

HOPE Newsletter – Issue 50
30 Practical Things Students Need to Know
How to Do Before Heading Off to College



Every year about this time, I begin providing recent high school graduates with information about how to make the most out of their first year in college. I tell them why they should arrive on campus early in the fall, how to choose classes that they will like and do well in first semester, and where to go for help at their school. These and other topics can be found in previous Huff Post blogs, including “GET READY! GET SET! GO FRESHMEN! How to Get a Running Start When You Arrive at College” and “10 Things Rising Freshman Can Do to Be Totally Ready for College.” The content of these two blogs is mostly on academic preparation.

Over the years, I have found that there is an even more important arena that many students (and parents) rarely think of: all the practical, life management tools and skills one needs in order to successfully leave home and adjust to college life as an independent, self-directed, responsible, resourceful person.

Years ago, I was an Orientation Officer at the East West Center in Honolulu, Hawaii, where I helped Asian and Pacific Islander students adapt to the American culture and educational system. When I thought about it, first year-college students have a lot in

common with foreign students, in that they are both entering a brand new world. What many don't realize is that learning to navigate one's personal world is critical to optimizing one's experience in the academic world. It's hard to think about getting A's in your classes when you find yourself wearing dirty clothes for three weeks because you haven't figured out how to use the dorm laundry facilities.

What follows are insights I gained at the East West Center and from former students who have sent me lists of "what I wish I had known before I went to college." I think you will be surprised, if not shocked, at the basic, simple, everyday things students don't know about or how to do, regardless of their economic and/or family background.

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW BEFORE YOU GO TO COLLEGE

Personal Care Stuff

How to:

- Wash, dry and iron clothes
- Decide if/what/when to take clothes to the cleaners
- Cook basic meals, as in boil or fry eggs, make spaghetti, cook hamburgers or other favorite foods
- Brew a cup (or pot) of coffee or tea
- Buy toiletries

Practical Life-management Stuff

How to:

- Organize and keep safe personal and academic records (medical, insurance, academic, etc.)
- Keep track of all Internet accounts, including logins and passwords
- Handle a personal checking account, including writing and depositing a check and reconciling bank statements (It's useful to set up a bank account either at a local bank or one that has branches in the city where your college is located.)
- Responsibly use a credit card, including how to pay bills so that you don't build up debt (It's useful to get a credit card and begin using it before you leave for college rather than sign up for one on campus.)
- Live on a fixed budget
- Research, purchase and/or return goods and products
- Tip people, including how much and when
- Handle yourself at an upscale restaurant

Professional Stuff

How to:

- Address an envelope (I know it's hard to believe, but many young people have never done this).
- Write thank you notes
- Put together and use a resume
- Write a cover letter

Transportation Stuff

How to:

- Use public transportation, including buses, trains, trolleys and metros
- Find, hire and use a taxi, when needed (and tip appropriately)
- If you have a car, get it serviced and/or repaired and not be taken advantage of
- Put gas in a car, change a tire, understand when a car needs oil, water, air in tires
- Arrange bus, train and/or air reservations to and from college
- Use a shuttle to get to and from an airport, train or bus station

Your Own Personal Stuff

How to:

- Ask for help
- Say no respectfully, and when to say yes
- Make a doctor's appointments, and have the names of a recommended dentist and/or doctor if you need to go off campus
- Determine when, how often and the means by which you will communicate with your parents (This is very useful to determine before leaving for college so that students don't feel burdened and parents don't feel disappointed.)
- Deal with emergencies: medical, car accident (minor and major), weather, you name it.
- Be aware of, but not get into the college drug and alcohol scene
- Behave in a sexually responsible way

It is also useful to become acquainted with the college and environment around your school before you actually arrive. Make use of Internet resources such as Google to find out where a college is located with respect to a city or town, what the town is like, what resources are nearby, including airports and local transportation, what special features you might be able to take advantage of, including entertainment, sports, historical sites, etc.

Throughout the summer, also be sure to read anything your college sends you about the campus environment, activities, orientation and the surrounding community.

WHEN DO YOU BEGIN GATHERING THIS INFORMATION AND LEARN HOW TO DO THINGS?

Now is the time to start working on the above list. If you are a student, go through and circle the items about which you want to know more and talk with your parents or friends who are already in college about the issues.

If you are a parent, set aside a time to sit down and go through the list with your teen. Dinnertime is good for these discussions. Use the list as a checklist and one by one, help your student identify an issue, gather information, talk about what's involved and then act on, learn about or practice what is needed (or set up another time to do that).

Just so you know, as a follow-up to this blog, the next one will be on "The Most Ridiculously Thorough College Shopping List You'll Ever See."

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