Advice for New Freshmen from Successful EIU Juniors & Seniors: In Their Own Words

Transition to College

Don’t come to College with the mentality that it’s the same thing as High School. Almost everyone that comes to the University is here because they want an education, they will take school seriously. Also, from my experience, at first I came in thinking that the workload would be the same from high school. I took AP classes in high school, so I thought I would be fine doing what I did in high school. I didn’t realize that I needed to work a bit harder to get the grades that I wanted.

Get the idea out of your head that college is just like high school. It's NOT! That's the first mistake I made when I came to EIU, I thought that since high school was a breeze so would college be. Within the first three weeks it was noticeable that I was slacking off, not doing my readings, not studying and not paying attention in class. When I got back my first exam, it was obvious that my study habits I had in high school were not going to work in college. After that I studied more, used the library, and got in touch with the resources on campus to help me be a successful student.

It's okay to be homesick. It’s not okay to let your homesickness keep you from enjoying your first year at college. Right now, you may feel lonely, or uncomfortable, or out of place—that’s perfectly one-hundred percent okay. You may feel like you’ll never make friends, or that the friends you make won’t compare to the ones you have at home. Maybe you miss your parents. Maybe you miss your dog. Or your bed. I’m here to tell you that missing the place and the people you built your life around is completely normal. There is nothing shameful about being homesick. That being said, I implore you to work through the first month, the first semester, or the first year that homesickness likes to linger in. It may feel good to go home every weekend or spend all your time facebooking your old friends, but that can distract you from enjoying this breathtaking, wonderful experience called college. With every event you go to, every person you meet, every class you engage in, you will find yourself thinking less about home and more about here. Push yourself to make new connections. Join an organization. Make a home here, and you will always feel comfortable.

No matter what anyone else may tell you, it’s not uncool to miss your parents, pets, or other family members. It’s natural, especially being away from home and being on your own for the first time. Try and go home throughout the semester every now and again, and if you live too far away to do so easily, call often and let your parents know how you’re doing. Ask and see if they’d mail you something from home to make your dorm a little more like home such as pictures, a favorite pillow, or a knick-knack. It may seem silly, but little touches like those are wonderful for helping you to get more comfortable with the idea of being on your own. Everyone’s been homesick at some point!

Roommates & Residence Halls

Get to know your roommate. Many times the relationship that you have with your roommate is the first friendship that you will have at college, and it can last a lifetime. Get to know them, set boundaries, and have fun together.

Be proactive and fix problems before they begin! Draw up a list with your roommate of any pet peeves you have, any expectations you may have, and courtesies you can give one another. For example, if you like to go to bed early, state you’d like guests to be out of the room by 10 or 11 unless you discuss it beforehand, or that TV and loud noises need to be off by then. Don’t like dirty laundry on the floor? Don’t be afraid to say so. It may seem silly, but talking about situations before they become issues will help keep a healthy relationship with your roommate.

College is a time to figure out who are you and what you want to do with your future. Don't let people you meet or your parents persuade you to make a decision you are not comfortable with. Join actives you are interested in and make Eastern your home away from home. Pick a major you are in love with and can see yourself enjoying for years to come.

Utilize your RA. Your RA should be number one on the “People You Should Get to Know List.” Their job is to assist you in any way they can. When I was a freshman, I talked with my RA often and we became friends. Anytime I needed anything, she was there to help me out. RAs are trained to be able to direct you to almost every resource on campus, so when your computer breaks or you lose your Panthercard, they'll know exactly where to direct you. Plus, they can recommend fun things to do on campus and RSOs to join. So, utilize your RA!

Going to and Being in Class

Many students think that they do not need to go to class because many college professors do not take attendance. Although attendance may not be factored into your grade, many professors still know if you are coming to class or
not. When it comes time for a test and you have a million questions, your professor is more likely to help you out if he/she knows you attend class on a daily basis. To make a long story short, always go to class!

Attend All of Your Classes. Show up, participate, and ask questions in class. This is an easy way for instructors to hear from students. They love when a question is posed and someone has an answer or provides unique perspectives and thoughts. It creates a healthy learning environment and challenges students to consider the broader picture of what is being discussed and how it relates to society around them.

Ask questions. College is a new learning environment. Unlike high school, you were able to make the choice to attend college, and because you made the choice, take advantage of it. While in class if you do not understand something, do not be afraid to SPEAK UP. Professors will be open to any of your questions and will love to see their students engaging in the lecture. The professors also provide office hours for their students. Go visit your professors whenever you have a question about an assignment, test, or even if you are feeling overwhelmed. Professors are here to help, but they can not do so unless you ask questions!

Faculty & Advisors

Professors have designated times that they are in their office to assist students. It is important to make use of these times because it can help you when you have questions about a test, or if you need homework help! Going in to your professors office will show that you care and you want to do well in the course!

