

A year ago, when my nephew was beginning his first year of college, I put together a top-ten list of advice for college freshmen based on my years as a professor and the advice of colleagues and [former students](#). Last week I checked in to see if my advice had been of any help. The original column appears below, with comments from Elias, now a rising sophomore.

## **1. SHOW UP.**

Attend every class session unless you have a contagious illness. (Woody Allen was right: 80% of success is just showing up.) And don't sit in the back; I can practically predict a student's grade based on where he or she sits. Slacking in the back row = bad grades with very few exceptions. *Elias says, "I can't say enough about how important this is. Two-thirds of the students in my 9:30 class, where lectures were posted online, never showed up for class. I went to everything, and as a result I developed terrific relationships with most of my professors."*

## **2. INTRODUCE YOURSELF.**

Find an excuse to go to office hours, not just once but two or three times a term. Take a draft of your essay to a TA or professor for review; once graded work has been handed back, go back and ask for advice on how to improve it. These people will be your references, advocates, and possibly even friends later in life; you want them to remember your name when the semester is over. And don't be afraid to kiss a little ass. If your professor is giving a talk or performance, show up — and make sure he or she knows you did. Helpful hint: always remind said professor, adviser, or TA of your name when you encounter them; they will be eternally grateful.

## **3. ENGAGE.**

Come to class prepared enough to ask a perceptive question or make a useful comment. Don't be a wallflower, but don't dominate either — your fellow students will not love you if your hand is always the first one up. When you e-mail a professor, do it for a good reason and be respectful (don't address us as "dude" or by our first names unless we've asked you to). Turn off your cell phone and do not text during class. We can tell.

## **4. AFFILIATE.**

Take advantage of what campus life has to offer — clubs, events, service trips, religious groups. Join something the first week; student activities start-up right away and there is no better way to meet non-freshmen. Try out any and all groups that seem interesting until you find your niche. Research shows that students who are affiliated with a campus group or who have a part-time job are less likely to drop out and more likely to progress through college on time. More important, it enriches the experience.

## **5. LEARN A LANGUAGE AND/OR LIVE ABROAD.**

Once you leave college, language classes are expensive and hard to schedule. Take advantage of the daily classes and language labs that are included in the price of tuition. Try to study abroad. Even if you can't get away for a whole semester, find a short-term spring or summer program and, when it comes to choosing where, the more foreign the better. *Elias says, "This is one of the best things you can get out of college. I am sad I didn't get to start taking language," Next year, Elias plans to start Chinese language study, and he recommends going above and beyond the school's language requirement.*

## **6. STAY HEALTHY.**

Don't neglect your health. Eat well and be sure to get enough sleep. Getting sick means lots of missed classes and lots of missed fun. The recreation center, gym, or intramural sports are great ways to meet people and will help keep your mind clear. Do not abuse any substances, and do not kiss anyone who is sick. *Elias says, "I had a lot of colds, although they weren't debilitating and I could still get to class. Maybe it was being around sick people, maybe too much alcohol." Whatever the case, he did not stay healthy and, sadly, "I did not go to the gym a single time."*

## **7. TAP INTO RESOURCES.**

Career and professional advice; funding for internships, study abroad or travel; opportunities to work with professors on research; mental health counseling and disability support services – these are all offered by most schools, but it is up to you to recognize your needs and make use of such resources.

## **8. BE SOCIAL.**

Leave the door of your dorm room open much of the day and cultivate a broad group of friends. Don't walk around campus texting. Make eye contact. Chat with kids in class. Set up a study group of three or four people to share ideas, questions, and notes if you have to miss a class (see #1). Michelle adds: I neglected an important piece of social advice – practice safe sex! Nothing can put a damper in your college experience, and that of your partner, like an unplanned pregnancy. *Elias says, "There was a lot of risky behavior going on – alcohol abuse, selling of prescription meds, people who wound up in the hospital because of drinking too much, girls who needed to take Plan B pills for unprotected sex." Elias's worst experience of the year was two car accidents less than a month apart. In both cases, the person at fault (not Elias, thankfully) was texting while driving. "I just don't put up with that anymore. I would never drive with someone I thought would drive while texting."*

## **9. SAVOR YOUR INDEPENDENCE.**

College is a time to grow up. Make the place where you live a home away from home so you have a measure of personal comfort. Create a positive atmosphere that will nurture you. Keep your support system – friends, family – in place, and call them when you need them, but don't be afraid of loosening the ties. *Elias says, "If anything, going to college has strengthened my ties with my family. It made me much more appreciative of having a stellar home life. I met people who were so happy to be away from home that they never wanted to go back. It made me really value my family."*

## **10. MAKE THE MOST OF EACH DAY. THE YEARS WILL FLY BY.**

Michelle Miller-Adams is an associate professor of political science at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan.