for a final, you are more likely to go blank during the test. Your ability to recall information and think clearly is directly connected to how much sleep you have had. It is better to go to look over the most important information and then hit the sack. This way, your mind will be clear and focused when you start the test, instead of trapped in a fog of exhaustion.

It is important to form the right habits as soon as you start college. During those first few months, you will be setting a precedent for your entire time in school. While it is possible to change bad habits later on, it is better to make the extra effort and start strong. These five pieces of advice will help you start your first year on the right foot, setting you up for a successful, enjoyable time at college. ■

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