

Middle Schoolers: Why College?

KnowHow2GO.org

- 1 You may be thinking, “College? Hey, that’s too far off to think about!” But you’d be wrong. Middle school is exactly when you should start thinking about your future.
- 2 Of course, your future is linked to the career you decide to pursue, and college is where you gain the skills for your career! So a little planning now—and keeping your grades up—will go a long way later.

Reason 1

- 3 Every bit of education you get after high school increases the chances you’ll earn good pay. Most college graduates earn a lot more money during their working years than people who stop their education at high school.

Reason 2

- 4 The more education you get, the more likely it is you will always have a job. According to one estimate, by the year 2028 there will be 19 million more jobs for educated workers than there are qualified people to fill them.

Reason 3

- 5 Continuing education after high school is much more important for your generation than it was for your parents’ generation. Today, most good jobs require more than a high school diploma. Businesses want to hire people who know how to think and solve problems.

Reason 4

- 6 Education beyond high school gives you a lot of other benefits, including meeting new people, taking part in new opportunities to explore your interests and experiencing success.
- 7 For more online resources on college prep, check out Links2GO.

Facing the Culture Shock of College – ARTICLE 1

By Kathleen Cushman

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1 Milenny grew up in a Latino neighborhood of New York City that sits in the shadow of the George Washington Bridge. She worked hard in her public high school and won a scholarship to Wheaton College in suburban Massachusetts. Although her parents, immigrants from the Dominican Republic, pressured her to stay home, Milenny wanted to explore the larger world.

2 When she arrived at college, however, Milenny realized that she had new bridges to cross. At her high school, most students had come from low-income families of color; now she was joining a largely white student body accustomed to privilege and status. Moreover, after her first few weeks of college classes, her academic confidence was shaken. She recalled,

It was really hard for me at first. I never cried because I was homesick in college. The only reason I cried was because I felt dumb. One night I called my cousin and I was like, "I feel so stupid. I shouldn't be here."

3 During their first few months of college, many first-generation college students (those who are the first in their families to attend a four-year college) face the same hurdles Milenny did. They feel the tensions of entering new territory, and their parents are unable to reassure them. Their fellow college students often seem to be members of a club of insiders to which they do not belong. These kinds of cultural tensions may be one reason that almost one-fourth of first-generation students who enter four-year colleges in the United States do not return for a second year (Horn, 1998).

4 Throughout the past two years, 16 first-generation college students from around the United States shared their thoughts on this transition with me—and, through the two books that resulted, with younger students who would also be first in the family to attend college. All 16 were currently in college or had just graduated. They bluntly described the shock of arriving with far less academic preparation, money, and confidence than their peers with college-educated parents. And they recalled how they managed to pursue a college degree while staying true to themselves. Their stories can provide courage and insight to students still in high school—and to secondary educators who are striving to prepare students for a successful college experience.

Feeling Like Outsiders

5 First-generation students at community colleges will probably find many fellow students who share their backgrounds, because these colleges typically serve large numbers of low-income students and students of color. At a state university or private college, however, first-in-the-family students are often taken aback by the social and academic climate. Jackie, who entered Colorado University in Denver after attending high school in a low-income section of that city, commented,

I was so nervous going in there because all these white people were dressed nice and I could tell they had money; they probably went to really good schools. So I was intimidated.

- 6 In fact, Jackie found herself academically unprepared for the university's premedical program to which she aspired, although she did well in her humanities classes. After two years, she enrolled in science classes at the community college on the same campus. Far from being a step backward, this decision helped Jackie compensate for her inadequate high school science education and navigate toward a career in dentistry.
- 7 Differences in income, social styles, and even speech patterns cause many first-generation students to feel like outsiders. Their first concern is often to make friends, which invites all the difficult identity issues of late adolescence. It takes tremendous self-esteem and determination for them to focus on their academic goals.
- 8 Eric won admission to Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, after graduating from an urban high school in Nashville, Tennessee. Although he wanted to fit in with the exclusive social scene there, he sometimes felt that he would betray his black community by doing so. His classmates were friendly, but their assumptions made him deeply uncomfortable. Over the course of his first year, Eric learned to engage his peers directly in conversations about race, class, and privilege:
- At first, I would go along with “you’re ghetto.” I was like, “I sure am from the projects!”—making a joke of something that I really took to be very serious. And that was not cool, just to go along with it. . . . I can’t do that to you all who were raised up like me. So I don’t play around with those racial jokes any more. If I’m going to be here and learn, if I’m going to accept different cultures and different styles, then you all gotta be at least a little respectful and acceptive of what I bring.
- 9 Raja, the son of Palestinian immigrants, grew up in a poor black section of Cleveland, and his tastes reflected hip-hop culture. Attending classes at Ohio’s Kent State University, he often felt the sting of condescension. Raja, who was working 40 hours a week on top of a full course load, recognized that his best defense was to study even harder. He explained,
- Some of the teachers look at me and they figure, “This guy’s not here to learn. He looks like he’s urban, his pants are sagging, he’s got his hat on backward.” They look at what you wear and how you’re walking and they’re basically going to judge your personality on that. . . . Every year, every semester, half my classes were this way. I just had to get an A on their test, so they’d know that I’m not a clown.

Forging a Social Network

- 10 My student collaborators said they made it past these barriers by forging strong, supportive relationships that included both social and academic elements. Many of these connections started when students joined campus organizations for minority groups.
- 11 When Karen, a Native American student from a small community, entered Oklahoma State University, she felt overwhelmed by its size and impersonal atmosphere. Seeking out other Native American students on campus helped her feel grounded and discover her own leadership skills:
- I think it’s important that we find our niche, find people like us. There’s a special house where a lot of Native Americans live, and there’s a Native students’ club; we have powwows and take trips.

- 12 Maly, who emigrated from China to Venezuela and then to New York City, won a scholarship to Lafayette College in rural Pennsylvania. She sought refuge from “a sea of white faces” in the international students’ association, where, she explained,

They’re so welcoming. Everybody’s integrating. It’s not just about one culture or one person. We’re learning about everybody. We’re learning about everything.

- 13 Stephen, a Mexican American student from Austin, Texas, found other students from his culture who were pushing hard to succeed when he joined a Latino fraternity at the University of Texas. He noted,

A lot of my fraternity brothers are first-generation college students. They know what it was like to grow up in a humble household, for your parents not to be able to support you in the ways they wanted to. They don’t have a lot of the same motivations and pushes as white students, but they are very determined, and I really appreciate and respect that.

- 14 Students who receive such support from the beginning often learn to enjoy standing out in the crowd. At Kent State, Raja realized that part of his education was to explore the mix of people around him, discovering who they were as he made a place for himself. He said,

My campus has 30,000 people on it, so when you’re walking to class, you’re walking with 5,000 to 6,000 people. Some sense inside of you wants to be different from others. And you are different—everybody’s different, no matter where you’re from. You just have to have an open mind about where you’re going. You’ll always find a group of people that have your same interests, who are there to learn and enjoy it, just like you.

- 15 Maly also developed a new sense of who she was and what she stood for:

I’ve grown very confident of what I believe in and what I am. Being in a very homogeneous college, it’s very easy to either go their way or completely isolate yourself from them. But I’ve learned how to stay in between—still participating in social events that they go to, but doing it in my own way. Always, always, stay true to yourself.

