



MERITUS

COLLEGE FUND

BRIDGING THE GAP

TO HIGHER EDUCATION

TIPS FOR COLLEGE

COLLEGE: WHAT TO EXPECT

Stage 1: The Summer of Transition

The days after graduation are filled with satisfaction and some nostalgia about the end of high school. Students anticipate the challenge of college, although their expectations may be somewhat unrealistic. Summer jobs to help pay college costs or summer programs to help prepare for the academic challenges to come are recommended.

Stage 2: Separation Anxiety

Students may be able to avoid the reality of their impending departure until they begin packing the trunk and making travel plans. Then, however, they begin to acknowledge the approaching separation from family, friends, home, and the support of the high school environment. Acute separation anxiety may occur when the day of departure arrives.

Stage 3: The First Term

The freshman academic program may generate severe stress. Students should avoid taking too many courses or enrolling in courses that are too advanced. Meeting roommates and learning the ins and outs of campus bureaucracy and about academic and social expectations may also produce stress. Freshmen should be sure to attend orientation programs.

Stage 4: The Honeymoon

First-year students are ready to be enthralled by everything they see. This is actually a good way to begin a college career because there are wonderful things to see and experience, although they may not happen immediately. The honeymoon stage is also a time when many college students experiment with alcohol, drugs or sexual activity. It is naïve to expect that students will not engage in these behaviors, but it is important that they understand the concepts of choice and moderation, and recognize the consequences of their behaviors.

Stage 5: The End of the Honeymoon

The realization dawns that much of college consists of hard work. Nothing will prepare freshmen for the shock of those first papers and quiz grades. This is also a time when students may experience the symptoms of homesickness, longing for the security of home.

Stage 6: The Grass is Always Greener

About midway through the first year, freshmen may begin to think that all their problems with this college could be solved by transferring to another institution. Many problems that seem insurmountable in the first semester are reduced or disappear by the year's end.

Stage 7: You Can't Go Home Again

Students who go away to college and suffer the pain of homesickness often long to return to the familiarity and security of home. After only a few days at home on the first holiday, many freshmen are struck by the realization that it is not that things at home have changed while they were away at college, but that they themselves have changed.

Stage 8: Learning to Cope

After six weeks or so on campus, freshmen can find their way to the library, have had real conversations with their roommates, and are expanding their circle of friends. They begin to enjoy classes, engage in campus activities, and in general, participate more actively in the life of the campus. One of the most important coping skills to learn is how to balance academic, personal and social demands. Time management is crucial.

Stage 9: Fear of Failure

Midterm examination may cause considerable stress as freshmen begin fully to appreciate the amount of work that must be done to prepare for them. Final exam time is even worse! The best way to cope with fear of failure is to make sure course preparation is thorough. If students have done the reading, gone to classes, and turned assignments in on time, their grades will be good. One of the most difficult adjustments to college life is learning to be a self-starter. In high school, many people monitored a student's progress. In college that number boils down to one, the individual student.

Stage 10: Putting it All Together

By the middle of the second or third term of the first year, freshmen usually begin to find that classes, residence hall experiences, social activities, and studies have all meshed into a well-integrated lifestyle. It becomes clear that success in college depends upon hard work, but the many wonderful opportunities for personal and intellectual growth are also readily apparent.

Adapted from a two-part article in the 1997-8 College Board Review entitled "Stress Points in the College Transition, Part II: Off to College," by R. Fred Zuker, Dean of Admission, Financial Aid, and Student Life, University of Dallas, Irving, Texas.

