

Students Helping Students: Navigating Your Freshman Year

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This latest edition in the “Students Helping Students” series presents realistic steps to having a successful first year of college. Written by current students with contributions from other students and recent graduates, the text contains practical and in some cases brutally honest information any first year student can relate to. The student contributors represent over two dozen various colleges and universities and share experiences from their college career. They also provide vignettes and supporting comments related to the topics. Though not divided into chapters, the text consists of an introduction; eleven focus areas students will face with corresponding subsections, inspirational quotes, words of wisdom from student affairs practitioners, and additional resources.

Opening with the author’s perspectives on what the first year is and is not the first area addresses leaving home. As the initial step in the journey towards independence, students are encouraged to face the myriad of emotions they will experience. Within the transition of leaving home, areas such as how to pack, saying goodbye, homesickness, separating from high school friends, and preparing for the first visit home all enable students to move forward. Adjusting to life based on the size of a residence hall room and how to adjust to going to college close to home are highlighted.

The next section provides a discussion of getting oriented to campus, both the physical environment and the human aggregate. Readers are encouraged to be creative in making new friends and made aware of the importance of building relationships with campus administrators. New student orientation and its importance are highlighted as one of the initial opportunities to begin the relationship building process. Beyond creating peer networks, methods for surviving the “roommate experience” and having a positive campus living experience are given. Sample ground rules and things that should expect when sharing a small space with another individual, they may or may not know are included. The reader is also introduced to the reality of “sexile,” or not being able to gain access to your room because your roommate has company. This aspect may be new to many students, but the authors assert that it can be a fact of living on campus.

The largest section of the book is focused on the academic adjustment first year students may face. Understanding the transition from high school work to college

academics is the overriding message. Becoming familiar with campus logistics, such as drop/add and registration, prioritizing assignments, and developing a study style are all discussed so that first year students can think realistically as they transition. Within the section they also discuss that students will have difficulties and how they can recover from them and not be discouraged. The supporting examples from the contributors ensure the reader has a clear understanding of what the transition will entail.

The benefits of involvement beyond the classroom are discussed. The notion of balance and exploration are presented as students work to find their niche. Students are asked to experience the unfamiliar and test out organizations without making a firm commitment initially. Since many students may seek activities they were involved with in high school, the importance of trying something new to broaden horizons is encouraged.

The next three sections provide the most realistic and honest advice for students as they explore the campus social scene, dating, and health issues. Once again the reality that students will party and interact socially is assumed and honest advice on how to ensure balance is given. The legalities of alcohol and other drug use are listed and students are asked to consider their choices wisely and be aware that consequences can be attached to some actions. Frank portraits of dating and sex are given in the hopes that students make informed decisions. Avoiding the “Freshman 15” through a balanced diet and exercise are advised, even though students will face the freedom of unlimited dining hall meals and late night pizza runs. Tips on how to exercise and how to consider establishing a healthy diet are listed.

The final content section explores life management. That includes understanding the responsibilities of financial and credit management, employment while in school, saving money, and protecting your property. Features of credit cards are pointed out so a more educated decision can be made when selecting a credit card. Balancing involvement, academics, and the need to be employed are discussed to give a portrait of how work can impact life as a students and your schedule. Practical ideas are also shared on methods for saving and being thrifty to stretch a budget.

Finally the text closes with preparation tips for transitioning into the next year. The decision to transfer, preparing for the transition home, and making summer plans are just a few of the areas covered. Inspirational quotes, words or wisdom from current student affairs administrators, and additional resources concluded the text.

This text imparts salient points to consider during the first year of college. Throughout it are ‘comic relief’ sections in which a contributor has provided examples from real-life related to the various topics. The length lends itself to a quick read, which should appeal to students. The text acknowledges that justice cannot be done to certain topics, but the attempt is made to bring attention to it. Students are provided with ways to be informed and calculating in their decision making, which can ease the transition into college.

More detailed information on campus bureaucracies and obstacles students may face might add to the usefulness of the text. The text would make a wonderful addition to training student orientation leaders as they prepare to field the questions of incoming

students. The fact that the information comes directly from those immersed or recently removed from the environment lends credibility to the material. The reminder that students are paying for their education and should take advantage of campus and local resources serves to empower students. The frankness of the topics mentioned prepares students for the reality of college life.