The Need for a Guiding Hand

- 16 Because parents of first-generation students can’t draw on their own college experiences for advice and reassurance, these students need guidance from other caring adults. One guidance counselor at a large Chicago high school sat down every Saturday morning in the fall to check in by phone with students he had sent off to college that year.
- 17 During Eric’s first semester at Wake Forest, he kept in close touch with teachers who had mentored him. He noted,

My high school teachers are still behind me. I’ve gotta call, ‘cause they’ll find out I’m struggling. If I’m having trouble in my class, they’re like, “We know somebody who’s going to give you a call tomorrow.” And when I go back, they use me as an example for other kids.

- 18 When faculty members reach out to first-generation students, they can provide not just academic coaching but also a crucial lift in confidence. Milenny found that her fluency in Spanish helped her do well in a freshman Italian course—and that an additional boost came from the warmth of the professors in that department:

A lot of other professors were scared to break that barrier with the students, but my Italian professors were encouraging. They tried to make me feel comfortable; they told me, “You can do it!” Little things like that, for me, made a big difference. *Milenny ended up majoring in Italian and studying abroad.*

- 19 College programs that link students and faculty in some way beyond large, impersonal classes make it more likely that first-year students will persist (Tinto, 2000). For example, at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio, freshmen may join smaller “learning communities” where students with similar interests and goals live and study together. This helps freshmen on this campus of 20,000 students bond socially and academically with other freshmen, upperclassmen, resident advisors, and faculty members.

Learning to Shift Between Cultures

- 20 In their reflections on the college transition, these students revealed what a challenge it has been to remain true to themselves in an environment where they differ from the norm. Keeping that balance means changing, but it also means remembering their roots. They learn what both the old and new settings call for, and they continually move in and out of different cultures. As Milenny explained,

For me, going away was more of a learning experience than probably everything I learned in college. You learn more about life than about academics. I came back and saw everything so differently.

- 21 Many students I talked with realized they had a lot to teach more affluent, mainstream students about adjusting to new cultures. As Eric said,

A lot of people at college have led sheltered lives. . . . They grew up where it’s easy to get away from people not like them. I’m not going to be fake with anybody; I want to be as real as I possibly can. Sometimes they teach me stuff; sometimes I teach them stuff. I mean, that’s college for you.

- 22 When Stephanie took a course in Latino studies at Bowling Green, she found herself talking comfortably for the first time in a mixed group about race and ethnicity:

Everyone was speaking their mind, and the minority in that class was Caucasian people. It definitely helped you feel like you’re not leaving your people behind. Maybe we [Latinos] didn’t all come from the exact same background, but we pretty much felt the same way about different things we talked about in class. Which is really different, and it opened up the eyes of the white kids in the class.

- 23 Just by getting to college, students like Milenny, Eric, and Stephanie have scaled a wall that keeps thousands of capable students from higher education because their race, origin, social class, or family income differ from the mainstream. The thorny issues of identity, privilege, and cultural understanding will continue to confront them as they make their way toward college graduation. If educators support them in the task, first-generation students will emerge with a strong new identity as college-educated adults.

College Is Worth the Cost – ARTICLE 2

The earning potential and variety of opportunities a bachelor's degree bestows justify the cost of tuition. Pro or con?

Bloomberg BusinessWeek, The Debate Room, March 2010

Pro: All the Math Points in One Direction

By Brooks C. Holtom, McDonough School of Business

- 1 The benefits of earning a bachelor's degree far outweigh the costs of tuition. The math in the aggregate is simple.
- 2 According to the U.S. Census Bureau, people who graduate with bachelor's degrees will earn nearly twice as much over the course of their careers as those who complete only high school. College grads earn \$2.1 million in lifetime income compared with \$1.2 million for high school grads. The cost of four years' tuition for a public school amounts to approximately \$28,000 and for private school is about \$100,000. Even if they go with the more expensive educational option, college grads net on average an extra \$800,000 in lifetime earnings.
- 3 College also prepares you for a well-rounded and healthful life (e.g., college grads smoke less, exercise more, and are twice as likely to engage in volunteer work). The social networks developed in college have lifelong personal and professional benefits. A college education dramatically increases the probability of finding a job that you enjoy.
- 4 Where the math gets tricky is in the case of a truly unique individual like Bill Gates of Microsoft or Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook. These billionaires achieved tremendous success without the benefit of four-year degrees. It is absolutely critical, however, to appreciate that their uncommonly great insights, drive, and timing are as unusual as the talents that allowed Michael Jordan and LeBron James to make millions of dollars without the benefit of college degrees (though even M.J. did go back to finish his degree later).
- 5 In short, we do not live in Lake Wobegon where "all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average." We live in an increasingly complex, knowledge-based society where the vast majority of people will have superior earning power throughout their 30- to 40-year careers based on completing a bachelor's degree.

Con: Practical Experience Trumps Fancy Degrees

By Tony Brummel, Victory Records

- 1 So you got great grades and earned your bachelor's degree? Congratulations. You may have been better off failing college and then starting a venture and figuring out why you didn't pass your classroom tests.
- 2 Being successful in business is absolutely not contingent on having a bachelor's degree—or any other type of degree, for that matter. A do-or-die work ethic, passion, unwavering persistence, and vision mean more than anything that can be taught in a classroom. How many college professors who teach business have actually started a business?

- 3 I am the sole owner of the top independent rock record label (according to Nielsen-published market share). Historically, the music industry is thought of as residing in New York City, Los Angeles, and Nashville. But I have blazed my own trail, segregating my business in its own petri dish here in Chicago. I started the business as a part-time venture in 1989 with \$800 in seed capital. In 2009, Victory Records grossed \$20 million. We've released more than 500 albums including platinum-selling records for the groups Taking Back Sunday and Hawthorne Heights.
- 4 Because I never went to college and didn't automatically have industry contacts, I had to learn all of the business fundamentals through trial and error when I started my own company. The skills I learned on my own have carried me through 20 years of business. Making mistakes forces one to learn.
- 5 If you have a brand that people care about and loyal, hard-working employees coupled with a robust network of smart financial advisers, fellow entrepreneurs, and good legal backup, you will excel. There are plenty of people with degrees and MBAs who could read the books and earn their diplomas but cannot apply what they learned to building a successful enterprise.

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Getting Ready for College Early: Steps 1, 2, 3, & 4 –

ARTICLE 3

U.S. Department of Education

Step 1

1 A two- or four-year college degree is becoming more and more important for unlocking the doors to economic and educational opportunity in America today. Getting a college education requires a lot of time, effort and careful planning by parents and students, but it provides knowledge and skills students will use for the rest of their lives to help them succeed in whatever they undertake. By going to college students:

- Get (and keep) a better job. Because the world is changing rapidly, and many jobs rely on new technology, more and more jobs require education beyond high school. With a two- or four-year college education, your child will have more jobs from which to choose.
- Earn more money. On average a person who goes to college earns more than a person who does not. Someone with a two-year associate degree earns more than a high school graduate. In 1998, a man with a bachelor's degree or higher earned almost 98 percent more than a man with only a high school diploma, and a woman with a bachelor's degree or higher earned almost 84 percent more than a woman with only a high school diploma.
- Get a good start in life. A college education helps your child acquire a wide range of knowledge in many subjects, as well as advanced knowledge in the specific subjects they are most interested in. College also trains students to express thoughts clearly in speech and in writing, to make informed decisions and to use technology-useful skills on and off the job.

2 Students who are not interested in going to a four-year college or university for a bachelor's degree can benefit from the skills and knowledge that two years of college provide to compete in today's job market. These students may want to pursue a technical program in a community, junior or technical college, which provides the skills and experience employers look for. Many high schools and some local employers offer career-focused programs called tech-prep, 2+2, school-to-work or school-to-career, which are linked to community and technical colleges. These programs coordinate high school course work with course work at local colleges, and in some cases give students the chance to learn in a real work setting. This way, the high school material better prepares students for college- level work, and also starts the student on a clear path toward a college degree.

