Transitioning to College – What to do with your extra freedom

It won’t take long before you see how much more freedom you have in college compared to high school (especially if you live in a dorm/apartment away from your family). Even if you live at home and are going to a local college, you’ll notice that instead of being at school from 7:30-3:15 M-F, you’ll only be in the classroom for 12, 15, or 18 hours per week. If you have online classes, you may not be on campus much at all! And out of those 4-6 classes, you are the one who chooses your schedule, unlike high school where you only got to choose one or two classes. So what do you do with all this freedom? Here are some tips on how to enjoy your freedom, without flying off the rails.

Go to class!

Even though professors don’t take attendance, you should still go to class! How else are you going to learn what will be on the tests and assignments? Plus if you get to know your professor, they’ll be more willing to work with you and help you bring your grades up if you find yourself struggling. So don’t skip classes and start living La Vida Loca! Studies have shown that students who don’t go to class are more likely to drop out of college. Plus, you’re paying for your education! Don’t give your money to a college just to walk out without a degree. You’d be surprised how much better you’ll perform by simply showing up to class.



Pick classes you’ll enjoy!

Try to take one “fun” class per semester. You want to have at least one class that you look forward to and are interested in. And remember, that taking elective classes doesn’t mean that you are getting out of work. You will still have to study and complete assignments for these classes that don’t necessarily go along with your major. But don’t they say, if you love what you’re doing, you’ll never work a day in your life? When you enjoy your class or your elective class, it can be a brain break and stress relief from your more difficult, required classes.

Use a planner!

Choose whatever works for you. If you like having things saved to your computer/phone’s calendar so you can set alarms and reminders, use it! If you like a notebook planner that you can always have in your backpack, use it! If you like a big desk planner that lays out all the upcoming things this month, use it! You know yourself best, so do whatever comes to you most naturally. But make sure you’re using a planner of some sort! It’s nearly impossible to remember EVERY assignment, due date, personal event, etc. by just memory alone. At the beginning of the semester, go through your class syllabi and put all the important dates and assignments into your planner. Add club, sport, personal events, and even your work schedule. Once you see everything laid out, you’ll see how easily you’re time fills up. If you’re going to have a good sleep schedule, you’ll need to learn to manage your time and get studying completed during your day, not staying up until 4 AM and completing assignments due before class starts at 8 AM.



Utilize your optimum learning times!

Some people study better during the day, while others study better at night. If you learn better at night, don’t take all 8 AM classes! You will struggle by staying up late studying, then having to get to an early class. Maybe instead, you night owls should take your classes at 12 PM and after. On the flip side, if you study better during the day, it may be better to go ahead and take an 8 AM class to get up out of bed, then spend the rest of the morning getting your work done for the day. You’ll get a lot more done working while the sun’s up than you would by taking evening classes from 6-9 PM.

Make Healthy choices!

Drink plenty of water, try to eat healthy foods, and exercise (even if it's just choosing to take the stairs rather than the elevator, or walking to class instead of driving or riding the bus). Most Universities offer students free gym memberships, have lots of water fill-up stations, and offer some healthy choices in the dining halls. Your body’s health can affect your class performance. Also, don’t forget how important sleep is. You need to rest and recharge before you can give 100% effort and full efficiency. So make sure you develop a healthy sleep pattern that works with your schedule. Also, make sure you’re being financially healthy. Don’t use up all your Flex dollars before October is here. Try to budget and get your money to last the whole semester. Additionally, take care of your mental health. There’s usually a doctor’s office you can go to on campus if you’re sick, and also counselors to go talk to if you’re needing help with your mental health. It’s normal to struggle with the transition between high school and university. Asking for help now will help you in the long run, and make you enjoy your short time in college.



Get involved!

It may be tempting, but don’t just go to class and then go back and isolate yourself in your room. There are so many things to do in college besides going to class (although class is the most important). Try to make some friends. Join the SSS program if your college has one (although sometimes they go by a different name). SSS is like Talent Search in college. SSS can help you keep on track to graduate on time, do fun things with you, take you on fun trips, and even offer scholarships for being in the program. You could also join some clubs, play an intramerial sport, go to first-year experience activities, try an exercise class at the gym, do some campus rec events, go to the college ball games, or join a church group or political organization. Do something that you care about. You will enjoy your time at college if you’re able to have some fun while you’re there. College is a unique time in your life where you have a lot of freedom and few responsibilities. Yes, you need to be responsible and put school work first, but you also need to have some fun and enjoy your short time in college.

Make the most out of your freedom while you’re in college!