

What People Wish They Knew Before They Started College



By Nikkee Porcaro

YouTube tells you it's all frat parties, slip n' slides, and endless spring breaks. Your older brother tells you it's endless studying, 8 a.m. classes, and searching for internships. What's the real deal about college? What do you wish you knew before you started?

All colleges are, of course, different, but commonalities abound among many major universities. I interviewed those who recently matriculated into college and those who graduated in the last decade; these subjects attended schools large and small.

When it comes to academics, some common themes kept popping up. Jared Bauman, a rising sophomore at Vanderbilt, was quick to reply with two major points when asked what he wished he knew before entering university: One, students should be better at writing essays and taking notes by hand, and two, students should learn how to skim long texts for when they get massive reading assignments.

"Every professor I've had so far at Vanderbilt has had a no-computers-in-the-classroom rule, so I wish I was bet-

ter at writing essays and taking notes by hand," Bauman revealed.

He was also vehement about planning and the importance of getting ahead. (My students should be nodding knowingly/eye-rolling here because planning is one of my favorite topics!)

"Students should get good at scheduling and mapping out their work," Bauman said. "I know people that never read syllabi and ended up far behind on readings and assignments when the professor didn't announce them publicly."

Gettysburg alum and attorney Kevin Jordan ('07) seconded this sentiment. "I can't speak highly enough of the value of time management. I never realized how much better off I'd be if I'd taken the time to budget out my weekly schedule or just look at a syllabus a teacher had given when they've done the work for you versus cramming at the very end," he said.

University of Maryland rising sophomore Eliana Zuckerman acknowledged the difference between college and high school: "I was shocked at how in-depth you have to know the material; in high school, you could just study three days before a test and it was fine, but in college you have to think outside the box when you're studying."

There was also advice on adjusting socially to college life.

"Students should feel comfortable being alone at times," Bauman said. "Not every meal in your first month on campus will be shared with new people and not every minute of every day will afford itself to movie-style college fun, so although students should plan to meet new people, they should also understand that it's perfectly normal to not be constantly surrounded by others."

"They certainly shouldn't feel inadequate if it takes a while to make friends," he said.

Zuckerman recommended making friends with people in your classes and your major. "It's nice to have people to study with and that forges bonds. You can plan your schedule with theirs for the next semester, too," he said.

Jordan, who played football and lacrosse at Gettysburg, encouraged openness to widening your social circle. "Some of the best friends I had were people I wouldn't have expected to be friends with," he shared. "Sure, I hung with my teammates, but some of my fondest memories were with people I never set foot on an athletic field with."

As college acceptances begin to roll in, take the time to celebrate — but



also to talk to family and friends who might be able to offer some 20/20 hindsight on the college experience (because c'mon, you know your parents want to tell their college stories nostalgically as you're getting ready to flap away from the nest) as you forge your own path. Just remember on Thirsty Thursday night that those 8 a.m. Friday classes sneak up on you quickly!

Nikkee Porcaro is the founder and president of No Anxiety Prep International, a greater Washington area-based educational consulting firm that assists students with their educational goals. Email Nikkee at nikkee@noanxietyprep.com.