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Digital Media Production
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Pro-Tips Before Starting College

Introduction

Hi! I'm Vince, a soon-to-be sophomore at UNI. I'm going to tell you some things that I wish I knew before college. I hardly struggled at all with workload in high school, and had a part-time job for the majority of it. When I became a college student, the excessive workload was a bit of a culture shock. Most of my tips will be relating to this. Some of these I'm still struggling with and trying to apply to my college life, but these have all worked for me and helped make my life easier, especially while attending college from home.

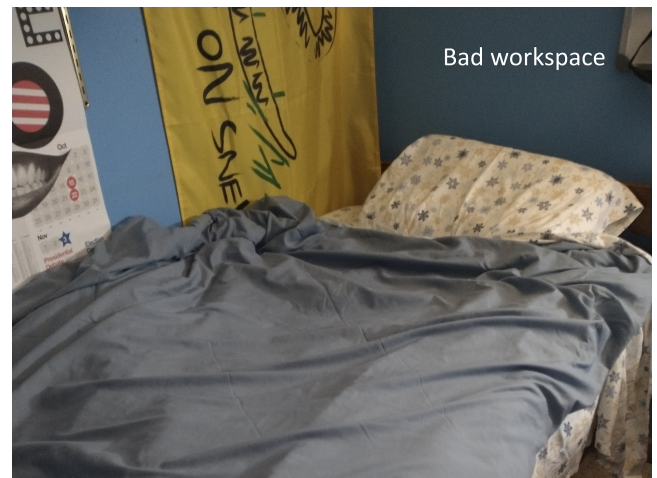
A lot of my tips will be online-learning-centric, but the sentiments can be stretched and made to fit in-person learning, which I will also cover.

Make a Schedule

One of the easiest ways to be productive with schoolwork (be it studying or doing homework) is to create designated times for both schoolwork and relaxation time. I borrowed this advice from an article provided for people who began working from home after the pandemic. The phrase "working from home" is almost the same thing as "homework," if you think about it, so it works!

Much like a real-life office or school has dress codes, you should push yourself to at least get ready at the beginning of each day. No, you won't be fit to learn if you set your alarms five minutes before your virtual class and attend it from bed. I know from experience. You should make a point to shower, brush your teeth, and put on clean clothes at the beginning of each day, as if you were attending class in person.

Besides feeling good about yourself, getting ready for the day also compartmentalizes periods of your day. In high school, I was there from 8:15 to 3:20 besides when I had open campus periods. Breaks were short but frequent, while work was consistent throughout the day. If your schedule in high school was similar and you had success, you should try to emulate it as much as you need to. This will help foster good habits. When I know I have a particularly busy day coming up, I usually write down all the things I have to do that day, and



Bad workspace



Good workspace

what times they will occur at. This means writing down my class times, meeting times if I have them, my work schedule, and when I'll start doing homework.

In short, follow the same advice people give about working from home. Even if there wasn't a pandemic, it's basically the same thing.

Get Ahead

In high school, I rarely had anything worth worrying about months in advance. The biggest assignments I had were just long papers. I never studied, and when I did, it was the night (or five minutes) before a test. The truth is, college makes you take it seriously, whether you want to or not. It sucks in this regard, but you can make it suck much less if you put in the effort.

At least in my experience, professors don't usually send out assignments a day before they're due. Usually, an assignment will be posted online about a week in advance. Use this time to do the assignment. I repeat, use the time in between the day the assignment is posted and the time it's due to look at it, ponder it, and do the assignment, or do it later if you know for sure that you can. Future you will be grateful.

There so many times that I wish I could have known what an assignment wanted a few days earlier. I'm pretty sure I missed out on a scholarship that I could have gotten a really good letter of recommendation for, had I read what requirements the scholarship wanted when I got the email. I decided to not look at the email until the night before it was due. In turn, I had to scrounge my old high school email for a picture of a piece of paper from one of my teachers saying they recommended me for a different scholarship. A fatal mistake.

Make sure you at least look at assignments before they're due if you can't find the motivation to do them early. Better yet, do them early so you don't have to later (I have no authority to speak on this).

Social Life

One thing that makes college better than high school is the fact that literally everyone there, ideally, is there to learn. In high school, people attend because their parents go to prison otherwise. You are in the same boat as everyone else, just trying to succeed and do assignments. There are no real cliques, or bullies; heck, most people don't even talk to each other in class besides during classwork. This is just my experience so far, anyway (during COVID).



It's a double edged sword, though. Where there are no bullies (though there weren't any for me in high school), there are less ways to get close with people, at least from classes. If you live in the dorms, it might be different, but I was pretty disappointed by how hard it was to make friends on my own. This could be due in part to the pandemic, but it seems like it would have been hard to get to know people anyway. I was pretty chill with most of my classmates and had a lot of "school friends" (the ones that you hang out with at school and text occasionally outside of school but not much more), but this hasn't really carried over to college.

My friend who chose to dorm made friends easily, though. I ended up being friends with them because of it, which was cool. Personally, I generally hang out with one friend group that I've been with since high school, so I don't mind not making college friends too much. Besides, making acquaintances and colleagues has been easy, especially ones who have the same major as me (digital media production).

In Conclusion

At least in my experience, college isn't as bright and shiny and amazing as I expected it to be. The reality of college is closer to working a full time job. However, that's okay. Expect to feel burnt out: it happens to everybody. College will push you, and this era of life is a period of change and learning. You will learn things in college, even if you feel like you didn't learn much in high school.