

## Adjusting to School

College can be exciting and difficult all at the same time. Students must learn to make lots of decisions and cope with changes regarding their social life, parents, academic standing, or future plans. So understand that if you're feeling stressed, you're not alone. Here are some tips to help you get adjusted, whether you are a freshman, transfer student, commuter, or returning student.

### Freshmen

Suddenly, perhaps for the first time in your life, you're moving away from everything familiar to you and beginning to make your way as a young adult entirely surrounded by strangers. It's a lot of changes all at once.

- **Feeling Homesick.** Freshmen struggle with being homesick whether they are half an hour away from home or across the country. Keep in touch with your family and old friends, but make sure not to isolate yourself from making new friends at school. As time passes and campus feels more comfortable, your feelings of being homesick will lessen.
- **Getting Along With Your Roommates.** Many freshmen have never had to share such a small space with someone before — let alone a perfect stranger! Living with someone can be challenging. Work through conflicts before they blow up. Regularly communicate with your roommate(s). And remember, you don't have to be best friends. Often roommates get along best when they have different circles of friends.
- **Establishing Yourself.** Four years in high school is a long time to establish and identify yourself as a talented individual, whether your talents may be sports, music, drama or academics. Freshmen may feel as if they are just another face in the crowd. As you get to know other students, keep in touch with your support network at home. They will assure you that you are unique!
- **Battling Perfectionism.** Many students struggle with perfectionism as freshmen. Study habits that may have worked in high school most likely will need to be adapted to fit the different academic climate of college. In addition, grade expectations usually need to be realistically lowered with the increased challenge of a college-level education. There may be campus resources where you can talk about issues like this.
- **Managing Your Time.** Only three hours of class a day? It can be hard to budget all your time to get assignments done, especially with added responsibilities such as jobs. Set aside a certain time each day to spend studying. Studying with other classmates can help you meet people and get better grades. And then enjoy your free time without guilt!

**Building a Social Life.** You may know that many college students drink and party to socialize. However, most college students overestimate the amount that other students drink. In fact, many college students drink rarely if at all, and campus life organizations offer great alternatives to partying on weekends. These activities — whether it is a dance party, cultural event, concert, or comedy night — will help you meet other students that share your interests. If you do decide to drink, be responsible! And always have a friend with you.

• **Dealing with Finances.** It is a well-known fact that the average college student is poor. Fortunately, many restaurants, movie theaters, and museums offer student discounts. Be creative — it is possible to have fun without spending money! If tuition is a problem, visit your campus career center for help finding scholarships and creating budgets. Be careful with credit cards. It is very easy to get into debt, so spend wisely and avoid impulse purchases! Freshmen aren't the only students that must make adjustments to campus. If you are a transfer student, commuter, or returning student, coming back to campus may still seem stressful. Although the tips above can always be helpful, here are some tips especially for you.

## Transfer Students

Transfer students, in a sense, are having the freshman experience for the second (or third) time around. In addition to the typical “freshmen” stressors, transfers must cope with some unique challenges.

• **Fighting Isolation.** Many transfers feel isolated. Orientation groups are usually made up of other transfers, and it may be difficult to meet other students. Participate in on-campus activities or join extracurricular clubs.

• **Finding Support Networks.** Transfer students may not receive the same help and guidance that incoming freshmen receive. These students have been placed in a strange environment, but schools tend to focus more on freshmen's needs. Talk with your academic advisor or visit the campus counseling center for answers to your questions.

• **Bonding with Other Students.** Transfers may feel as if they “missed out” on the freshman bonding time at their new school. It may seem as if everyone else has established his or her group of friends. Give it time — good friendships aren't made over night.

## Commuter Students

Off-campus living definitely has its advantages — an escape from a stressful academic environment, more freedom and personal space, and peace and quiet. But commuting students must make adjustments coming back to campus as well.

# Back to Campus



- **Building a Social Life.** Commuters may find it hard to navigate the social waters of a university since they are usually absent on weekends. Make plans to meet up with friends or classmates for social activities on the weekends.

- **Participating in Campus Life.** Commuters don't experience some aspects of campus life, such as dorm living. Feel more connected by spending time on campus even when you don't have class. Study at the library, and use university facilities such as the gym or dining hall instead of going off-campus.

## Returning Students

Returning to campus after a summer away is an adjustment. Many students have become reacquainted with the comforts of home, such as good food and old friends. In addition, returning students may be confronted with new concerns.

- **Balancing Academic Loads.** More upper-level classes might mean more studying and less free time. But this isn't inevitable! With some time management and focused studying, you will be able to adjust to the increasing academic demands.

- **Deciding on the Next Step.** Thinking about the future is a source of anxiety for many returning students, whether it's choosing a major, thinking about studying abroad for a semester, or deciding on post-graduation plans. It can be especially distressing if you feel that you have no direction. This is a common feeling. A visit to your school's career center may be able to give you some guidance.

Sometimes these changes and adjustments can trigger depression or other mental health issues. If the above techniques do not appear to be working, don't hesitate to seek professional help. If your feelings of constant stress become feelings of sadness that go on for weeks and months, you may be experiencing more than just difficulty adjusting to life's changes. Visit your student counseling center — services are confidential and are usually free of charge.

For more information, visit our website at [www.mhawisconsin.org](http://www.mhawisconsin.org).

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