TRANSITIONS TO COLLEGE

I. Homesickness

- **What about your family?** You may feel the pressure of their need to have you in their lives.
- **You may feel grown up and miss home simultaneously.** Or you may feel glad you got away yet feel overwhelmed by the changes in your life.
- **You may miss home cooking!** You can either gain or lose the “freshman 15” (pounds of weight)
- **1st generation students – going where no one’s gone before!** Parents and others may not understand the demands on your time, the college lingo or culture, your changes, your different choices – you need to gently educate them. It’s normal to feel whatever you are feeling: guilt, joy, confusion, pain – all at the same time! Meritus personnel & your mentor can help by talking with you and your parents if you want.
- **Not everyone has the same experience of college.** You may have found it a relief to leave home, a group home or your foster situation – the college structure and safety may be nice and new to you.
- **You may feel alone, but others have felt the way you do!** For some, college is “the best four years of their lives, but not for all of us. Be open to the different experiences and challenges you and others may be facing. Talk with other students, your mentor, and Meritus folks.

II. How to Build a Support System

- **“One of few” vs. “one of many”.** Sometimes you may be the only student of color in your class. You may feel you “stand out” and professors notice when you aren’t there. Use this to your advantage.
- **Build your support system.** Join a social organization with students with whom you feel comfortable – a club or sorority/fraternity (but beware of dues not covered by financial aid)
- **Discuss how to make friends in college.** It can be lonely, but many other students are lonely, too. Help yourself by helping others...
- **Expand your horizons.** Think outside of the box – try making some new, different friends
- **You’ll always have your family and friends.** This is your opportunity to meet different people.
- **Make friends, or at least peace, with your roommate.** Learn to talk with him/her to resolve misunderstandings and negotiate space. COMPROMISE. Clean up after yourself. Be courteous.
- **Attend your dorm’s activities** to get connected with others. Be social and open to your floor mates, especially your roommate.
- **Use the RA’s (residential assistants) for help** if your roommate situation is getting bad.

II. Classes

- **Register for classes early**
- **Get advice from counselors and make a long-term plan**
- **Get used to working independently**

III. How to Access University Resources

- **Attend your school's orientation!**
- **Where do you go for help?** Learn where campus resources are for academic and major advising, student activities (clubs), student health center, financial aid, tutoring, disability center, personal counseling, campus police/escort service, career center (jobs/internships), EOP, "how to" courses in study habits, time management, test taking, etc. These services are free to you – you paid for them with your fees!
- **Get to know individuals in these offices.** Ask to see them each time you go in – develop relationships
- **Many services are available on the web.** Class registration, posting grades, financial aid awards, eligibility requirements, fee payment deadlines, what you owe to the school.
- **Look in the Student handbook, web pages, campus directory, and ask other students!** Some offices may have different names than you'd expect.

IV. Stress Management

- **What is *stress*?**

Stress is defined as the nonspecific response of the body to any demand placed on it. The key to reducing stress is to recognize the stress, identify your reaction to it and look for a solution that fits your style. What causes you the most stress? How can you change the situation and relax yourself?

- **Ten Ways to Control Stress:**

1. **Set realistic goals** and priorities and identify those things your must do first.
2. **Organize your time** in accordance with those priorities.
3. **Learn to say "no"** when asked to do something stressful
4. Recognize that **some stress is unavoidable**
5. **Make a list** of stressful situations in your life. Divide the list into things you **can't avoid or control** and things you **can change to make less stressful**.
6. **Use your time and talents effectively** to address those stressful situations you can change.
7. **Don't waste your energies** in a frustrating attempt to conquer what you can't control.
8. **Don't be afraid** to ask questions, solicit suggestions, and share your problems.
9. Do allow yourself time to **enjoy personal interests and things that make you happy**.
10. **Get regular rest and exercise.** Find ways to separate your feelings from stressful situations.

- **Negative Symptoms of Stress/Positive Results of Managing Stress**

	<u>Negative</u>		<u>Positive</u>
Physical	Sleeplessness Muscle pain/Headaches Weight loss/gain Lack/Increase of appetite	High blood pressure Fatigue	Energy Feeling rested Strength Flexibility
Behavioral	Aggressive driving Risk taking	Carelessness Grinding teeth	Adapt to change Tolerate frustration

	Impulsive behavior Use of alcohol & drugs Cravings (sweets)		Tolerate others Recreation Relaxation Sleep
Mental	Feeling uneasy Anxiety /Fears/Anger Depression Suspiciousness & mood swings	Critical of others Reduced productivity Preoccupation	Sense of humor Fulfillment Sense of independence Self reliance