Utilize Professors’ Office Hours. This time welcomes an easy way to get to know instructors, ask questions or for feedback regarding assignments and exams, and an opportunity to demonstrate a strong commitment to successfully passing their course.

Talk to your professors. Respect their position as a professional (a friendly, “Hello, Dr. Suchandsuch,” is much better received than, “Hey Teacher!!!!”), but don’t be too intimidated to confront them for help. Establishing a relationship with your instructor is a near-guaranteed way to improve your performance in the class by showing that you truly care about their course. Office hours are your best resource for assistance in the class; even if you go in with simply an arbitrary question, it will begin a conversation that will likely be productive and rewarding. Your grades will thank you later.

Connections, Connections, Connections. Build relationships with your professors. Go to their office hours, ask questions, and participate in class. Professors appreciate that you go to their office hours and you ask questions. They are willing to help if you ever have questions or issues in their class. Also, remember scholarships are important, most of the time scholarships require letters of recommendations from your professors. I always went to office hours, my professors saw that I cared about my education and they also got to know me. I could ask letters of Recommendation from more than half of the professors I’ve had so far.

Studying

As a freshman, I wish I used the library more. In the dorms, it can be hard to find a quiet place to study or write a paper. You are surrounded by your friends and it is hard to stay focused. I believe that the library is worth the walk because you will find out that it helps you get a lot of work done!

Study for Exams and Complete Assignments. Take time to review material, create a study guide, and form study groups with peers in classes. When selecting a study group, be conscious of the caliber and attentiveness of people. Select those that are interested in the learning process and desire to obtain a good grade in the course. As Jim Rohn said, “You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with.” So, chose wisely.

Building Good Habits

Everything in moderation. College can easily be a free for all. Stay up all night, sleep all day, eat ginormous amounts of dining hall food, go on a twelve hour Netflix binge, etc. It really is a liberating feeling knowing that you can do whatever you want and no parental figure is going to be there to question you. I get that. This tip serves to tell you that while eating an entire pizza at 4:00am seems fun at the time, your body and your 8:00am class will suffer later. Do yourself a favor—more oft than naught, try to live by the motto “everything in moderation.” Your health, grades, personal relationships, and mental wellbeing will thank you.

Take your freshman year seriously. Freshman year is very important; it determines in a way how you will be doing gradewise the next four years. You want to start off strong and give it your all. Don’t skip class either. For a lot of the
classes, attendance is mandatory. If you don’t show up to class, after certain amount of absences teachers deduct percentage points from your final grade in the class. I have seen that at times people are borderline in a class but since they have missed so many times the teacher just ends up giving them the lower grade because of their absences.

Create a routine for yourself and stick to it! It is always good in the first few weeks of school to write down when you have class, but it’s even better to add in time to study, eat, sleep, and do participate in extra-curriculars. This will greatly help you stay focused and stay motivated during the first semester so you don't get off track.

Play Hard, Work Harder. One of my dear friends shared this quote with me from Lakshmi Mittal, “Hard work certainly goes a long way. These days a lot of people work hard, so you have to make sure you work even harder and really dedicate yourself to what you are doing and setting out to achieve it.” Don’t forget why you made the chose to attend college. Set goals to achieve and go get them. College is a time to have fun and meet new people, do that, while keeping your bright future in mind after graduation.

With no one to tell you what to do, it can be very tempting to put off all work until last minute, word of advice: DON’T! Create a weekly to do list and try to accomplish something every day on that list! It can be something as simple as doing your dishes or starting a project earlier. Take advantage of your free time in an organized way so you are not stressed out by the end of the semester.

Take breaks. If you find yourself stressing out, don't be afraid to take a break. Go for a walk or take a nap. Sometimes classes and activities can wear us out, but we can't forget to pay attention to our health. If you find yourself becoming agitated easily or tired all the time, give yourself a personal day. Do a fun activity alone or with friends in order to release stress, so you’ll be ready to jump back into your schedule tomorrow!

Once you get your first assignments for the school year, have a binder or agenda to write them down. Don’t leave it to memory! Once you have this done, block off time throughout the day or at the end of the day to do homework. This will insure you have time to do it--meaning you won’t be scrounging for time ten minutes before class--., you’ll have more time for super fun activities and hanging with new friends, and you won’t start the year feeling like you don’t have control. Being able to have some sense of control is important in making you feel comfortable in such a new environment.

Finances

Be Frugal. As tempting as it is to exercise your newfound freedom by splurging on all those sweet items you have had waiting on your Amazon wishlist for years, take advantage of college as a time to save. Seriously, you can find free t-shirts, free pizza (you can expect it to be Papa John’s, but you know an organization really loves you when it’s Pagliai’s), and free entertainment all over the place. With a prepaid meal plan and the Panther Shuttle to transport you around town, you can legitimately go multiple weeks without spending a cent. We all know college is expensive long-term, so being a conscious spender now will definitely have its benefits in a few years.

