New Experiences - New Friends: How To Make It Happen

Whether you are an incoming freshman, a transfer student or a returning adult student, entering college is an exciting time. At Roosevelt University (RU), there are many opportunities to learn and to try new things, see new places and make new friends from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. However, making new friends can be scary, especially if you are transitioning to RU by yourself. Building friendships takes time and isn't always as easy as it sounds. Before your social network is established, it can be a lonely time. It is easy to feel that everyone else has friends or to begin to fear that "something is wrong with me since I don't have friends yet."

It is helpful to remember that others are "in the same boat". Remind yourself that anyone in a new environment goes through an adjustment phase. Moreover, many people feel nervous about meeting others at first, but find that other people are usually pleased when they're approached with friendliness. Most people are happy to talk about movies they have seen, books they have read, sports, the weather, or even what the government is doing to student loans. These topics may provide a bridge to other conversations. Be positive, thoughtful, and encouraging while asking open questions such as, "What was that like?" rather than questions requiring only a yes or no answer. As conversation progresses, talk about your feelings and experiences allowing others the opportunity to get a sense of who you are.

When meeting new people, the best thing to do is to be yourself. It is a good sign if you are able to share your true feelings and thoughts, rather than hiding who you really are, perhaps out of a fear of rejection. Try to be confident in your interactions with people. Use common courtesy and address people by name when appropriate. Try not to be influenced by stereotypes. Remember that people from different cultures have different ideas about physical contact such as handshakes and casual touching, so be respectful of that. Make a daily effort to sit beside someone in the classroom and to say hello; get involved in class discussions. Talk with classmates after class about homework assignments. When you recognize someone in the hallway or cafeteria line, say "hi".

It may feel a little awkward at first to take the step from greeting people in the classroom to inviting them for coffee or to meet for lunch, but if you take the risk you may be rewarded by friendship. Remember, if you've made friends before, you can make friends again.

Be patient, don't be critical of yourself. If someone isn't interested in making friends with you beyond an acquaintanceship level, it's not necessarily a judgment about you. He or she may not feel the need or have the time to develop new friendships.

Watch out for attaching labels to yourself, such as "shy, quiet, nervous, or boring" which can prevent you from taking initiative. Resist the urge to withdraw from people and don't isolate yourself. Know that in time, you will make friends.

Another great way to meet new people is to get involved and to attend one of the many events around campus. The Office of Student Activities (OSA) is busy year round planning and holding events both on and off campus. They offer discount tickets for movies, plays, operas and orchestra events. Events are advertised on the OSA bulletin boards throughout the campuses. Also, the College of Performing Arts hosts plays and musical shows all year long. Tuesday nights you can attend free, live jazz at the Auditorium Campus. The concerts you can attend are numerous, and the

talent of your schoolmates will undoubtedly impress you.

The University is full of student organizations that you may join. These clubs bring students with similar interests together, making it easier to start conversations. Some organizations have meetings in the evening so that busy students can attend. You can get information about student organizations at the "Take a Look Fair" held every semester.

It takes diligent effort and patience to make new friends. At some point, most students will experience varying degrees of loneliness, homesickness, and perhaps even feeling a little disloyal to old friends.

While social anxieties are common, becoming excessively anxious and avoidant of social situations is not. Sometimes a person avoids social situations because he or she is afraid of acting in a manner that could be embarrassing or humiliating. This avoidance can interfere with work, social activities or important relationships, and causes considerable distress. If you find any or all of these feelings and behaviors happening to you, it may be that you have a social phobia. Please come to the Counseling Center for assistance.

Taking the time to make friends is part of taking care of yourself. Ultimately, seek out people who contribute most to your happiness and support you in being the person you want to be. You may very well find that making new friends is one of the most rewarding aspects of college life. Get out there and introduce yourself!