

WHAT EVERY INCOMING COLLEGE FRESHMAN REALLY NEEDS TO KNOW

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It's that time in August when, like every year, the aisles of Bed Bath & Beyond and Target are jam-packed with nervous mamas holding packing lists and their future college kids trying to decide whether to go with the blue or the red body pillow. I remember just a short time ago, when I too was purchasing the last few items on my list and anxiously awaiting my first day of college. And so, here is a letter with a little advice and a lot of love for all those college freshman twiddling their thumbs and twirling their hair and wondering what's in store.

Dearest Incoming College Freshman,

As I head back to campus tomorrow, to my last first day of school, my final year of college, I have a knot in my throat and tears in my eyes. College, my friend, will be the most beautiful, amazing, and life-shaping experience that you have yet encountered.

On your move-in day, you'll feel overwhelmed. Whether you're going to a huge school, a tiny school, on an in-between (like me!), the campus will feel like you're never going to learn your way around, the school culture will feel foreign, and the students will feel like strangers. Don't lose your marbles.

You will know your campus like the back of your hand in a short time. The school's culture will become as much a part of you as the fingers on your hands or the toes on your feet. And the people--the strangers--they'll become your best friends. Not best friends like "oh, BFF," but real **best** friends. Like laugh so hard you cry and cry so hard you laugh and turn to them with anything and everything all day or night best friends.

However, knowing the campus and the culture and the beautiful people doesn't come without a price. You have to stretch yourself. I mean reallllly stretch yourself. You can't just take a step outside of your comfort zone, you have to take a leap. A running leap. Like you're competing in the long jump.

But that's not my personality, you might say. *It wasn't mine either.*

When I arrived on campus my freshman year, I was ridiculously excited, but more than that I was insanely scared. High school had been okay for me, but it was really pretty bad my junior and senior years. My friends had gone in a very different direction than I wanted to take, leaving me for other things that I wanted no part of. I was nervous the same thing would happen again.

So as an incoming college freshman, I decided that by golly, I was going to make friends. And they were going to be fantastic friends who treated me well. And make friends I did. *But it was not by accident.*

I went to every orientation meeting, spent hours at the org. fair, went to all of the freshman weekend events, talked to people I'd never met, knocked on girls' doors who I didn't know and asked them to get coffee with me...the list goes on. I won't sugar coat it: it was awkward. For me, very awkward. But the days passed and the calendar flipped to September and then October and it wasn't awkward anymore.

It was an amazing little life that I had created on my campus for myself. I was involved, really involved, in many different groups and organizations on campus. "Plugged in" as college counselors say. And I had friends. In my classes, on my hall, and in the clubs that I was a part of. And for the first time in a long time, my soul was happy. And I was truly proud of myself. Because I didn't sit back and watch my freshman year go by and wonder what could've been.

I lived a life I loved by choice.

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So to you I say--jump in! You're not the child you were going into high school. You get to make decisions about friendships and activities based on the type of people you want to be around and what you care about. It's no longer about doing things so "it'll look good for college." Choose to do what you love with people you love. And don't settle for less.

You joined a club that you're passionate about, but the people aren't rocking your socks off? Join another one. Talk to the person next to you in class. Be the first to ask your hallmate to lunch.

Let me tell you a little story: Over freshman orientation weekend, I was walking down the stairs in the business school, when I noticed that the girl in front of me looked oddly familiar. I remembered that we were Facebook friends since we were both in the incoming freshman group for our school. With shaky hands, I tapped her arm and asked her name. "Taylor," she said, "This is weird--but aren't we friends on Facebook?"...

It's three years later and Taylor is my best (like best-best) friend at Elon. She and I have been roommates for two years (this will be our third) and are inseparable on campus. I thank God for a friend like her, and smile knowing that it all began with taking a breath and asking for her name.



Taylor being a goober our freshman year in my dorm...don't kill me Tay ;)

And school stuff? Ya know, like the "reason" you're in college. To study and learn and get a degree. That'll all come. You know what it takes to get the grade you want--do it. You know how long you need to study for your exams--so take time to study.

But above all, know that when you leave your school after four too-swift years go by, it's not going to be the campus or the classes that you *really* miss; it's going to be the people. It's all about the people. (And PS--you'll learn much more from your relationships than your classes anyway ;))

So throw yourself out there. Take a deep breath, exhale (but not too loudly, don't wake your roomie!), and stand tall. You're meant to be exactly where you are. It's up to you to make it the experience you want. Choose to live a life that you love.

No matter what crazy-difficult classes or heart-wrenching breakups you go through in your four years, **it's going to be the people who carry you through.**

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I am so excited for you. I might not even know you. It doesn't matter. I'm thrilled for you! Rock out your freshman year, because you'll never get another one. And freshman year is the bomb dot com. Seriously, my favorite year of life to date.

Good luck and remember: this is only the beginning.

All my love and excitement for you,

Blair xoxo