V. Study Tips

- **Establish a study plan.** Set specific times for studying. When possible, incorporate the following time management principles:
- **Plan for peak periods of concentration.** Determine when your high and low periods of concentration occur. Reserve peak times for intensive study. Use less efficient times for less intensive tasks like rewriting notes and recopying or typing assignments.
- **Schedule study times according to class periods and course formats.** Study close to the time you are in class. Some classes take more preparation before class. Others require review after class. For a class in which you discuss and recite, plan to study just before class begins. For a lecture course, plan to study soon after the class ends.
- **Study in time blocks.** Plan 50 minute blocks of study time separated by 10 minute rest periods. Your study time will be more focused when you know when a break will occur.
- **Study difficult subjects first.** When you begin studying, your mind is alert and fresh and your concentration is better. Do not give in to the temptation to get easy things and little assignments out of the way first.
- **Practice distributed learning.** Learning occurs more effectively if it is spaced over several study sessions. Study a subject one hour each of three nights rather than three hours in one evening. You will master the material more easily if you follow this method.
- **Use daylight hours productively.** Research shows that each hour used for study during the day is equal to one and one-half hours used at night.
- **Make your semester plan livable.** Allow adequate time for eating well-balanced meals, sleeping eight hours a night, resting quietly, and relaxing with friends. Your physical health and mental attitude contribute significantly to your success as a student. Leave enough time in your schedule for your physical, social, and recreational needs.
- **Revise your plan.** You probably will not construct the best plan for your needs the first time you try. You will discover what kind of plan will work best as you live with your plan and revise it. Remember that sticking to a sensible, well-balanced plan will make your life easier and help you succeed in college.

VI. Time Management:

• I'll Stop Procrastinating Tomorrow!

Here are a few suggestions for how to gain and maintain control of your time.

- Get started: Just starting a big project alleviates a great deal of the anxiety associated with doing it. Even if you still have a long way to go, the project seems much more approachable once it is underway.
- Use schedules: Make up a daily activity schedule and designate specific study times. Be flexible; even if you don't always stick to the schedule it will make you much more aware of how you are spending your time.
- Daily To-Do Lists: Make up a list the night before of the things you would like to accomplish the next day. Be sure to list in order of priority, and then check it off as you go.
- Avoid self-criticism: Being overly hard on yourself when you have put things off only perpetuates the problem. Concentrate on what you can do better next time, remembering that low self-esteem is invariably associated with poor time management.
- Use motivators: Learn to apply one of the principles of motivation; we are motivated by the immediate consequences of our choices, not by the long-range consequences. Determine what you most enjoy doing and schedule yourself to always study immediately before this activity.
- Use the bits and pieces approach: Break large projects down into smaller steps then resolve to whittle away at the project as step at a time. Keep telling yourself, "better half than none at all". Remember, you don't need to have the whole project streamlined just to start on it!
- The Five Minute Plan: Agree to start a project and only work on it for a predetermined, limited amount of time (5 minutes, 15 minutes, a half hour, etc). Then, after this time has passed, you can evaluate your progress and make a decision either to continue or to switch to something else. This allows you to build momentum.

How Much Time Is There in a Week?

Time spent in class	16 hours
Time spent studying	32 hours
Time spent eating	21 hours
Time spent sleeping	56 hours
TOTAL	125 hours

Total weekly hours 168 hours
 -125 hours
=43 hours of leisure for sports, job, fraternity/sorority, etc.