3 Students interested in technical programs will probably want to take some occupational or technical courses in high school, but they also need to take the "core" courses in English, math, science, history and geography that are outlined in step 2.

What Kinds of Jobs Can You Get with a College Education?

4 One of the major benefits of acquiring a college education is having more jobs to choose from. Parents and students should talk about the kind of work that interests the student, and find out more about the kind of education that specific jobs require. For instance, some jobs require graduate degrees beyond the traditional four-year degree, such as a medical degree or a law degree. As students mature and learn

about different opportunities, they may change their mind several times about the type of job they want to have. Changing your mind is nothing to worry about, but not planning ahead is. For more information on the educational requirements of specific jobs, contact a guidance counselor or check the Occupational Outlook Handbook in your library.

5 *Examples of Jobs Requiring College Preparation*

Two-Year College (Associate Degree)	Four-Year College (Bachelor's Degree)	More Than Four Years (Various Graduate Degrees)
Computer Technician	Teacher	Lawyer
Surveyor	Accountant	Doctor
Registered Nurse	FBI Agent	Architect
Dental Hygienist	Engineer	Scientist
Medical Laboratory Technician	Journalist	University Professor
Commercial Artist	Insurance Agent	Economist
Hotel/Restaurant Manager	Pharmacist	Psychologist
Engineering Technician	Computer Systems Analyst	Priest or Rabbi
Automotive Mechanic	Dietitian	Dentist
Administrative Assistant	Writer	Veterinarian
Water and Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator	Investment Banker	Public Policy Analyst
Heating, Air-Conditioning, and Refrigeration Technician	Graphic Designer	Geologist
	Social Worker	Zoologist
	Public Relations Specialist	Management Consultant

Source: Compiled by the Planning and Evaluation Service of the U.S. Department of Education from various sources.

6 By the time a child is in sixth grade, families should start talking about going to college. Make it clear that you expect your children to go to college, and together start planning how to get there. Everyone knows that high school courses and grades count for admission to college, but many people don't realize that a college education also builds on the knowledge and skills acquired in earlier years. Your child should plan a high school course schedule early, in the sixth or seventh grade.

Challenging courses help kids get into college

7 Research shows that students who take **algebra** and **geometry** early (by the end of the eighth and ninth grades) are much more likely to go on to college than students who do not. In a national sample, only 26 percent of low-income students who did not take geometry went to college; but 71 percent of low-income students who took geometry went to college. It is common in other developed countries for students to have mastered the basics of math, algebra and some geometry by the end of the

eighth grade. By taking algebra early in middle and junior high school, students can enroll in chemistry, physics and trigonometry. In addition, students should take three to four years of a foreign language and as many Advanced Placement courses as they can before finishing high school.

8 Just as employers want workers who have certain skills, most colleges want students who have taken certain courses. Many of these courses can be taken only after a student has passed other, more basic courses. The most important thing a student can do to prepare for college is to sign up for the right courses and work hard to pass them. As parents, you should get involved in choosing your children’s schedule for the next year, and make sure that your children can and do take challenging courses. College-bound **middle and junior high school students** should take:

- **Algebra I** (*in eighth grade*) and **Geometry** (*in ninth grade*) or other challenging math courses that expect students to master the essentials of these subjects. Algebra and geometry form the foundation for the advanced math and science courses that students need to take in high school to prepare for college. These courses give students the skills they need to succeed on college entrance exams, in college math classes and in their future careers.
- **English, Science and History or Geography.** Together with math, these courses make up the core or basic academic classes. Every student should take English every year in middle school and in high school. They should also take as many science and history (including geography) classes as possible because all of them are good preparation for college. See the chart on the next page for examples of recommended courses.
- **Foreign Language.** Many colleges require their students to study a foreign language for at least two years, and some prefer three or four years of one language. Taking a foreign language shows colleges that a student is serious and willing to learn the basics plus more, and shows employers that he or she is prepared to compete in the global economy.
- **Computer Science.** Basic computer skills are now essential, and more and more jobs require at least a basic knowledge of computers. Make sure your child takes advantage of any opportunities the school offers to learn to use computers.
- **The Arts.** Many colleges view participation in the arts and music as a valuable experience that broadens students’ understanding and appreciation of the world around them. It is also well known and widely recognized that the arts contribute significantly to children’s intellectual development.

9 There’s no substitute for taking challenging courses and working hard. The following chart lists some of the courses students should take.

10 **High School Courses Recommended for College**

English 4 years	Mathematics 4 years	
composition	algebra I	geometry
American literature	algebra II	trigonometry
English literature	precalculus	calculus
world literature		

History and Geography 2 to 3 years	Laboratory Science 3 to 4 years
geography U.S. history U.S. government world history world cultures civics	biology earth science chemistry physics
Visual and Performing Arts 1 to 2 years	Challenging Electives 1 to 3 years
	economics psychology computer science statistics communications
Foreign Language 3 to 4 years	

Note: Taking Advanced Placement courses and Tech-Prep courses in any of these subjects can give students added skills for college.

Source: Compiled by the Planning and Evaluation Service of the U.S. Department of Education from various sources.

Step 2: Getting Ready

Taking the Right Courses for College Starts in Middle School

Get a Leg Up on College Preparation and Save on Tuition

11 High school students can also take courses for credit at many colleges. These courses, Advanced Placement and Tech-Prep, are available in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades. Middle school and junior high school students who plan ahead and take algebra, a foreign language and computer courses by the eighth grade are better prepared for Advanced Placement and Tech-Prep courses in high school.

- **Taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses.** Advanced Placement courses are college-level courses in 16 different subjects, from arts and music to calculus and English, that help students get ready for college during high school. Students who score high enough on the AP exams can receive advanced placement in college or college credit. This saves time and money, as students may be able to take fewer classes in college. Your child’s teachers, guidance counselor or principal can tell you if your local high school offers AP courses. If they are not offered, work with other parents to get them included as part of the core curriculum.
- **Taking Tech-Prep courses.** Students who want to pursue a technical program at a community, technical or junior college may want to prepare by taking some technical courses in high school in addition to the core courses. Talk to someone at your child’s school or from a community, junior or technical college to find out the best high school courses to take for tech prep involvement. “School-to-work” and “school-to-career” courses can also help connect students to colleges and the workplace. Work with your school counselor to find local businesses or school-to-work councils that can provide your child with these opportunities.

- **Getting ready for college admissions exams.** Most colleges require students to take either the SAT I or the ACT in their junior or senior year of high school. Ask your guidance counselor how your child can best prepare for these exams.

Don't go it alone: help for parents

- 12 Some parents especially those who did not go to or finish college themselves may worry that they cannot provide their child the guidance and support needed to get ready for college. But remember, getting ready for college is more work than anyone can handle on their own, and you don't need to have gone to college yourself to help someone else get ready for college. To provide children extra opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills they need for college, many schools offer **before- and after-school programs**, where children can learn more about the subjects that interest them, under the care and guidance of adults. Some schools also have mentoring programs, where an adult who has studied or worked in the same field in which a child is interested can provide extra help and advice about, for example, the challenging math and science courses college-bound students need to take, and how to plan for a college and a career connected to their interests. Ask your child's teachers or guidance counselor for information about such programs in your local schools. Ask your child's principal about opportunities for teachers or others who have graduated from college to come into the classroom to talk with students about their experiences and success.

