

# STARTING THE FRESHMAN YEAR RIGHT



HINTS FOR MAKING THE  
TRANSITION TO THE FRESHMAN  
YEAR IN COLLEGE

## STARTING THE FRESHMAN YEAR RIGHT!

You've made it this far and now you can't wait to leave home and your parents are probably excited about it too, but have you thought about the actual process of leaving home and setting up a new life in another place? You're going to be on your own: no parents, no curfew, no set schedule to follow, and very few rules of behavior. So, sounds too good to be true, huh? But how do you plan to survive without the safety nets that your parents and high school have always provided?

The following are some tips to help make the transition a little easier. Many of them have been suggested by former Goddard High School students.

### GET ORIENTED

If one is available, do the orientation program for incoming freshmen. Some are held in the summer, and some are held a few days before the start of the fall term. Some summer programs offer you the opportunity to enroll early as part of the orientation activities. If they do, take advantage of this opportunity since you will have better course availability.

Orientation sessions offer valuable information about the campus and its programs and facilities, security, organizations and activities, etc. They are like a road map to the school, and they will keep you from making too many time-consuming wrong turns. They are also a great way to meet other people and start making friends. Of course, orientation sessions at some schools are a lot more fun than others, but even if they are a little boring, you can still learn some valuable information and shortcuts.

### PREPARE FOR DORM LIVING

Most schools ask you to list your dormitory and roommate preferences. You will be asked to choose between single-sex and coed dorms; if you want coed, you may be offered the option of coed by floor or by room. Other options may include all-freshmen or mixed-class dorms, dorms with designated "quiet" floors, and "substance-free" dorms. You might as well get used to the fact that there will be noise and confusion in all dorms, but some are better than others for actual study conditions. Many students do their studying in designated study lounges in the dorms or in the library.

The roommate situation: Most freshmen have to learn to live in a room with a total stranger, deal with constant noise, and cope with the fact that clean laundry no longer reappears automatically in their dresser drawers. You and your roommate will probably have different values, outlooks, and habits...and this can mean trouble if you don't learn to discuss and *compromise*. If you find out your roommate's name and address or e-mail address during the summer, write a letter of introduction and suggest an exchange of information to help start the term off on the right foot. Talk about your study habits, sleep patterns, and standards of housekeeping (just how deep does the pile of clothes on the floor get before you bother to pick up a few things?) so that there are no unpleasant surprises.

**RESPECT** is the key to successful roommate relationships. If you are unlucky enough to get the roommate from another planet, seek help from your RA, dorm director, or student services director. A bad situation can make your life miserable and affect your academic success.

**Stuff.** When you get in touch with your roommate, work out who's bringing what. Rooms are often quite small with very limited storage space, so you may not have enough space for

both of you to bring every conceivable convenience from home. Consider sharing certain items especially ones that take up a lot of space like appliances. Make sure you are aware of dorm regulations regarding electrical appliances such as microwave ovens, small refrigerators, etc., before you load them into the family van for the trip to campus. Most dorms allow some small appliances, but you'd better read the fine print on the housing regulations first.

You will really need the use of a computer and a good word processing program at school, but check out the availability of computers before you consider taking your own. Some private schools offer computers in the dorm rooms, but most schools can only offer labs in the dorms, library, etc. If you have to use a lab, you may have to wait....and if you have to wait, you may miss a deadline.

**Laundry.** You will probably be doing your own laundry (it's a sad thing, to be sure, but Mom just won't be there to take care of it for you). If you're smart, you'll take a crash course on the finer points of doing laundry before you leave home. Pink jockey shorts (for those of you who have never done laundry, pink shorts are a by-product of washing your white underwear with your favorite red

sweatshirt) tend to cause a ripple in the men's locker room!! It's a good idea to take a couple of laundry bags or plastic baskets with you and stock up on quarters!!

**Security.** Crime is a growing concern on all campuses. Be smart and protect yourself and your property. Keep your door locked and your valuable property out of sight when you are not in your room. Learn how to contact campus security in an emergency, and find out if an evening escort service is available. Most campuses have some sort of security, and those that are larger and/or are located in or near a city tend to have many security services available.

#### KNOW THE POLICIES AND CHOOSE COURSES WISELY

The college catalog will become your guidebook. It tells you everything you need to know about the policies of the school, which courses you need to take, and what your degree requirements are. *You* (not your parents nor your advisor) will be expected to read it and be responsible for your own progress toward graduation. *Ignorance is no excuse* at this level. Study the catalog and then meet with your advisor. Making poor class choices can cause you to have to take one or two extra terms of classes.... and this

means more \$\$\$, as well as extending your graduation date.