- **Planning Will Save You Time and Headaches:**

Consider these tips on how to calendar and prioritize your semester activities

- **Make A Semester Plan:** The Semester Plan is the foundation of your time management system. It's not intended to refer to specific assignments or activities – it is where you keep an *overview* of all the *kinds* of activities for which you need to allocate time every week. The schedule allots time for classes, studying, personal care, eating, sleeping, recreation, etc. As you go through all your syllabi for classes, start estimating the amount of time you'll need for attending class, studying, researching, and working on projects. Then estimate how much time you'll need every week for basic things like personal care, eating, sleeping, recreation, etc. During the first month or so of school, you'll probably need to make adjustments to this plan, and you will definitely need to revise your plan at the beginning of each semester.
- **Make A Month-at-a-Glance Calendar/Course Chart:** With your class syllabi still out, write all important dates on a month-at-a-glance calendar. Note when assignments, themes, reports, and research papers are due. Record dates for quizzes, tests, mid-terms, final examinations, and presentations. These dates are your goals and referring often to your calendar will help you keep focused on your goals. Be sure to list the specific page number to be read or covered in quizzes, as well as other assignment details. This will make it easier to schedule later, without having to always refer to your syllabi.
- **Make A Weekly Priority List:** Before each school week begins, prepare a weekly priority list that takes into account both short and long-term assignments. List those things that you both need and want to accomplish during the week. First, identify what needs to be read, reviewed, or written for each course. List specific chapters and pages. Then review test schedules and long-term assignments and specify time for preparation. For example, include library time for research if a semester paper is assigned. Use your weekly priority list to break down long-term assignments into manageable pieces and to monitor progress toward your goals. As you make this list, glance over the assignment or pages to be read and estimate how long this task will take. This will help you schedule it later.
- **Make A Daily Schedule:** This is where you schedule all the items on your monthly schedule and weekly priority list. Start by adding items from your monthly list that already have fixed hours, such as your work schedule, meetings, study groups, tutor sessions, etc. Then fill in the remaining time blocks with the unscheduled items on your weekly list, beginning with the items you've given the highest priority.
- **Beginning Your Time Management Plan**
 - **Syllabi:** During the first week of each semester, your professors will present you with a syllabus or course outline. It contains valuable information that will help you plan your study time for that course, including class policies, test types, and final grade calculation. The syllabus is a plan to follow, or a road map of a professor's expectations, so file each one in a safe place for frequent future reference. You can predict much about a course from the syllabus, and it can help you to design your academic activities for the course.
 - **Long-range planning needs to begin on the first day of class.** Planning out your semester will help you reduce confusion and anxiety.

- **Final Time Management Tips For Students**

Does it seem like there's never enough time in the day to get everything done? Feel like you're always running late? Here are some tips for taking control of your time and organizing your life.

- **Make a "To Do" List Every Day:** Put things that are most important at the top and do them first. If it's easier, use a planner to track all of your tasks. And don't forget to reward yourself for your accomplishments.
- **Use Spare Minutes Wisely:** Get some reading done on the bus ride home from school, for example, and you'll kill two birds with one stone.
- **It's Okay to Say "No":** If your boss asks you to work on a Thursday night and you have a final exam the next morning, realize that it's okay to say no. Keep your short- and long-term priorities in mind.
- **Find the Right Time:** You'll work more efficiently if you figure out when you do your best work. For example, if your brain handles math better in the afternoon, don't wait to do it until late at night.
- **Review Your Notes Every Day:** You'll reinforce what you've learned, so you need less time to study. You'll also be ready if your teacher calls on you or gives a pop quiz.
- **Get a Good Night's Sleep:** Running on empty makes the days seem longer and your tasks seem more difficult.
- **Communicate Your Schedule to Others:** If phone calls are proving to be a distraction, tell your friends that you take social calls from 7-8 p.m. It may sound silly, but it helps.
- **Become a Taskmaster:** Figure out how much free time you have each week. Give yourself a time budget and plan your activities accordingly.
- **Don't Waste Time Agonizing:** Have you ever wasted an entire evening by worrying about something that you're supposed to be doing? Was it worth it? Instead of agonizing and procrastinating, just do it.
- **Keep Things in Perspective:** Setting goals that are unrealistic sets you up for failure. While it's good to set high goals for yourself, be sure not to overdo it. Set goals that are difficult yet reachable.