Step 3: Getting Ready for College Early

- 13 Most people believe that college is much more expensive than it really is. Although some colleges are expensive, many colleges are within reach. Even if a student wants to go to a more expensive school, financial aid (money available from state governments, colleges and the U.S. Department of Education) can help those students who have planned ahead and worked hard in school pay for college. The basic costs of college are **tuition**, which is the amount of money that colleges charge for instruction and attendance; **fees**, which cover other costs, like athletic activities and special events; and **other expenses**, including room and board (the cost of housing and food), books, supplies and transportation. While costs vary dramatically, tuition can be as low as a few hundred dollars per year for part-time students receiving financial aid.
- 14 How much a college costs usually depends on whether it is a public or private school. The majority of students attend **state or public colleges**, which receive a portion of their budgets from state or local governments and can charge lower tuition to students who live in that state. Students from other states pay higher tuition. **Private institutions** tend to be more expensive than public colleges and charge the same tuition for in-state and out-of- state students.
- 15 By the time your child attends college, tuition, fees, room and board, and other expenses will be higher than the amounts listed here, but remember: as college costs increase, the amount of money you earn, and thus the amount you will have available to pay for college, may also rise. No one can be sure how much costs will change over time, so be cautious when people tell you a particular amount. To get an idea of how much expenses are now for major colleges and universities in the United States, visit www.finaid.org/ on the World Wide Web, or look at the college guidebooks in your local library or bookstore.

- 16 For information on the costs of college and paying for college, enrollment and types of programs that are offered in colleges, visit COOL, the National Center for Education Statistics College Opportunities On-line site on the Internet at www.nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cool/. The COOL Web site is designed to help students and their parents understand the different types of colleges and the costs of attending college. Information about individual colleges is also available on the COOL site.

Step 4: Paying for College: The Aid is Available, But Save, Too

- 17 Families are not alone in paying the costs of college: every year millions of students apply for and receive financial aid and almost half of all students who go to college receive some kind of financial aid. Because college represents an investment in our most precious resource, our children, no child who wants to go to college and is willing to work hard should be prevented by financial need. Here's what to do:
- **Start saving early.** Saving money is the best way to prepare for meeting the costs of college. Set aside money each month, starting now, to build a college fund. Think about where your child might attend college, how much that type of college might cost, and how much you can afford to save. The earlier you and your child begin saving, the smaller the amount you will have to set aside each month.
 - **Apply for financial aid.** All needy students can apply for federal, state and other student financial aid to help them pay for college. The two major types of aid are grants or scholarships, which do not have to be repaid, and loans, which are available to students and parents and, like a car loan or a mortgage, must eventually be repaid.

Where Can You Apply for Financial Aid?

- 18 The **federal government** supplies \$46 billion annually in student aid, about 75 percent of all student aid.
- **Pell Grants** are the most important form of student financial aid for the nation's neediest students. In 1999-2000, almost 4 million needy students received Pell grants. The size of the grant depends on the student's need. In 2000-2001, the maximum grant will be \$3,300.
 - **The Work-Study Program** lets students work during the summer or part-time during the school year to help pay for college. Colleges help find jobs for students, and the federal government helps pay the salary. Work-Study jobs give students valuable work experience and are often related to the student's classes or future career in addition to helping pay the costs of college. The new additions to the Work-Study program, the **America Reads Challenge** and **America Counts**, let students work as reading and math tutors for young children helping students give back to the community and pay for college.
 - **Federal Loans** are available to both students and parents. **Stafford Loans** for students are either *subsidized*, for needy students, where some of the accumulated interest is paid by the government, or *unsubsidized*, where the student pays all of the accumulated interest. **PLUS Loans** are loans to parents for any costs that are not paid for by other aid.

A quick word about student loans

19 Students usually do not have to start repaying their loans until after they finish school, and the interest rate is usually lower than for other kinds of loans. Many students are hesitant to take out loans, but **remember**: college graduates usually make a good deal more money than people who do not have a college education, so paying a loan after graduation will be easier than it might seem. Nevertheless, it is important that both students and parents understand the terms of the loan before agreeing to them and know when repayment will begin and how much their payments will be. There are many different education loans, so before taking out any loan, be sure to find out what the exact conditions of the loan are.

20 Other Forms of Aid Include:

- **Federal aid administered by colleges** including **Perkins Loans** and **Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (SEOGs)**, the U.S. Department of Education gives aid to colleges, who decide which of their students need it most.
- **HOPE Scholarships, Lifetime Learning tax credits, and other tax benefits for higher education.** The HOPE Scholarship tax credit provides a maximum of \$1,500 (100 percent of the first \$1,000 of tuition and required fees, and a 50 percent credit on the second \$1,000) for each of the first two years of college. The Lifetime Learning tax credit provides a maximum \$1,000 tax credit to help college juniors and seniors and graduate and professional degree students, as well as adults who want to go back to school. For detailed information on who is eligible for these and other tax benefits, it's best to refer to your Internal Revenue Service (IRS) forms and publications which are available at www.irs.gov.
- Many **states** and **colleges** offer financial assistance directly to individual students based on need or merit. **Merit-based aid**, usually scholarships or grants, is given to students who meet requirements not related to financial needs like doing well in high school or displaying artistic or athletic talent. A notable example of state aid is the **Georgia HOPE Scholarship**, which guarantees students free college as long as they have earned a B average and stayed off of drugs. Call or write your state's higher education agency or college financial aid offices to request information about these opportunities.
- **Other Assistance.** Organizations, foundations and other groups offer scholarships to academically promising students, minorities, women and disabled students. To learn more about these scholarships, speak with your school guidance counselor or go to the reference section of the public library.
- **Serve Your Country.** Many opportunities exist for students to pay for all or part of a college education by serving their country during or after their college years. Service in Americorps, the Merchant Marine Academy, the country's domestic Peace Corps or in the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) entitles students to scholarships of varying amounts to cover educational expenses. The U.S. Army, Navy and Air Force each has its own military academy (a four-year college and a commission in the military after graduation), where tuition is free, but only the most highly qualified students are admitted. Local armed forces recruiting offices can provide more information. Call 1-800-94-ACORPS for more information about AmeriCorps. It's a way to serve your community and pay for college.

More Information on Federal Aid

- 21 For the most up-to-date information about student aid supplied by the U.S. Department of Education, call the Federal Student Financial Aid Information Center at the U.S. Department of Education **toll-free** at **1-800-4FED-AID**. You can also get a copy of the federal financial aid form, which is required to apply for all federal financial aid, by calling this number. You can also obtain the guide to federal financial aid for students, called **The Student Guide**, which provides an extensive and annually updated discussion of all federal student aid programs. You can obtain the **Guide** by writing to the following address:

Federal Student Aid Information Center
P.O. Box 84
Washington, DC 20044

- 22 To apply for other aid in addition to federal aid, you may need additional forms. High school guidance counselors can tell you more about applying for financial aid, including where to get forms you might need for state aid. College financial aid offices can also be of help to you.

More Information on Other Topics Discussed in This Handbook

- 23 For the latest Department of Education publications on topics related to college-going, call **1-877-4ED-PUBS toll-free** or visit www.ed.gov/about/ordering.jsp.
- 24 Information on planning for college early can be found on the Department of Education's Think College Early Web site, with special sections for students, parents and educators, at www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/thinkcollege/early/.

A Final Note

- 25 A college education is a major ingredient for success in the world today, and by taking the right courses and working hard your child can be prepared to go to college. Building a strong foundation of high-level classes, starting with algebra I and geometry by the eighth and ninth grades, and continuing to take rigorous courses through high school will better prepare students for college admissions tests and college course work. By saving for college and taking advantage of financial aid from the U.S. Department of Education, colleges and states, you can change college from a dream into a reality for your children if they are willing to take the challenge to do their best in school from the start.

