



TRANSITION TIPS

For Incoming Students

Congratulations!

Welcome to your first semester at American University! The transition from high school to college is a significant one, not only for you but for your family as well. Below you will find ideas and suggestions to make this transitional period in your lives a little easier. You may find them sobering, or just common sense, or you may need to adapt them to your particular circumstances. But we encourage you to put them to use to help you succeed in college and make your time here fulfilling and fun. If you have any questions or concerns about your transition, please feel free to make an appointment with a clinician at the **Counseling Center** | (202) 885-3500 | www.american.edu/ocl/counseling/

Stay Organized

The key to success in college is to stay organized, and be disciplined in the use of your time and energy. In high school, it's likely that much of your time was structured and monitored. Now, little of your time is structured, and yet you are likely to have substantially more work to do. It can feel like you have lots of time, but then suddenly mid-terms come, research paper deadlines arrive, and you realize you have fallen behind. Between social and academic demands, your sleeping schedule can turn upside down. If you have morning classes, you can find yourself sleeping through them (or sleeping *in* them). Don't let this happen! **It can take a while to get the hang of being in charge of your own time and energies** - it is a learned skill, so you may need to experiment, get some help, and experiment some more in order to learn it.

Get Help

College is more than an academic education. It's about developing autonomy, a sense of responsibility and self-esteem. You may feel a tension between wanting to do everything yourself and knowing that you need help. Getting help doesn't mean you are weak or have failed. It means you are wise. It means that you know you are at college to *learn* and are willing to take the needed steps to succeed. Make an appointment with a counselor at the Academic Support and Access Center (x3360) or the Counseling Center (x3500) if you are wondering where to begin.

Get Help Early

Seek help as soon as you recognize a problem, before your troubles compound themselves. If you fall behind in a class, go to the professor. Students are often surprised how supportive their professors can be; for example, they can help steer you to tutors for specific subjects and for writing. If you have trouble with your roommates, go to your Resident Assistant (RA). If you have family or personal worries, call the Counseling Center and set up a confidential appointment with a clinician. Or just go to the person -- whether RA or academic advisor or clinician -- you feel most comfortable talking with, and ask them what resources there might be to help you with your concerns. Check the AU Web site www.american.edu/ocl/counseling/ to explore the wealth of support resources available.

Help Your Parents/Family Members Help You

One way to think of your family's role while you're at college is for them to be in your background, much like a base camp for mountain climbers. Their role is to support you in making informed decisions, as opposed to making your decisions for you. Your role is to venture forth from the base camp and climb that mountain! These may be new roles for both of you, and you'll need to help one another get used to the change.

If you want them to listen as opposed to giving you advice in a phone call, it's okay to gently tell them that. Sometimes it may be the reverse -- you really want their advice, whether you decide to take it or not. It's okay to coach them in how they can be supportive of you.

Forge New Connections

You may find yourself overwhelmed by the size of the university, feeling a sense of isolation in a crowd. You may miss the familiarity of your family and hometown friends. Although your natural reaction may be to withdraw, we'd recommend that you get involved in a student organization, club, community service activity, or some other activity where you might meet people who share your interests. It's natural to feel uncertain in a new situation with new people, and to miss your old activities and friends. While these feelings are normal during your transition, don't hesitate to make an appointment with a clinician to talk them over, especially if you are feeling lonely, isolated, or depressed.

Watch Your Spending

You may be flooded with offers for credit cards and phone cards. Credit cards offer a dangerous combination of instant gratification and a deferred price. It is surprisingly easy to get buried in credit card debt – whether you are spending on social activities, basic necessities, or as a way of coping with low self-esteem or anxiety. Be clear about what you can afford and what you can't. It helps to stick to a monthly or weekly budget, use email or snail mail instead of the phone for long-distance relationships, and to be careful about overspending, whether with charge cards, Eagle Bucks or ATM withdrawals.

Make Decisions Deliberately

College may offer you more freedom and opportunities for “sex, drugs (including alcohol) and rock-n-roll” than you have had in the past. Your decisions (and vulnerabilities) in these areas may be influenced by your anxieties about fitting in, your perceptions of what the norms are for such behaviors among your new friends, and your avoidance of other problems or challenges. Typically, students overestimate the amount and frequency with which their fellow students drink, drug, and engage in sex. We'd suggest you think through your own personal values and goals in advance and decide if, how, and when *you* want to experiment in these areas, including a clear-headed assessment of the risks involved and the legality of your actions.

Be a Good Roommate

Your new roommate(s) may turn out to be your closest friend(s) or your biggest headache(s). Roommate disputes are common issues that students bring to their RA, the Counseling Center, or Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution. Being a good roommate may challenge you to be more assertive of your rights and needs, or perhaps more accommodating than you have had to be in the past. Don't hesitate to seek out a consultation or intervention.

AU Counseling Center , Mary Graydon Center 214
(202) 885-3500

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