Make it a point to meet with your advisor regularly and well before each registration period. No one *will* be looking over your shoulder to make sure you are meeting your requirements. This is your responsibility!!

If you are at a large school, try to choose at least one small course (one in which there is only a small number of students) in your first term so that you can get to know at least one instructor well and a few people with whom you can work closely. This will make you feel less like a number and more like a real person.

#### PAY YOUR TUITION AND FEES

Even if your parents are paying the bills or you are on scholarships, all expenses are in your name. Take responsibility for monitoring these and see that they are taken care of in a timely manner. Check all statements and receipts for accuracy since schools can make mistakes. Keep all receipts and statements in a special file in case you have to provide documentation. When packing for college, make sure you take along copies of your financial aid statements and receipts for college bills already paid.

## SET UP A MEAL PLAN

Most schools offer a variety of meal plans, including special plans such as vegetarian meals. Some meal plans are covered as part of your housing contract. There is a variety of options available, so make sure you understand how many meals per week are provided and in what locations. It's a good idea to get a meal plan for the first year so that you are guaranteed at least a couple of well-balanced meals a day even if you have overdrawn your account!!

There is a popular idea that freshmen automatically gain 15 to 20 pounds. Unfortunately, this is true in most cases, but it's not the fault of the meals provided on the meal plan. It's the result of poor eating habits and too many junk-food meals. So if nothing else, taking advantage of a meal plan might keep you from putting on unwanted pounds!

## LEARN TO BUDGET YOUR TIME

The biggest mistake that most freshmen make is *misuse of time*. The typical freshman takes 15 credits-or 5 courses, or 15 hours a week-compared to about 30 hours of weekly class time in high school. That

sounds like a lot of free time...until you discover that for every hour of class time, you may have to do two hours of reading and studying.

Another shock is that no one will be looking over your shoulder making sure you go to class or do your reading!!! Assignments will be given weeks in advance and no one will hover over you to make sure that you work every night. For most freshmen there comes a dangerous moment when you realize that if you can't make yourself work, then you might as well pack up and go home. The key to making it all work is to *get organized* and practice *time management* skills.

*Use a Planner.* It doesn't have to be one of those fancy things that cost \$50, but use some kind of planner or assignment book to keep track of everything especially assignments, projects, tests, papers, etc. Get in the habit of using it everyday to write down all obligations.

*Use your course syllabus or outline.* At the start of each term, the professor will hand out a syllabus, or course outline, which tells what will be covered in each class session and gives reading assignments and the dates of papers, quizzes, and tests. Transfer these dates and deadlines into your planner immediately...and you will save yourself a lot of wasted time.

***Set up a schedule:*** Your time in high school was structured...classes all day and homework at night. In college, you will have much more free time during the day in between classes. Don't waste it. Set up a daily schedule that includes study and reading time in between classes so that you don't save it all until the evening.

Upperclassmen will tell you that as freshmen, they had trouble going from the structure of high school to the lack of it at college. Many freshmen with limited study skills and time management skills (Mom always reminded them to do things!) simply fall apart when tempted by the constant availability of social distractions. They party too much, skip too many classes, and suddenly it's too late to do anything but panic and fail. Former students have said, "Don't make cutting class a habit. If you do, you aren't getting your tuition's worth and you'll regret it at test time."

Save yourself the anguish by setting up a daily schedule that includes time for study. You will discover that having a daily schedule actually frees up time for you to do other things.

***Get help.*** When in doubt, ***ask for help.*** Every school has some kind of assistance for students experiencing

trouble - tutoring programs, writing centers, math centers, online homework assistance. Some dorms even have these programs available within the dorm. Some professors also offer help sessions prior to exams. Also, there are always study groups you can join. ***The bottom line is that help is there if you ask for it.***

### LEARN TO BUDGET YOUR MONEY

This is another area where no one will be looking over your shoulder telling you what to do. You and your parents should sit down well before you leave for school and establish a realistic budget. Make sure you settle who is responsible for paying what (telephone calls, trips home, unexpected expenses).

Most businesses will not accept out-of-town checks, so plan to open a checking account in a bank near campus or have a debit card available. Keep your checkbook balanced and up to date...and don't abuse an ATM card!!! Most freshmen say this was their biggest mistake next to time management.

It's not a bad idea to "hide" a couple of hundred dollars in your bank account for an emergency. Don't add it in...just pretend it isn't there. Most freshmen say that you will

experience some kind of money emergency, and you will be glad you did this.

