

First-Generation College Student Guidebook



Congratulations on making the decision to further your education. You are embarking on an adventure that's certain to benefit your future!

College is a period of self-discovery and a time for taking charge of your life. It's a time to step out of your comfort zone and take on new challenges.

As a first-generation college student, you will assume new responsibilities and overcome new obstacles. You will also develop lifelong friendships and many fond memories.

Enjoy the journey!

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A note to first-generation students



Being a first-generation college student is something you should be proud of, but it can come with its own set of challenges—and rewards.

This booklet is written for you. It's filled with tips and advice to help you succeed in your classes and have a great college experience.

Some common thoughts and feelings

It's not uncommon for first-generation students to feel a bit isolated, especially if it feels like no one on campus shares their background or experiences.

Some first-generation college students feel pressure, like their family is depending on them to do well. This can cause a lot of stress. If you ever feel this way, know that your family is proud of you, and just do your best.

As a first-generation college student, you should be very proud of yourself for the work you've done to get where you are. And if you're ever feeling stressed, lonely, or like no one understands you, know that there are many students who share your feelings, fears, and doubts—and that there are people who can help.

Don't succumb to imposter syndrome

Imposter syndrome is the feeling that you're not good enough, or that you've somehow tricked everyone into thinking you deserve to be there. If you ever feel this way, know that you've worked hard, and that you have earned your spot.

Get off to a good start

Getting off to a good start is a great way to build confidence.

Get familiar with the campus

Take time to explore the campus. You will likely discover fitness facilities, libraries, cafés, computer labs, and more. As you explore, look for study lounges, coffee shops, and other quiet places to study.

Attend orientation activities

Feeling like you belong at college is a big part of being successful. Try to attend any and all orientation activities. This is a great way to meet new people and get acclimated to college.

Take charge of your education

For every hour you spend in class, plan to spend two hours reading, studying, and completing assignments. Also understand that no one is monitoring your progress or checking to see if you're going to class. *You are responsible for your own academic progress.*

Get familiar with your school's LMS

From scheduling to class announcements, you will be using your school's Learning Management System (LMS) a lot. Review the system's features and tools, and make sure your settings allow email and text notifications.



Get off to a good start in all of your classes

Go to every class and do every assignment—right from day one. Don't get behind. Once you get behind in a class, it can be very difficult to get caught up.

Manage tasks and time

In college, you are responsible for managing your own time and organizing your own affairs. Here are some tips to help you stay on top of all you need to do.

Make to-do lists and prioritize tasks

Make a daily list of the things you need to do and rank them in order of importance. Focus on one task at a time. At the end of the day, take the tasks that didn't get done and put them on the next day's to-do list.

Use an academic planner or homework app

To help you stay organized, regularly use an academic planner (available at the campus bookstore) or a homework app such as myHomework or iHomework. *Don't rely on your memory. Record everything that needs to be done today, this week, and throughout the semester.*

Make good use of the time between classes

Use this time to study, review notes, meet with professors, do research, or prepare for upcoming classes. The more you get done during the day, the more time you'll have at night for other activities.

Combine tasks

Study while doing laundry, get your exercise by jogging to the library, or go over your class notes while waiting for a friend.

Control time wasters

Social media, TV, and video games can be huge time wasters. Schedule small chunks of time for these activities, and stick to your schedule.



Be a savvy student

These tips will help you navigate your academic world wisely and efficiently.

Regularly meet with your academic advisor

Make regular appointments with your advisor to discuss required and elective courses, program options, and graduation requirements.

Take a “College 101” class

Many colleges offer an optional one-credit “College 101” or “Intro to College” course. Colleges also offer classes and/or workshops on study skills, test taking, and more. *Research shows that students who take advantage of these courses and programs are more successful in their classes.*

Schedule classes wisely

Selecting the right courses is important, but so is the way your courses are scheduled. Unless you’re a morning person, avoid early morning classes. Also, only schedule back-to-back classes if they are in the same building or very close by.

Understand college policies, rules, and regulations

Make sure that you understand things like drop/add policies and registration procedures. It’s often assumed that you already know most of these things, so it’s up to you to get clarification when you don’t understand something.

Use the library

Despite the availability of online information, use your college library. Libraries subscribe to otherwise unavailable periodicals and databases that will be invaluable to your studies. Consult with reference librarians. They are masters at locating hard-to-find information.



Succeed in your classes

How you spend your time in class will have a direct impact on your academic success.

Sit in the front of the class

When you sit in the front, there are fewer distractions. You're better able to see what's written and hear what's spoken—and you send a positive message to your instructor.