College Preparation in Middle School – ARTICLE 4

Why Middle School Actually Does Matter for College Admissions

By Allen Grove
About.com

In general, you don't need to worry too much about college when you are in middle school. Parents who aggressively try to mold their 13-year-olds into Harvard material may do more harm than good.

Nevertheless, although your middle school grades and activities won't appear on your college application, you can use seventh and eighth grades to set yourself up to have the strongest record possible in high school. This list outlines some possible strategies.

1. Work on Good Study Habits

Middle school grades don't matter for college admissions, so this is a low-risk time to work on good time-management and study skills. Think about it—if you don't learn how to be a good student until your junior year, you'll be haunted by those freshman and sophomore grades when you apply to college.

2. Explore Several Extracurricular Activities

When you apply to college, you should be able to demonstrate depth and leadership in one or two extracurricular areas. Use middle school to figure out what you most enjoy—is it music, drama, government, church, juggling, business, athletics? By figuring out your true passions in middle school, you can better focus on developing leadership skills and expertise in high school.

3. Read a Lot

This advice is important for 7th through 12th grades. The more you read, the stronger your verbal, writing and critical thinking abilities will be. Reading beyond your homework will help you do well in high school, on the ACT and SAT, and in college. Whether you're reading Harry Potter or Moby Dick, you'll be improving your vocabulary, training your ear to recognize strong language, and introducing yourself to new ideas.

4. Work on Foreign Language Skills

Most competitive colleges want to see strength in a foreign language. The earlier you build those skills, the better. Also, the more years of a language you take, the better.

5. Take Challenging Courses

If you have options such as a math track that will eventually end in calculus, choose the ambitious route. When senior year rolls around, you will want to have taken the most challenging courses available at your school. The tracking for those courses often begins in middle school (or earlier). Position yourself so that you can take full advantage of whatever AP courses and upper-level math, science, and language courses your school offers.

6. Get Up to Speed

If you find that your skills in an area such as math or science aren't what they should be, middle school is a wise time to seek out extra help and tutoring. If you can improve your academic strengths in middle school, you'll be positioned to earn better grades when it really begins to matter—in 9th grade.

7. Explore and Enjoy

Always keep in mind that your middle school record doesn't appear on your college application. You shouldn't stress about college in 7th or 8th grade. Your parents shouldn't stress about college either. This is not the time to be calling the admissions office at Yale. Instead, use these years to explore new things, discover what subjects and activities really excite you, and figure out any bad study habits you may have developed.

A Letter to a Future College Student – ARTICLE 5

By Roberta Ching

Dear Future College Student,

- 1 I'm writing to tell you how glad I am that you are planning to go to college. I'm also going to tell you why I hope I don't see you when you get here. I'm a professor at Sacramento State, and I run a program for students who aren't ready for college level English and math. If it turns out that you aren't ready, of course I will welcome you and help you, but I'd rather have you be ready when you arrive at college. Let me explain.
- 2 Right now you are taking English and math (you are taking math, aren't you?). You are probably getting good grades in those classes and in the rest of your classes too, but those grades only tell you that you are doing well compared to the other kids in your school. They don't tell you how you compare to other kids across the state, and they don't tell you whether you are prepared to meet the standards of universities like mine. The bad news is that if you aren't ready for college English and math, you are going to have to do extra work and spend extra time and money getting ready. If you come to a CSU, you will have to participate in Early Start, a new program that requires you to begin getting ready the summer after you graduate by participating in Early Start at your local CSU or community college or by working online. Once you have completed Early Start, you may have one or two courses in English and one or two in math still ahead of you. You will have to demonstrate that you've reached the required level of proficiency, and you will only have one year to reach proficiency in both math and English.
- 3 Now let's talk about what it takes to be successful in college. The reason we ask you to take the EPT and ELM is that we know that you have to be proficient in critical reading, expository writing, and problem solving to be successful in most of your college classes. Most college courses assign huge amounts of reading that you have to do independently, and your professors expect you not just to read for information but to read critically—to understand that everything you read is making an argument. You will have to figure out what that argument is, weigh the evidence that different people offer in support of their positions, and then come to your own conclusions, whether the argument is about the role of women in Mayan culture or the best way to predict earthquakes or the causes of poverty. Once you've read an assignment, then you will often be asked to write in response to what you have read, evaluating, comparing and contrasting, or combining ideas from various sources. You will also be asked to use math in a variety of ways, solving chemistry problems or evaluating statistics or applying math in accounting or economics. In other words, what you are studying now in high school will give you the tools you need in every course (well, almost every course) in college.
- 4 In addition to excellent critical reading, expository writing, and math abilities, you will also need to bring certain habits of mind. Professors expect their students to be curious and willing to experiment with new ideas. They want them to see the viewpoints of others and to question what they themselves believe. They expect them to participate in classes enthusiastically by taking part in discussions, asking provocative questions, and coming up with hypotheses. Faculty also expect students to work hard and hold themselves to high standards. They want students

in their classes who show initiative and develop ownership of their own education. Students must be able to work independently since most of the grade in a course will be on work that is done outside of class—writing papers, carrying out research, solving problems. As more and more classes are taught partially or completely using technology, faculty expect students to be able to create Power Points, use electronic course management systems, do research on the web, and know how to evaluate the credibility of sources and how to give credit for ideas and material that comes from those sources.

- 5 All of this may sound intimidating, but first year college students are all still in the process of developing these competencies. The important thing for you to remember is that the more progress you make in high school both in mastering your coursework and in developing these habits of mind, the smoother your transition will be to college. When you get to college, take advantage of Summer Orientation, First Year Seminars, Learning Communities, tutoring opportunities, and all the other resources that are designed to help you be successful. And if it turns out that you still need to work on your academic preparation, people like me will be there to help you polish your reading and writing abilities and solidifying your understanding of math. College is one of the most exciting times of your life both socially and academically, a time when everything you've learned up 'til now begins to pay off. So take advantage of everything your high school has to offer. When you enter your college, you will be glad you did.

Best wishes,

Robby Ching, Chair Learning Skills Department
Sacramento State University

What's College Like?

Adventures in Education

Get real answers from college students about daily life on campus.

Going to college is fun and exciting, yet many students worry because it is such a big step in their lives. Have you ever wondered what a typical day looks like for a college student? Here's your chance to get honest answers from college students. Find out what they would do differently if they could go through high school again, how they decided on a major, what they do for fun, how they've met people, and more.

Bryan – Computer Science Major, New York

"I'd say for a typical day of class, I spend about three to four hours studying."

Vanessa – Public Relations Major, Fort Worth, Texas

"Balance is key. A student needs to attend class, eat healthy, work out, sleep, relax and have fun."

Robert – Finance and Accounting Major, Hong Kong, China

"I live on campus, enjoy the flexibility and freedom that college life offers."

Josh – Computer Science Major, New Braunfels, Texas

"In college, most of your work is done outside the classroom."

Michelle – Journalism and Communications Major, Zurich, Switzerland

"At the college level, good time management is crucial."

Sandra – Computer Science Major, Brentwood, California

"I am not your traditional student. I decided to go back to college to enable a career change."

Adrianna – Applied Sociology, Byers, Texas

"From day one, every teacher would tell me, 'the harder you study in the beginning, the better the student you are in the end.'"

A Day in the Life of Bryan

Read the campus perspective from a computer science student from New York.

