

Hagan Scholarship Foundation

College 101 — Tips and Tricks

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As you begin your college career, your first year will bring independence, new relationships, and decisions that will shape the rest of your college experience. These tips are meant to help you not just survive your first year, but thrive throughout college.

The first few weeks on campus are critical. Some tips apply immediately; others provide longer-term guidance. Whatever you do, be yourself and make the most of your college experience. Expect some stress and homesickness — that is normal. Do not let it wear you down.

Go to All Orientations

The faster you learn your way around campus and through its administrative processes, the more comfortable you will feel and the better prepared you will be when issues arise.

Get Organized

In high school, teachers often guided you through assignments and due dates. In college, professors post assignments — sometimes for the entire semester — and expect you to be prepared. Use an organizer, calendar, or app to track when assignments are due.

Find Your Ideal Study Place

Find a location free from distractions where you can focus. It may be a corner of the library or a quiet lounge. What matters is that it works for you.

Go to Class

Skipping an 8 a.m. class will be tempting at times. Resist the temptation. Attending class is how you learn the material and receive important information about tests, deadlines, and course changes.

Know Your Course Requirements and Due Dates

Professors prepare syllabi and course calendars so you know exactly what is expected and when. “I didn’t know it was due today” is not an acceptable excuse.

Meet With Your Professors

There are only upsides to getting to know your professors, especially if you run into difficulties later in the semester. Professors hold office hours specifically to meet with students — take advantage of that time.

Get to Know Your Academic Adviser

Your academic adviser helps with course conflicts, adding or dropping courses, scheduling future semesters, and deciding on majors and minors. This person is a key resource for any academic issue. Do not hesitate to request a different adviser if the relationship is not working.

Seek a Balance

College life is a mix of academic and social activity. Do not tip too far in either direction. Work hard so you can enjoy yourself — but keep academics your priority.

Get Involved on Campus

A common problem for new students is homesickness and feeling disconnected. Joining a select group of student organizations, clubs, or sports teams helps you make friends, develop new skills, and feel more connected to your school. Be selective — do not overcommit.

Strive for Good Grades

Grades that came easily in high school will need to be earned in college. Set goals and work consistently to achieve them.

Take Advantage of Campus Study Resources

Most colleges offer learning labs, tutors, and writing centers. If you are struggling, use these resources. Forming study groups is another effective strategy.

Make Time for Yourself

Set aside time for activities that help you decompress. Whether it is exercise, reading, or a favorite hobby, taking care of yourself will make you more effective academically.

Do Not Rush Your Major or Career Decision

College is the time to discover what you enjoy, what you are good at, and what you want to do. Take your time exploring your options. Many students change direction — that is perfectly normal.

Take Responsibility for Yourself

Own your mistakes and move on. Being an adult means taking responsibility for your decisions and their consequences.

Connect With Classmates

In the first week, make an effort to meet at least one person in each of your classes. These connections expand your network and provide a resource when you have to miss a class.

Find the Career Services Office

Whether you know your career path or not, visit your college's career services office early. They can help you plan, prepare, and act on your future.

Do Not Procrastinate

Waiting until the last minute may have worked in high school. It will not work in college. Give yourself deadlines and stick to them.

Stay Healthy

Many first-year problems trace back to illness from poor sleep, poor diet, or neglecting health. Get enough sleep, eat well, and exercise. Without a parent to provide balanced meals, it is easy to make poor food choices — the common "Freshman 15" weight gain is real.

Manage Your Money

Create a budget and stick to it. Avoid credit card solicitations — credit card debt among college graduates is a serious and common problem.

Do Not Cut Corners

If you cram and procrastinate, you may pass tests but you will learn very little. Never cheat on papers or tests.

Expect to Feel Overwhelmed at Times

There is a lot happening in your life right now. Knowing that everyone around you feels the same way — even if they do not show it — can be reassuring.

Final words of advice: You have done the preparation — now enjoy it. Do not be a statistic. Use your network, have fun while learning, and get the most out of your college experience.