Participate in class

When in class, ask questions and participate in discussions. The material will be more interesting, time will pass more quickly, and your instructors will see that you know the material.

Eliminate distractions

Disable your phone and put it away. Consider using an app like Freedom or SelfControl that blocks the internet and other apps for a period of time.

Take notes

When you take notes, you don't have time to think about anything else. Taking notes therefore helps you stay engaged. And having good notes to study from later is an added bonus. Test out the most common notetaking methods (e.g., Cornell, outlining, mapping). Find what works best for you.

Have contact information for classmates

If you miss a class, you'll want to contact a classmate to get a copy of any handouts, and to find out if any assignments were given.



Communicate with your instructors

Don't hesitate to contact an instructor whenever you have a question, concern, or problem. Asking for help means that you're smart and mature enough to take control of your success. While most instructors are happy to help, you must initiate the contact.

Study smart

Academic success isn't about studying a lot, it's about studying smart.

Study in a quiet place

Locate a quiet, well-lit space where all you can do is study. By eliminating all distractions, you force yourself to do one thing only—study.

Organize your study time

Before you start to study, make a plan. Decide exactly what you want to get done and the order in which you'll do it.

Study the “worst first”

Don't put your least favorite subject off to the end of a study session. Study the less interesting and more difficult material while you're still fresh.

Turn off your phone when studying

Nothing wastes time more than cell phone usage. Don't let overuse of your phone sabotage your academic success.

Save and back up computer files often

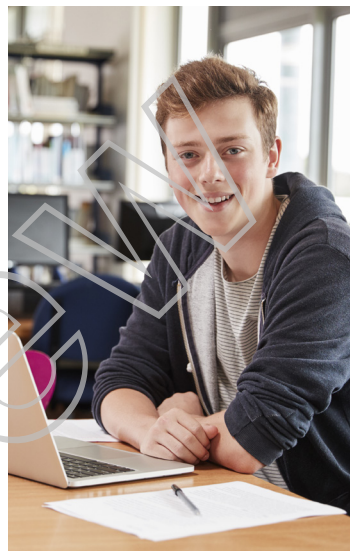
Avoid every student's nightmare of lost or corrupted assignments and papers. Use external hard drives and/or online back-up systems.

Just say no

There's plenty of opportunity for socializing and fun during college—*but academics must come first*. Know what you need to do, and don't let anything get in the way of your schoolwork.

Seek help early

At the first sign that you're struggling or falling behind in a class, speak to your instructor or academic advisor about the availability of extra help sessions or tutoring.



Get the most out of college



Studies show that students who participate in campus life are more likely to have higher grades and better class attendance.

Here are some ways that you can make the most of your college experience.

Participate in organizations

There is no better way to meet other students and develop a sense of belonging than by participating in student organizations. You'll meet students who share your interests and passions, gain teamwork and leadership skills, and have some fun in the process.

Reach out to others

College is more than an academic setting—it's a social environment.

- ▶ Introduce yourself to students sitting near you in class, and arrive early or stay after class to mingle.
- ▶ When walking around campus, rather than texting or looking at the ground, look up and make eye contact with other students.
- ▶ Watch your body language. People are drawn to those who stand tall, act confident, and seem positive and approachable.

Stretch your boundaries

College life offers unique opportunities to gain exposure to people, activities, and ideas that may have been unavailable to you previously. Meet people from different backgrounds and cultures and try something new (e.g., yoga or an intramural sport).



Check out the campus calendar

Your college's website has a calendar of campus events. Stay abreast of what's happening on campus, and invite your friends to join you at sporting events, concerts, art shows, and other campus activities.

Limit social media time

Many college students spend several hours a day on social networking sites, blogs, game sites, and elsewhere online. The most meaningful and lasting relationships, however, involve the people you socialize with in person. Communication via phone and computer should complement your interpersonal relationships, not replace them.

Get enough sleep

For many students, fatigue (and the inevitable illness that accompanies it) is directly responsible for failure or poor performance in college. You simply will not be able to concentrate in class, complete assignments, and perform at your best if you are sleep deprived.

Socialize in moderation

Doing things with friends is an important part of college life. But your new freedom and independence brings with it new responsibilities and a need for self-discipline. Behavior like partying and skipping class can undermine your academic success and have long-term, negative consequences. Give yourself permission to turn down social invitations when other priorities need to take precedence.

Act in accordance with your values

Your values are your core set of beliefs that guide you. Make sure that the choices and decisions you make are consistent with your values.

Take advantage of college services



Your tuition dollars help colleges provide lots of valuable services, but it's up to you to take advantage of them.