**AVOID** all offers for low-interest credit cards. You will be swamped with offers for these...and they will sound very attractive and enticing, but they are a fast road to needless and painful debt. **JUST SAY NO!**

### TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE SOCIAL SCENE

Yes, you are there to get an education, but you are also there to meet new people and gain new experiences. Take advantage of opportunities to meet people such as orientation activities, mixers at your dorm, and, if you're interested in Greek life, the activities involved in rush for fraternities and sororities. Meeting people right away is the best way to fight homesickness.

### EXPLORE EXTRACURRICULAR PROGRAMS

At large universities you will find a wide range of free and inexpensive activities to attend. Also explore such offerings as radio and television stations, newspapers and literary magazines, debate teams, choruses, theater ensembles, political groups, etc. Smaller schools will also offer many opportunities for you to indulge your special interests. Sometimes

this type of exposure helps you decide on a future career, so take advantage of the many things that are offered. These kinds of activities broaden your knowledge base and help you meet people.

### LEARN TO MAKE WISE CHOICES

You will not only be called upon to make good choices about your courses, your use of time, and your use of money, you will also be faced with many other situations where your choices can have far-reaching consequences. The temptations will be many and varied. Keep your wits about you and your priorities straight and make decisions that reflect your values and your objectives for your education.

College is more than a place to get an education. Most students rank their "learning-from-living" experiences as just as important as the 'learning-from-books' experiences...and most reflect that their success was highly dependent on their attitude and motivation.

### MEDICAL AND DENTAL INFORMATION

If you're going to a school that is a considerable distance away, you might want to take copies of your medical/dental files just in case...and

especially if you have any ongoing medical/dental issues. Check with your parents so you know what your medical/dental coverage is before you go off to school...especially emergency care coverage.

### SUGGESTED CHECKLIST FOR RESIDENCE HALL LIVING

#### **Appliances:**

Hair dryer  
Radio with alarm  
Stereo/CD player  
Microwave (if allowed)  
Small refrigerator (if allowed)

#### **Bed/Bath:**

Blanket/Comforter  
Pillows and pillowcases  
Sheets  
Towels  
Toiletries

#### **Clothing:**

Normal clothes/shoes  
Rain gear  
Swimsuit  
Athletic wear  
Comfortable shoes for walking/playing

#### **Desk supplies:**

Calculator  
Wall calendar  
Daily/weekly planner  
Desk light (portable)  
Dictionary and thesaurus  
Paper clips, pens, pencils

Stapler  
Ruler  
Scotch and masking tape  
Paper and notebooks

#### **Eating-related Items:**

Dishware and utensils (plastic)  
Drinking glasses/coffee mugs  
Snacks

#### **Laundry Supplies:**

Detergent  
Fabric softener  
Hangers  
Iron and ironing board  
Laundry bag/basket(s)  
Quarters

#### **Room Furnishings:**

Bedspread  
Memo board  
Posters/pictures  
Small rug  
Extra wastebasket

#### **Extras:**

Backpack for books  
Paper towels  
Games/cards  
Sports stuff  
Computer

#### **A little bit of home:**

Photos of family/friends  
Stuffed animal(s)  
Personal mementos  
(These aren't necessities, but they help fight homesickness!!)



- Keep in mind that dorm rooms are usually small with limited space. You can't take everything.
- Plastic storage boxes or crates are a handy thing to take and can be stored under your bed.

**Handy things to take that may not be on a dorm supply list:**

- Power strips and extension cords. There are *never* enough outlets in dorm rooms. Make sure, however, that you don't overload the circuits. It's embarrassing if you become known as the kid responsible for the dorm's three-hour blackout.
- Fan(s). Older dorms may not have good air circulation even if they are supposedly air-conditioned.
- Hammer and screwdrivers. These will come in handy when you're getting your room set up.
- Bathrobe and flip-flops. No, you probably don't use a bathrobe at home...but it's a long walk down the hall to the communal bathroom. And the flip-flops are for standing on wet (and sometimes slimy) floors in the showers where lots of other people have been. Take *them...you'll be glad you did.*
- Shower caddy. Another thing you don't have at home because you have your own bathroom. They're a great help carrying all that soap, shampoo, conditioner, etc., back and forth down the hall to the bathroom.
- First aid kit and small sewing kit. It's amazing how handy these two items can be. Remember, Mom's not there to take care of you!
- Umbrella(s). You will be walking everywhere...and it does rain at some time in every city or town.
- Flashlight. A handy item when the electricity goes out...which can be frequently, especially in older dorms where the wiring may be a little outdated.