1. **What is a typical day for you on campus?**

There isn't really a typical day. That's the beauty of college life, it's always changing. I leave the house around 9:15 to go to the gym and work out for about two hours. I go to class from 1:50-2:40, my next class is from 3:00-3:50 so I don't have much time in between to do anything but get to the other side of campus. Then I've got another class at 4:10-5:25. After that, I usually meet up with my best friend and we go have dinner. I go home and start studying for about three hours, more if I've got a test the next day. Studying consists of doing the assigned readings, reviewing past lectures and quickly looking over upcoming lectures. I'd say for a typical day of class, I spend about three to four hours studying. I always try to fit some sort of extracurricular activity in the day.

2. **What do you do for fun? Do you stay at school and get involved with the recreational activities available on campus or go home over the weekend?**

My friends and I usually get together on the weekends and play some football or basketball. I'm in the meteorology club and have some friends there too. At night, we usually go to some of the local bars or sometimes catch a movie. My girlfriend and I also go dancing and that's always a blast. I work out five days a week. It gives me time to think about things going on in my life.

3. **That's the biggest difference between life in high school and life in college?**

The biggest difference between high school and college is that your time management skills are far more crucial. If you've got good time management, college is a breeze but if not, it's almost impossible.

4. **What's the easiest way to meet people and make friends?**

There are plenty of people around and meeting them isn't hard at all. The easiest way to meet someone is to get involved in something. Whether it's your classes or a club or something like that. You just have to put forth the effort. Try to form study groups, people always want to find a study partner.

5. **How did you decide on a major?**

Both of my parents work in the computer industry and I've been raised with computers and technology so it was sort of natural that I have an interest in it. However, I did change my major from biomedical engineer. I just didn't have as much interest in it anymore.

6. **What were the most helpful classes you took in high school to prepare you for college?**

Unfortunately, high school didn't prepare me for college. I didn't have to work nearly as hard then as I do now. I learned all of this in my first semester and believe me, it was a tough one. If I had to pick a class, I'd say it was AP English. It helped me with my writing so that when I have a paper due, I don't sweat it and just write it. It gave me confidence.

7. **Is there enough help available if you have trouble with a class?**

There is an amazing amount of help available: Professors, weekly help sessions run by teaching assistants, other classmates, tutors (some for a price and some for free).

8. **How did you choose a college or university?**

I applied to two colleges and only one accepted me. I would have chosen Texas A&M University anyway just because the campus and people are incredible. There is no place like it anywhere.

9. **Do you live on campus or off campus? What advantages or disadvantages are there to living on or off campus?**

I lived on campus for two years and now I live off campus. There are plenty of pros and cons to both. Off campus, you get more room to live in and don't have to worry about other people's messes. You can live the way you want and not by someone else's rules. However, it costs more, there is more responsibility with bills, and the bathroom isn't cleaned for you every day. On campus, there is plenty of stuff to do. You can easily meet new people, get a meal, and bathrooms are cleaned everyday. On the other hand, you can't bring anyone back to the dorm, and it is more difficult to study in a dorm than an apartment.

10. **If you could go through high school again, what would you do differently?**

I would study more and develop my time management skills. Both are crucial to survival in college.

11. **Do you consider your college lifestyle to be balanced and healthy?**

I consider my lifestyle to be balanced. I plan every day in order to have plenty of school time and free time. If you just work all the time then you'll fall apart really fast but if you play all the time, your grades will fall really fast. It probably divides up to be about six to seven hours school work and about four to five hours of free time.

A Day in the Life of Vanessa

Learn about daily life on campus from a PR major from Fort Worth, Texas.

1. **What is a typical day for you on campus?**

Balance is key. A student needs to attend class, study, eat (healthy), work out, sleep, relax, and have fun. The problem is fitting all those in. Obviously, some days are spent studying and some are spent more on extracurricular activities. I don't study everyday but I attend class regularly. If you miss, it is usually detrimental to your grade. I am very involved in extracurriculars, which makes me enjoy my time on campus and at the university.

2. **What do you do for fun? Do you stay at school and get involved with the recreational activities available on campus or go home over the weekend?**

I go home often to see my boyfriend, but I would never recommend that for a first year student. Leave all relationships when moving to a new place and beginning your serious school career. Get involved in organizations that interest you and have fun on weekends—go to sporting events and parties.

3. **That's the biggest difference between life in high school and life in college?**

You can do whatever you want whenever you want in college. The freedom is a blessing and a curse. You have to have discipline so you know when to go to bed, when to study and if there's time, when to party. I almost miss having my bedtime set by my parents.

4. **What's the easiest way to meet people and make friends?**

Live in a dorm and get involved in activities—really involved—take on projects and leadership roles.

5. **How did you decide on a major?**

I examined what I liked doing and what made me happy. Take some classes that interest you and see if the topic strikes your fancy.

6. **What were the most helpful classes you took in high school to prepare you for college?**

AP English—college is all writing and reading.

7. **Is there enough help available if you have trouble with a class?**

Study groups are very popular.

8. **How did you choose a college or university?**

For one, the program I wanted to study influenced my decision. And then, I wanted to be in a fun city.

9. **Do you live on campus or off campus? What advantages or disadvantages are there to living on or off campus?**

I have always lived off campus, which is nice in that it allows getting away from campus. But living on campus makes it easier to study and make friends.

10. **If you could go through high school again, what would you do differently?**

Work hard but enjoy the free time. I don't think that high school needs to be so hard that you are burnt out on studying by the time you get to college.

11. **Do you consider your college lifestyle to be balanced and healthy?**

Yes, for the most part. I make sure to get sleep and eat. I wish I could work out more but I have so many responsibilities.

A Day in the Life of Robert

Get answers about daily life on campus from a finance and accounting major from Hong Kong, China.

1. **What is a typical day for you on campus?**

I start off the day by eating a nutritious breakfast and getting ready for class. Some of my classes are spread throughout the day, so I go in and out of my dorm room. I usually have club or team project meetings in the evenings. I also head to the gym and work out at the end of the day. Sometimes I choose to go the library or studying lounge at my school for studying.

2. **What do you do for fun? Do you stay at school and get involved with the recreational activities available on campus or go home over the weekend?**

I rarely get involved with the recreational activities on campus. I usually go home over the weekend, which can become stressful sometimes because I can never get my work done.

3. **That's the biggest difference between life in high school and life in college?**

High school is about fitting in for popularity and respect from classmates. College is about fitting in for networking opportunities and academic reasons. Life in high school seems very routine and restricted, but life in college offers much more flexibility and freedom.

4. **What's the easiest way to meet people and make friends?**

Be the initiator and the active voice in group meetings, classes, and social events. Join a worthwhile organization and stick with it for a long time.

5. **How did you decide on a major?**

I looked at four factors when considering my major: financial compensation, flexibility, interests, and future growth.

6. **What were the most helpful classes you took in high school to prepare you for college?**

AP English allows me to write better. AP History allows me to look at a problem with a more thorough analysis. All my math classes allow me to solve many mathematics problems in school or at work.

7. **Is there enough help available if you have trouble with a class?**

There is always enough help if you are willing to ask persistently. Earn friends that are willing to help and to share their knowledge. Professors and teaching assistants usually have flexible office hours for tutoring. There is no need to pay for additional help.

8. **How did you choose a college or university?**

Financial and academic reasons were my two main factors for deciding on a college. I chose The University of Texas at Austin because it is affordable and has a prestigious business school.

