College Survival Tips

- Give yourself an opportunity to adjust gradually to the new academic demands. Choose a course load that includes some challenging classes and others that will be less intense.
- Buy a calendar and make sure you write down when and where your classes meet, when assignments are due, and when tests will take place. Give yourself ample time to study rather than waiting until the last minute and pulling an all-nighter.
- Don’t always do what’s easiest at the time. Make smart decisions. For example, when it comes to your money, stick to a budget and use credit cards wisely. When it comes to your health, get enough sleep, eat well, and pay attention to what your body tells you. You’ll need energy to enjoy all that college has to offer.
- While forming new friendships can be fun and exciting, true friendships are formed slowly, and the beginning of college can consequently be a lonely time. If you’re unsure about participating in certain social scenes or activities, don’t hesitate to seek guidance about the best ways to resist these pressures. Talk to parents, trusted friends from high school, and college counselors.
- Get to know as many academic or resident advisers as possible until you find at least one you can trust and with whom you can communicate. Show up for professors’ office hours and communicate with them through e-mails and phone calls.
- College work is demanding, even for students who were at the top of their high school class. Check out tutoring and special learning centers to get help studying. Time management is also critical to success.
- Joining clubs and organizations is a good way to make connections, but some students overdo it. Shop carefully for those activities that best meet your interests and needs.
- Stay in touch with high school friends who can offer stability and support when things get rocky.
- Try not to alienate your parents, but don’t feel compelled to go to incredible lengths to please them. Strike a balance, and parents should be able to adjust.
- Be patient. It takes time to understand the rhythm of a new academic life and for students to develop a personal learning/studying style. Over the first semester it becomes easier to understand the flow of work and realize how to accommodate different teachers’ standards and course requirements.

What the college student can do to ease the transition

Remember that you’ve lived through previous transitions in life and found your way again.

Sometimes the newness of a situation can feel overwhelming and your emotional response may feel very intense and perhaps even scary. Hence, it can be comforting to remember that in the past you have lived through similar experiences (e.g., like starting at a new high school, traveling to a new, unfamiliar region, etc.) and that in spite of your initial reaction you were able to adjust eventually.

Also, it may be better to share your reactions with someone in spite of your possible worry that no one would understand. Chances are, as you keep a fear locked up inside yourself, it will tend to grow in intensity and become more pervasive, rather than going away. You can often gain relief – and possibly a new, reassuring perspective – when you give yourself permission to express your concerns/reactions to someone.
Remind yourself that your thoughts and feelings are important whether or not they are shared by others. Allow yourself to ‘listen’ to your feelings/thoughts/reactions rather than pushing them down or medicating yourself with alcohol, drugs, food, etc. You might gain insights that could lead to different ways of dealing with your experience. Attending college is not only a chance to gain an academic education: the experience also provides the opportunity to get to know yourself better.

**Take care of yourself**

Remember it is generally helpful to:

1. **Acknowledge** your thoughts, feelings, reactions (at least internally) without making a judgment (e.g., I am really feeling sad; I am angry, scared; I am feeling inadequate, etc.).

2. **Ask** what might be going on for me? ‘What does this situation remind me of?’ Invite your thoughts to go wherever they want to in order to get as much awareness/insight as possible. Sometimes a person experiences strong emotions that seem like an overreaction; it might be possible that the present circumstances provoke an emotional memory of a previously stressful/painful situation. Recognizing this connection might allow you to have a better understanding of your present situation. If you worry about something excessively (obsess) and/or engage in compulsive obsessing, etc., what might be the real worry, fear…that gets masked by your conscious, obsessional thoughts?

3. **Reassure** yourself that no matter what you think or feel, it is all right even if it is negative; there is a difference between thinking and feeling something and acting it out which may not be healthy, constructive or acceptable. **Thoughts/feelings do NOT equal actions.** Ask yourself, given your feelings/thoughts, what would be helpful right now? What might you be able to do to comfort yourself and/or to deal with the situation constructively.

4. **Remember** previous adjustments. For example, when you first started high school, went to camp, started a new job…imagine what you felt like. Note your feelings, thoughts from that experience…how did you deal with it? What was comforting to you?

5. How do you generally deal with stress? What else could you do to soothe/take care of yourself? Try making a list of activities. Find ways to engage in new activities.

6. Do you ever use drugs, alcohol, or food to help yourself ‘feel better?’ If so, what could you do instead?

**Follow the tips for good health on a daily basis**

1. Exercise regularly.
2. Pay attention to your nutrition. Make sure to eat regularly.
3. Get adequate sleep.
4. Interact. Have contact with someone else.
5. Learn/try something new.
6. Do something nice for yourself, do something nice for someone else, write in a journal.
7. In regards to alcohol use, if you choose to drink, it is wise to:
   a. Set a limit for yourself before you start drinking.
   b. Pace yourself, drink slowly, have a non-alcoholic beverage in between drinks.
8. Attend to making good choices about drinking alcohol

**Need Additional Help?**

North Idaho College counseling services offer free group and individual counseling/psychotherapy for these and related issues for NIC students. For more information or to schedule an appointment, stop by Student Health & Counseling Services (2nd floor of SUB) or call 769-7818. All appointments are strictly confidential.