

Becoming a Successful College Student

By Sue Stock, Ph.D.

Transitioning to college is a major life event. Even the smoothest entry to college features a good deal of change. This article offers a "top ten" approach to the issues that successful students consider and anticipate as they begin their college careers.

1. Be ready for the transition and willing to be flexible.

You are reading this article, which means you're already a step ahead. It is important to know that a transition is coming, so that the changes that await you do not come as a surprise. Be aware that you may need to think and behave differently in the upcoming weeks and months.

2. Know Your Campus.

Be aware of all of the services available to you as a student. Know where they are located, and use them.

Where do you go to post your electronic resume profile? Who can help with stress management? Where can you find your academic advisor? Successful students know the answers to these questions ahead of time, so if they need the help they can go directly to the office providing the help. And, successful students not only know where to get help, they get it when it is needed. Students who are unwilling to seek help are more likely to have continued problems. Please see the end of this article for a listing of a few of the resources RU has to assist you.

3. Get involved. AND 4. Take advantage of the wide range of out-of-class opportunities.

I will discuss these together, because #4 is a good way to do #3. Research on college students who are active in campus organizations and other activities indicates that, in general, students who are involved actually do better and are happier in school than those who are not. This might seem counter-intuitive, because the involved students have less time to do their homework. However, it appears that when you are active and involved in your campus, you are also more motivated to do well in your coursework. Although in-class experiences are of course crucial, you also will gain and grow from your out-of-class experiences as well. For example, being involved in a campus organization can provide you with leadership and management opportunities, allow you to meet students and faculty in your field, and/or enable you to practice the values of promoting social justice and environmental responsibility.

We are so fortunate to be in the world-class city of Chicago. Take advantage of all that it has to offer. Browse an out-of-the-way art gallery, take free yoga classes at Millennium Park, volunteer for Big Brothers/Big Sisters, visit a new neighborhood and try some new food...the opportunities are endless.

5. Learn college-level time management skills.

The time demands of college are likely very different from other school and work settings you may have experienced. You will spend just a handful of hours in class, and your instructors may not take attendance or check that you did the reading. However, you probably will have a lot to do during your unscheduled hours. A general guideline is to plan to spend 2-3 hours working out of class per 1 hour spent in class, per week. For example, you can expect to spend an average of 6-9 hours out of class working on a three-credit course each week. Balancing the multiple demands on your time (classwork, job, social time) and making good use of your unscheduled time is essential to success in college.

6. Learn college-level study skills.

Many Roosevelt University students were successful high school students, and those skills certainly will

help you at RU as well. However, you may find that the nature and amount of work in college will require you to add additional skills, such as learning how to read a college textbook or modifying your note-taking techniques. The Academic Success Center is a good resource for tutoring and help with your academic skills.

7. Learn to manage your money.

You have many opportunities to spend money in college. Some you have little choice over—such as tuition and books—and it can be a challenge to cover those costs. However, college also brings many other optional ways and situations in which to spend money: Do you get a \$4 cup of coffee twice a day? How about concerts, plays, and other events? Your cell phone bill? The endless credit-card applications you may receive? Make sure you are clear about how much money you have and what you need to spend it on, as well as how much you have for the more optional expenses. Setting financial goals and making a budget can be helpful.

8. Claim your education.

The author Adrienne Rich wrote about the importance of claiming an education. For some students, high school was a series of attempts to do the minimum and get away with it. If this was the case for you, consider radically changing this attitude. College is full of opportunities, and we all know how much your university bill is. Get your money's worth—ask questions, talk with your professors after class, become involved in additional projects, perhaps even attend a professional conference related to your chosen field.

9. Set goals: academic, extracurricular, work experience, personal.

"Those that fail to plan, plan to fail." Somewhat harsh words, but true. We know that if a person takes the time to set a goal and makes plans to achieve it, it is much more likely that goal will be reached. Consider what you want to achieve in your first year at RU, and make concrete plans to reach those goals. You may want to set a variety of goals, in different "sizes": What do you want to get out of your college experience in general? What do you want your first year to be like? What do you want to make sure to accomplish in your first month on campus?

10. Plan to succeed your first semester.

This is a specific recommendation in terms of goals: Plan to do well right away. Set high, although not unreasonable, expectations for yourself for your first semester. Some college students allow themselves to focus on playing rather than working when they first begin college. This can set up bad habits, and also potentially leave you with a GPA deficit to surmount in upcoming semesters. Certainly, give yourself some leeway—perfection is not a reasonable goal—but a successful first semester certainly is possible. Good luck!

Resources for RU Students

RU has many resources available to help student achieve their goals. Check out www.roosevelt.edu/current for a comprehensive listing of student services. Also, some of the services mentioned in this article can be found at:

The Counseling Center

www.roosevelt.edu/counseling
AUD 462 and Room 114, Schaumburg

Office of Career Services

www.roosevelt.edu/ocs
AUD 470 and Room 125, Schaumburg

The Academic Success Center

www.roosevelt.edu/asc
HCC 310 and Room 125, Schaumburg

Academic Advising and Assessment

www.roosevelt.edu/advising
AUD 124 and Room 125, Schaumburg