9. **Do you live on campus or off campus? What advantages or disadvantages are there to living on or off campus?**

I choose to live on campus because it is very convenient to go to classes and meetings. It takes me around five minutes to get to most of my classes. Living on campus gives the distance convenience, but housing is more expensive. Living off campus has the distance disadvantage, but housing is cheaper and it offers a different atmosphere from the university campus.

10. **If you could go through high school again, what would you do differently?**

I would relax more in high school. I would maximize the number of times I take the SAT. I would just have more fun in high school because I cared too much for my grades back then.

11. **Do you consider your college lifestyle to be balanced and healthy?**

I consider my college lifestyle fairly balanced and healthy in areas such as studying, social, exercise, and nutrition, but I need to improve my sleep/rest and relaxation habits. Most people I know lack a balanced and healthy lifestyle. They stay up late, eat food that is not healthy, and use most of the time for play and not for study.

A Day in the Life of Josh

Discover how a computer science major from New Braunfels, Texas views daily life on campus.

1. **What is a typical day for you on campus?**

The amount of time spent studying depends on the class entirely. Any science class (biology, chemistry, physics, math) involves hours upon hours of studying. Other classes I can get away without studying. I have been to two universities. At the University of North Texas some entry-level classes were very large with over 250 students and I skipped class a lot. Some classes I skipped over 80% of the time, just because I wasn't missed, and wasn't learning while I was there. I now go to Trinity University, where class size is much smaller (almost every class I have is less than 20). The professor notices when you are gone and it has an impact on your grade. Thus, I have not skipped class very often at Trinity. As for extracurricular activities, I typically run before class. In the evening, there are usually intramural sports, depending on the season, or parties.

2. **What do you do for fun? Do you stay at school and get involved with the recreational activities available on campus or go home over the weekend?**

During the daytime, my free time consists of napping, browsing the Internet, playing video games with people in the hall, or chilling with the roommate doing errands. At night, I go play pool or hang out at a friend's house. There's not much of a city life around my school, which is why I go home on weekends quite often. For two years, I lived really far from home, and now I'm about 30 miles away. Some of my best friends still live in my old town, and there are things to do that are more exciting there than at my school.

3. **That's the biggest difference between life in high school and life in college?**

In high school, there was no point to studying, or taking books home. In college, most of your work is done outside the classroom. I think that and the freedom from being away from your parents are huge.

4. **What's the easiest way to meet people and make friends?**

You walk up, introduce yourself, and start talking. But most people aren't that brave, and usually I'm not either. I meet people in class, or through other people.

5. **How did you decide on a major?**

I have always been interested in computers and engineering. So I started doing computer science, and it has been really easy and fun for me. Plus, it won't take too long to complete.

6. **What were the most helpful classes you took in high school to prepare you for college?**

I was only in high school until my sophomore year. The classes I took in high school did not come even close to preparing me for college.

7. **Is there enough help available if you have trouble with a class?**

Usually I ask other students to help me out. Professors are usually really helpful as well. I have never tried the mentor path.

8. **How did you choose a college or university?**

Money was a crucial factor. I wanted to go to Rice initially. I wasn't accepted. Then I wanted to go to the University of Texas at Austin, which would have cost more than Trinity. My mom made me apply to Trinity, and I ended up going there because of their scholarship and financial aid programs.

9. **Do you live on campus or off campus? What advantages or disadvantages are there to living on or off campus?**

At Trinity, you are expected to live on campus for three years or until your senior year, whichever comes first. The coming year will be the first one living off campus for me. I don't know the differences yet.

10. **If you could go through high school again, what would you do differently?**

I would not participate in band. Participate in clubs.

11. **Do you consider your college lifestyle to be balanced and healthy?**

Usually, yes. Relaxation is definitely there. Sleep is hard to come by sometimes. Nutrition I will have to work on, now that I'm living by myself.

A Day in the Life of Michelle

Get the perspective of a journalism and communications major from Zurich, Switzerland on campus life.

1. **What is a typical day for you on campus?**

During the week I spend four days attending classes, four to six hours on average. Studying takes up about three hours per day. One day per week I work as a German teacher at a language school. I also swim competitively five times per week for two to three hours per day.

2. **What do you do for fun? Do you stay at school and get involved with the recreational activities available on campus or go home over the weekend?**

In Switzerland, the campus is empty on weekends because most students go home to their families. I usually go home myself. If not, I get together with other students, go to the movies, parties. I do not participate in any recreational activities available on campus because I am very involved with my swim team.

3. **That's the biggest difference between life in high school and life in college?**

There are suddenly more responsibilities. For instance, you're expected to know how to manage your time so that you meet the deadlines. You're expected to study and complete your assignments but nobody is watching over you. Good time management is crucial.

4. **What's the easiest way to meet people and make friends?**

Study groups, tutorials, and small classes. Join political or sports organizations, a theatre group or a committee that organizes school events. There is something for everyone.

5. **How did you decide on a major?**

I went to different classes and chose what I liked best. I also visited my high school library to get some ideas and talked to older friends.

6. **What were the most helpful classes you took in high school to prepare you for college?**

I took Latin so that I could study languages. Knowing Latin has helped me a lot along the road. It gave me a general sense for language structure and grammar, and has made learning other languages easier.

7. **Is there enough help available if you have trouble with a class?**

Yes. Usually our professors tell us about the possibilities. There are plenty of tutorials and study groups that meet regularly, and professors and their assistants offer advice during official consultation hours or by appointment. For me, study groups work best.

8. **How did you choose a college or university?**

I chose the one closest to my hometown so that I could continue training with my swim team. However, since costs and rankings among Swiss universities are about the same, I strongly recommend spending time at universities in the French, Italian as well as German speaking parts of Switzerland if you want to improve your foreign language skills.

9. **Do you live on campus or off campus? What advantages or disadvantages are there to living on or off campus?**

There is no on campus living. I live about 15 minutes from the university in an apartment I share with another student. However, the closer to the university, the more expensive. The nice thing of living close by is that one can schedule classes for every day and choose them much more freely by having certain classes early in the morning and others late in the afternoon.

10. **If you could go through high school again, what would you do differently?**

There is not much I could have done differently. At the high school level, choices were very limited.

11. **Do you consider your college lifestyle to be balanced and healthy?**

Leaving home was quite a shock and it took me a while to get used to preparing my own meals. It was a lot easier when my mom was in charge of breakfast, lunch and dinner and I would get three healthy meals per day. However, I get enough sleep and exercise a lot. Towards the end of a semester, it becomes more difficult to stick with my sleeping habits because of all the exams and semester end parties.

A Day in the Life of Sandra

Learn about campus life from a computer science major from Brentwood, California.

1. **What is a typical day for you on campus?**

I spend about three hours a day in class and probably averaging another two to three hours on homework. Last semester, I was enrolled for 10 hours - just below the full-time level. I had classes from 11 a.m. - 1:45 p.m. every day except Friday, so about 13 hours per week. One of my courses (calculus) required that I spend approximately six to eight hours per week doing homework. Another required approximately two hours per week, and the remaining courses required an average of two to three hours per week (although on a sporadic basis). I worked full-time at the beginning of the semester, but left my job due to some severe scheduling conflicts (with my sleep schedule). This semester, I plan to work less but on a steadier schedule (say 15-20 hours per week) and to try to become more involved. I'm thinking that I will probably average a couple of hours per week in extracurricular stuff that is related to school, such as career fairs or organizational meetings.

2. **What do you do for fun? Do you stay at school and get involved with the recreational activities available on campus or go home over the weekend?**

Since I don't live on campus, I don't stay at school over the weekends. Some of the recreational activities do look interesting, though. My university has a non-traditional student's organization that hosts some outings and social activities and I will be taking part in some of those.