Apply for Scholarships. I never really knew what to expect my first year regarding finances. My parents ended up paying a good amount of money because FAFSA and scholarships did not cover it all. I never looked or applied for any scholarships once I was here on campus. The University offers a lot of scholarships, so take advantage of that. There are also outside scholarships that one can apply for.

Getting Involved

Make a resolution to try new things. This is a cliché tip. Still, I want to express the importance of trying new things, and not just in a passive way. I sincerely hope that every freshman is actively seeking new experiences. When you try new things, you learn new things. Maybe you’ll learn that you don’t like frisbee golf. Maybe you’ll learn that spoken word poetry kindles your creativity. With new things, the opportunities are endless. So, when you see on Facebook that ROTC is allowing anybody to rappel off of Klehm Hall, go see what the fuss is all about. Maybe you’ll seriously end up jumping off a building. Maybe you’ll see a classmate there and get to talking. And just maybe, almost two years later, you guys will be best friends (true life story here).
Getting involved on campus is awesome. This is a great way to meet new people and be involved with something that interests you. On campus, there are so many different organizations and RSO’s to get involved with, I am sure you will find one you are interested in! Taking advantage of these opportunities can also help you in the future as well. Having a leadership position in any organization or RSO can make your resume look great!

**College is about new experiences!** Try an intermural sport if you’ve never really been a sporty type of person, or check out what concerts Doudna (the music department) has to offer throughout the year. Never listened to live jazz before? Give it a whirl! You’ll be surprised at what might perk your interests.

**Get Involved.** There are over 200 registered student organizations (RSO’s) at Eastern. Involvement in RSO’s and extracurricular activities will give greater meaning your college experience. There are organization leaders and members, advisors, players and coaches that crave enthusiasm, determination, motivation, ideas, and leadership abilities. Discover something that is appealing and interesting, since college is the perfect time to explore new opportunities. Take pride in being an athlete, being a member of an organization, and showing positive character because that PRIDE and COMITTMENET is what makes Eastern unique.

**Volunteer.** Being on a college campus opens up vast opportunities to serve both the university and surrounding communities, which you will likely not find at any other point in your life. Whether you enjoy working with little kids, your own peers, or senior citizens—or if you dislike working with people entirely and would rather spend your time with a computer or some plants—you can find ample opportunities to match both your academic and personal interests. The joy you will feel from knowing you are making a difference in society is indescribable. Plus, as an added bonus, getting involved your freshman year and being able to cite long-term involvement on a resume is going to show employers what a passionate and dedicated individual you really are.

**Explore Charleston.** You’ve probably already heard one million people say “Charleston is so boring.” What?! I really don’t understand that phrase. A town is what you make of it. My advice to you is to get out there and explore the area. Don’t have a car? That’s cool—the Panther Shuttle will take you all over this town. Plus, a lot of things are in walking distance. Go to the square and check out all the cool antique shops, watch live music at Jackson Avenue Coffee, or take a pottery lesson. Tour the gazillion Lincoln sites around. Get a ride to the World’s Fastest Pop Machine in Lerna. Charleston Lake! Fox Ridge State Park! The list goes on. Not to mention all the exciting things on campus. Charleston can be boring if you allow yourself to believe it is. Don’t be that person. Go explore Charleston.

**Meeting People**

Don't judge something or someone too early. You will be introduced to many different activities and people within the first month of school, don't react too harshly or judge too quickly because your used to your old way of life. You never know who may end up making a giant impact on your life and becoming your new best friend. Be open to hanging out with different types of people and different events. College is a learning process not only for academics but also about yourself. Something you hated in high school may become your favorite thing in college. With an open mind, possibilities for personal growth are endless!

**Join a club** (especially related to your major) to meet new people. Isolation is never fun. See what clubs are available, get involved in dorm committees, or check out what Greek life has to offer. You’ll make new friends, make new experiences, and you’ll be happier being a part of something!

**Do your thing.** Be yourself, and the friends you want will come flocking to you. Wear your Seinfeld shirt to class, leave your door open while blasting your favorite Beyoncé song, or turn on the Cardinals game in your lobby. Show off your interests, and you will be surprised how easy it is to meet new people. Heck, my now best friend and I met during Prowl when we reached for the same oatmeal-raisin granola bar; we attended the subsequent Teacher Education meeting together and have been nearly inseparable since.

Last, but not least, HAVE FUN. College is about experiencing new things while being independent and responsible. You are an adult embarking on a journey that you will cherish for the rest of your life. Make those memories count, you only go to college once!