Academic problems? Speak to your instructor/professor or your academic advisor. Visit a Tutoring Center or Writing/Math Lab.

Dorm issues? Speak to your RA or visit the Residence Life office.

Medical, nutrition, or sexual issues? Visit the Health Center.

Undecided about your major or career? Schedule an appointment with Career Services.

Money problems? Check with the Financial Aid office about loans, grants, scholarships, and/or student work opportunities.

Personal, emotional, or substance abuse problems? Visit the Counseling Center.

Spiritual or religious concerns? Visit the Campus Ministry or a nearby place of worship.

Computer or phone issues? Visit the IT Help Desk.

If you have a problem, question, or concern but don't know where to go, visit your college's Student Services or Student Affairs office. They will direct you to the services you need.

Your college wants you to succeed!

Many colleges have First-Year Experience Programs and some colleges have services specifically for first-generation students. Talk to your advisor about what kinds of support services are available for you.

Be smart with money

Financially savvy students avoid incurring unreasonable debt by living frugally during their college years.

Have a weekly budget

Create a worksheet to help you stay within your budget—there are a variety of college budget worksheets online. There are also lots of budgeting apps available (e.g., Monefy, Mint). Every time you make a purchase, withdraw cash, or deposit a check, you just enter it on your app.

Don't have a car

Walk, use public transportation, and/or ride a bicycle. You'll save thousands of dollars by not owning or driving a car. Insurance, gas, maintenance, and parking fees add up quickly.



Take advantage of free campus activities

Most colleges offer free or inexpensive sporting events, concerts, films, café entertainment, theater productions, and speakers. College and local libraries also have free movie rentals.

Check out textbook options

Comparison shop for textbooks and consider your options—rent vs. buy, electronic vs. print, used vs. new. Resell unwanted books immediately after final exams.

Eat well and wisely

Research your options and only purchase the college meal plan you're going to use. If you're not on a meal plan, find discount grocers, buy in bulk, and cook most of your own meals.

Understand financial aid

There's a great deal of financial aid available; however, the process of obtaining financial aid can be confusing. If you need help paying for college, go to your college's financial aid office and ask for assistance.

Manage stress

College can be stressful. New people, new demands, and new surroundings. It's very important for college students to find healthy ways to deal with stress.

Confide in those you trust

When you're stressed, talk to friends and family members. Confide in those you trust. You can also drop in or make an appointment at the counseling center. Everything you discuss will be held in confidence.

Make changes if you're feeling overwhelmed

If you're feeling overwhelmed, or think that you may have taken on too much, make a list of everything going on in your life and determine what can be modified, delayed, or dropped.

Take care of mind and body

Get plenty of sleep, eat healthy, and exercise. Also make sure to take time every day to relax, recharge, and rejuvenate. Check with your college's counseling, health, and recreation centers about relaxation training, yoga, Pilates, or tai chi.

If it's beyond your control, let it go

If you are stressed over things you can't change, let those worries go.



Try meditation

Meditation can help you deal with stress, find calm, and feel more centered. You can meditate by sitting quietly and listening to your breathing, or by going for a walk, taking some deep breaths, and noticing what you see, feel, and hear. You can also try a guided meditation app, like Calm, or stream guided meditations on Spotify or YouTube.

For some calming techniques, watch this quick video!



Stay motivated

These tips will help you stay motivated, engaged, and ready for a challenge.

Surround yourself with positive people

Choose to be around people who support and encourage you. These are the people who will help you achieve your goals and realize your dreams.

Practice positive self-talk

We all have an “inner voice,” and when things aren’t going well, that voice can be negative and critical. You can help yourself stay positive and motivated just by changing your “self talk.” Replace “I’m terrible at math” with “I’m smart—I can do this.” Changing how you think will change how you feel and act.



Use motivating “self notes”

Write motivating words, ideas, and/or quotes on sticky notes. Put these notes anywhere you’re likely to see them.

Turn failures into successes

When something doesn’t go well, learn from the experience, and use that knowledge to do better the next time.

Hit refresh

When you’re feeling overwhelmed, walk away. Listen to music or have lunch with a friend—then return ready to tackle your work.

Figure out what motivates you

Turn what competes with your schoolwork into a motivator. For example, get a paper done early so you can hang out with friends, or reward yourself with video game time once your homework is done.

Have confidence in yourself

College coursework should be challenging, and you should expect it to be difficult at times. Just know that you can rise to the challenge!

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**This booklet is filled with
helpful tips and expert advice on how
you can succeed in college!**

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