3. **That's the biggest difference between life in high school and life in college?**

Since I went to a private college-prep high school, it was not all too different. One difference is the lack of authority—there are no disciplinary actions taken for not turning in homework, no one calls your house if you don't show up for class—you are expected to be an adult and act responsibly.

4. **What's the easiest way to meet people and make friends?**

Most of the friends I have made have been in my classes. It's easier to become friendly with someone with whom you share a common interest.

5. **How did you decide on a major?**

I'm a computer science major because I've always been interested in using computers—taking them apart to see how they worked, seeing just what a piece of software could do, things like that. I took some introductory classes that exposed me to programming, loved them, and my course was set.

6. **What were the most helpful classes you took in high school to prepare you for college?**

I don't think there were any, it was so long ago. The math classes help me now, and I'm glad I took the foreign language class (so I don't have to do it now). But the class that has been the biggest help for me (although it wasn't in high school) was my freshman writing course. I have used the research and construction tactics I learned in that class in almost every other course I've taken.

7. **Is there enough help available if you have trouble with a class?**

It seems that there is quite a bit of help, although I have run into some problems. Lower division and general Ed requirements tutors are fairly easy to come by. There is a learning center at the school staffed with folks that can handle most of these questions. Computer Science (advanced) and math questions are a little more difficult. Here you are more likely to have to rely on your instructor and whatever tutor is available for your class (if any). I have found the instructors to be approachable and helpful for the most part, although I have occasionally encountered language barrier problems.

8. **How did you choose a college or university?**

Location.

9. **Do you live on campus or off campus? What advantages or disadvantages are there to living on or off campus?**

I live off campus. For me, that is really the only choice—I don't really think I would fit in (or want to) with a dorm full of freshmen. Although, living on campus can be very convenient. My university has a residential college program that puts people from the same dorms in the same classes and gives them special tutors and study sessions (in their dorms). I think that a program like that would be a real advantage to someone going to college and living away from home for the first time. I'm sure it's also a great way to meet people and make new friends.

10. **If you could go through high school again, what would you do differently?**

I would go straight to college. I had good grades, but my parents were unwilling to pay for extended education for me. I have since learned that parental cooperation is not entirely necessary. I could have managed.

11. **Do you consider your college lifestyle to be balanced and healthy?**

I try to keep my lifestyle relatively balanced. Of course, when you are self-supporting, financial constraints can easily affect that balance. I have had some difficulties in managing adequate study time, especially if I don't plan for time alone or time that I am "stuck" on campus without something else to do. When I can get sleep, studying and work in balance, everything else seems to fall into place.

A Day in the Life of Adrianna

Get a real take on campus life from an applied sociology student from Byers, Texas.

1. **What is a typical day for you on campus?**

Usually, I attend two or three classes in the morning. I have plenty of free time but I have chosen to use it studying. From day one, every teacher would tell me, “the harder you study in the beginning, the better the student you are in the end.” Having followed their advice, I don’t have to work as hard now that I’m a senior. As for extracurricular activities, there is no time for me to spare, especially regarding intramural sports with scheduled game days.

2. **What do you do for fun? Do you stay at school and get involved with the recreational activities available on campus or go home over the weekend?**

You absolutely cannot experience college if you go home every weekend, which is why I stay at school. On the weekends, most social activities take place. You miss out on a lot if you choose not to participate. I enjoy spending most of my free time with my friends, since I live six hours away from home. They are my family stand-ins.

3. **What’s the biggest difference between life in high school and life in college?**

College is more of a melting pot of different kinds of people. There is more than one way of thinking and you are exposed to a lot of opinions. I learned to be open-minded when I moved to college. Everyone has a voice and it is better for you to listen than to force someone to listen to you. I also learned how to define myself as an individual. I matured on my own and learned to make my own choices without supervision. Plus, I learned to deal with the consequences.

4. **What’s the easiest way to meet people and make friends?**

I suggest living in the dorms for two or three years. I enjoyed having people around me all day.

5. **How did you decide on a major?**

I took several different classes that were not basics, but interested me at the time. Plus, I changed my major a few times till I found my niche.

6. **What were the most helpful classes you took in high school to prepare you for college?**

Science, math, computer/keyboarding, and literature courses were very helpful.

7. **Is there enough help available if you have trouble with a class?**

Each college has its own tutoring programs. At Southwest Texas, the professors were always available during office hours or by appointments. I strongly recommend going to the teacher or teacher’s assistant. I found that alternative assistance can be helpful, but sometimes it differs from specific instructions of certain teachers.

8. **How did you choose a college or university?**

I always wanted to move to a big city but didn't think I would take such a big change from a small town setting. Going to Southwest Texas was a small adjustment and I have Austin and San Antonio close by if I want to go visit a big city.

9. **Do you live on campus or off campus? What advantages or disadvantages are there to living on or off campus?**

I live off campus now. Living on campus, you are among friends and are able to wake up five minutes before class and still get there on time. It is convenient also because there are plenty of resources that you're paying for anyway that are just a short walk away. Living off campus, you have your own kitchen, bathroom, and if you can afford it, your own bedroom.

10. **If you could go through high school again, what would you do differently?**

I would have designed better study habits.

11. **Do you consider your college lifestyle to be balanced and healthy?**

Yes, mainly because I have other people helping me or giving me advice when I need some. If I look tired or grumpy they tell me to get more sleep. And they invite me to go work out with them. As for nutrition, well, the cafeteria has planned nutritious meals. It's just a matter of getting the proper portions.

Types of Colleges

Understand the similarities and differences between the certain types of schools.

Adventures in Education

- 1 The list is almost endless—colleges, universities, community colleges, private colleges, public colleges, vocational schools. But what are the differences between them, and where do you begin?
- 2 Once you know where you want to end up, then you have to find the right school to get you there. Here's a run-down of the types of options available after high school:

Community and junior colleges

- 3 Community and junior colleges generally offer 2-year associate degree programs. For students who decide to continue their studies in a 4-year program, the courses usually transfer to 4-year colleges.
- 4 Community colleges offer specialized job training in certain areas, much like vocational schools. They're affordable and prepare students to enter the work force immediately following graduation. It's usually easy to get in and easy to transfer into a 4-year college or university.

Four-year colleges and universities

- 5 Four-year colleges and universities offer bachelor's degrees in many fields of study. Many also offer graduate programs with opportunities to earn a master's degree, doctorate, or professional degree. The curriculum is usually broader than a 2-year school.
- 6 Public colleges and universities are subsidized by tax money from the state in which they are located and are generally less expensive than private colleges. However, the low rates are normally available only to residents of the state. Out-of-staters, or non-residents, usually pay higher rates. They also may have limited financial aid funds for students.
- 7 Private colleges, on the other hand, are funded through endowments, tuition, and donations. The cost of attending a private college is usually higher than a public university. But don't rule private school out only because of cost! Private colleges often offer financial aid options that make their cost feasible.

Vocational training schools

- 8 Vocational training schools are privately owned and operated schools that offer a wide variety of training options, such as computer technology, cosmetology, mechanical repair, court reporting, paralegal services, office administration, and medical assistance.
- 9 Vocational courses take from five to 12 months to as much as three years to complete. Vocational training schools usually have open admissions, which means they will admit all students interested in attending.

- 10 **For more information about the options available to you after high school:**
- Search the Internet. Most educational institutions have Web sites that will provide you with specific information about the institution.
 - Talk to a high school counselor. He or she will have guidebooks and literature on schools, admission requirements, and financial aid.
- 11 For more information about the costs associated with each type of institution, refer to AIE's "The Cost of College" page.