

# Adjusting to University

Welcome to UNI life! Attending university is one of the first major life transitions for many young adults. Some students are excited to take on the new experiences of campus life, while others feel apprehensive about making this change. Regardless of your outlook when beginning your first year of college, you may benefit from talking with others who have already made that transition.



## Making the Transition

What are some of the most common changes you can expect in the first year on campus?

**New environment and relationships.** First year students must adapt to an unfamiliar environment, adjust to different living arrangements, and develop new relationships. Living with roommates may be the first 'test' freshmen experience. Students face the challenge of adjusting to roommates who may have very different boundaries and individual needs than family and friends from home. Roommates may or may not develop close friendships, but communication and compromise can build a smoother transition.

College brings a unique opportunity to interact and live with students from various backgrounds and cultures. Expanding your worldview by learning about each other's differences and similarities will likely enhance your college experience.

**Greater personal freedom.** Living on your own for the first time means that you will gain independence and take charge of the many choices and decisions that your parents and teachers made for you in the past. While this newfound freedom can be exciting, it may also feel overwhelming and less predictable than what you are accustomed to. The freedom to manage your daily life is a learning process, but one that can be very satisfying.

**Added responsibility.** First-year students must manage the important daily responsibilities that accompany their increased personal freedom. Students must manage basic tasks such as eating, sleeping, exercising, and going to class. New students must also address more complex responsibilities such as balancing studying and socializing, participating in clubs and activities, and handling finances. Managing time is a demand that all first-year students experience. A typical day in college is less structured than high school, and there is more reading and studying that is required outside of class. Some students may feel as if they have no free time to do anything but schoolwork, while others feel like they have too much free time outside of the classroom.

**Changing relationships.** While there are many changes occurring in your new campus life, there will also be changes in your relationships. New students often face challenges such as best friends going to other universities, beginning new romantic relationships or

maintaining existing ones, and juggling newly formed relationships with already established ones. Students must balance a sense of connectedness and separation while at college. Some freshmen feel the need to call or e-mail home several times a week in the first few months away, while others require less frequent communication with their family and friends.

## Common Stressors

The first year of college is a new and exciting adventure, but one that may come with a few challenges along the way. What are some of the most common stressors that first-year students experience?

**Time Management.** Now that you are in uni, there are no more eight-hour school days like those in many high schools. You may have class for six, three, or even zero hours a day. The rest of your time must be negotiated between homework, clubs and activities, work, socializing, and self-care. Students often feel as if there is just not enough time to do everything that needs to be done. Using a schedule and some organizational skills will help you to effectively manage your hectic and changing life.

**Academic Performance.** By nature, university coursework is challenging, and it can be hard to keep up with the increased academic demands. Some students undergo pressure from both them and their parents. There may be requirements for scholarships and graduate school admission that you have not previously experienced. To manage the increased demands and expectations, it is important to attend class regularly, keep up with readings and assignments, and ask for help when you

need it. Professors and teaching assistants are there to assist you and want you to succeed.

**Roommate Conflict.** Learning to live with someone new can be one of the most challenging aspects of going to college. Different living habits are the most common source of roommate conflict (i.e. neat vs. messy; quiet vs. noisy; early-to-bed vs. up-all-night). Failure to communicate your expectations about living together can lead to tension and eventually conflict. To avoid “roommate fallout” you should communicate your needs and expectations respectfully, while recognizing your own habits and quirks that might affect your relationship.

**Long Distance Dating Relationships.** It is not uncommon for first-year students to begin college in a long-distance dating relationship. Where at one time this relationship may have helped you cope with everyday stress, it could now be a source of distress due to the distance between you and your partner. Uncertainty in what the future holds for the relationship is one of the most common stressors experienced by college students in long distance dating relationships. There are a few key efforts that each partner can make to lessen the sting of separation. Verbal communication, openness, and assurance of one another can reduce stress associated with being separated. It is also essential for each partner to seek social support from others and remain active in their individual lives while apart.

**Body Image.** Many university students also struggle with body image. Our culture pays a great deal of attention to the appearance of our bodies, particularly during young adulthood. Media representations of the ideal body, messages from peers, and other cultural

factors shape what we perceive as “normal” or “good”. It can be difficult to have a clear, healthy perspective on us and our bodies when our culture sends so many confusing, conflicting, and sometimes unhealthy messages. This can be stressful at a time when many are trying to “fit in” with others and make new, exciting relationships. If you find yourself preoccupied with how you look or become distressed about your body, discussing your concerns and ideas with someone can be extremely helpful in creating, developing, and maintaining a body image that is healthful and fulfilling.

### Recommendations for First-Year University Students

What steps can you take to have a great first year of college?

**Be patient.** While campus may seem new and overwhelming for new students, it becomes more familiar with time.

**Connect with other students.** If you talk to other students, you are likely to discover that they share similar questions and concerns. Your R.A. is an excellent person to go to when issues arise. She or he is equipped to help you solve problems and refer you to appropriate resources.

**Get involved.** Student organizations are a fun way to interact with other students and faculty. Meeting people with similar interests and goals is an exciting way to make friends and participate in social activities.

**Utilize resources.** There are numerous resources on campus designed to create a rewarding college experience.

**Care for yourself.** The foundation for a productive college career is a healthy lifestyle. Take the necessary steps for nurturance, getting adequate rest, socializing, and physical activity.

## References

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Source of information: Counseling Center at University of Illinois

## Need Additional Help?

If you feel that you have questions regarding this topic or you may struggle with a personal problem do not hesitate to contact the Mental Health Counseling Service, which is a confidential on-campus service for students. You may set an appointment with an MH Counselor during counseling office hours via the online booking system for more information you may seek us at [www.mentalhub.hu](http://www.mentalhub.hu)

Did you know that as a student you are titled to attend six (one hour long) sessions/talks with a professional MH counselor online for free?