Consider these tips, but personalize your habits so that they suit you. If you set priorities that fit your lifestyle, you'll have a better chance of achieving your goals.

From: College Board 2007 Handbook

VII. Academic Insights: Tips from Meritus Scholars

- What is a GE? GE stands for General Education requirements. They are different for UCs, CSUs and private institutions so it is imperative that you meet with a counselor to find out what yours are for your specific campus. Once you know it will be easier for you to schedule your quarter or semester. Some classes fulfill more than one GE and sometimes also fulfill a major requirement. For example, Lit 1 fulfills my humanities GE as well as a prerequisite for my major. As often as possible, schedule GE classes that fulfill more than one requirement. This will save you time and money!
- Get familiar with your campus library. No matter what your major is at some point you will be required to do a research paper. Many libraries give tours to incoming freshmen and transfer students. Try to go to one of those. Make sure you are familiar with the library database. Most schools have online databases that students on campus are automatically connected to, so in essence you can look for research materials in your room and just go to the library to pick them up. If you don't know how to look for something on the database or you are just unsure of what to do just ask a librarian for help.
- Learn how to talk to professors. Never feel intimidated by a professor. You pay their salary and if you need assistance they are obligated to help you. If you feel unsure of speaking to the professor by yourself bring a friend with and prepare questions before hand that you would like to ask.
- Find a good academic advisor. It doesn't necessarily have to be an actual academic counselor. It is important to find somebody who knows a great deal about the school system and can help you to make the right informed decisions about your classes and your major. You should meet with them as often as possible, at least once a quarter or semester. In your meetings you should bring a tentative course plan for the follow quarter of classes that you want to take. They can accurately tell you if the class is ideal for you as well as the professors teaching style (to find out about a professor it is best to ask a student who has been in one of their classes).
- It is a good idea to meet with the head of the department or one of the department advisors if you know what you want to major in or if you have narrowed it down to a few areas. They can give you a more detailed list of the requirements of your major. Often departments place list of classes that will be taught in an upcoming semester or quarter. It would a good idea to look over this list and plan ahead on what you would like to take to fulfill major requirements.
- Majors often have lower and upper division requirements. Lower divisions are usually classes that are prerequisites for upper division classes. Upper divisions are the ones that ultimately count for your major and degree.
- Learn about your resources and don't be afraid to use them. If you are an EOP student find out where the EOP office is. Utilize all the resources they have available such as study breaks (when you too stressed with studying for finals they supply food), or

free tutoring. Also utilize professors and TA's, if they can put a name to a face and they know how much you have invested into the class it makes it harder for them to fail you.

- Do not be afraid to ask questions. Even the ones that you might think are stupid – you can bet that there's someone else who is afraid to ask the same question. You're paying for knowledge, so make sure you get all of it you can.
- PLAN, PLAN, PLAN! You can never over plan! Get an organizer and use it every day. READ your syllabus thoroughly, buy your books on-time, pay tuition on time.
- Always plan your exams ahead of time. For each exam, depending on the difficulty and length, give yourself at least one week to study and get prepared.
- If you plan to live in apartments, it seems to work best to live with friends that you know but aren't really close to. Money and friends don't mix well, and living with best friends can damage a relationship permanently.
- Though it may seem taboo to many people, a lot of students seek out the psychologists on campus when they are stressed and depressed. College students have the highest rates of depression, especially on large campuses.
- Homesickness: Talking to you family every day helps. Make good friends who are some of best friends today. Bring nostalgic stuff from home. Don't try to count down the days until you can go home – keeping track of the days only made things worse.
- Make a realistic schedule of your week - sort of like a timetable of your classes, studying time, eating time, etc. Take each day one day at time.
- Always take time to do things that make you happy, and don't stretch yourself too thin with joining clubs, making and hanging out with friends.
- Remember, wherever you are, to stay focused. You are at school to earn a bachelor's degree, not a degree in dropping classes and or partying.

- **Take on only what you can handle**
- **Ask for help**
- **Turn every challenge into an opportunity**
- **Use your confidence to not be afraid!**