

College: The Great Transition

This was written by a GSIS major in her senior year for YOU! She attended Embry-Riddle Prescott for four years, and was employed by our office at the time she wrote this. Our thanks to Coleen for sharing her experience and valuable lessons.

Coming to college after high school is a large shift in both environment and expectations. Some parts of the transition are easy, while other require ingenuity to work with. Adaptation is key, as is asking for assistance. It benefits you to become familiar with campus departments and services, policies, standards of conduct, grievance procedures, etc. Find these online and also in your Student Planner.

Disabilities Support Services (DSS)

At college, disabilities support works differently than it did in high school. In college, students are expected to initiate the request and advocate for their own accommodations, rather than others (a committee of teachers and parents) automatically doing so on your behalf. The best way to handle this is to begin talking to the DSS office early and often.

Registering with DSS

Registry with Disabilities Support does require documentation. Before you come to campus, request a letter from your physician on letterhead stating exactly what the diagnosis you require accommodation for is. DSS also wants any evaluative and diagnostic information pertaining to your diagnosis. This combined with the DSS intake form and a meeting with DSS gets you registered for support. Although not required, if you have copies of previous IEPs or 504s that specify the accommodations that you had in high school, bring those to your initial meeting with DSS. All educational accommodations will be reviewed anyway for appropriateness to a college environment.

Each Semester

One major change is how often accommodations are reviewed. At ERAU, accommodations are reviewed every semester, whereas high schools are only legally required to review them yearly. This makes it advisable to communicate with DSS at least twice a semester, once at the beginning to confirm that the accommodations are in place and to pick up the Accommodation Letter, and once at the end of the semester to confirm that next semester is set up. Ideal timing is one week before classes commence for the semester, and immediately after registration for next semester. A draft of those emails might look like:

Hi [DSS staff name],

I'm registered for the below classes next semester.

Professor	Class Number	Class Section

I would like to confirm that my accommodations of X, Y, and Z are appropriate for these classes.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

Your Accommodation Letter

Accommodation Letters (ALs) are another change. In high school, students are not required to interact directly with their professors regarding how their accommodations are implemented. At ERAU, students are required to meet with professors to discuss how the accommodations are implemented every semester with every professor. Students are not required to disclose their specific diagnosis, and it is in fact a violation of federal law for a professor to require it. Each professor signs the AL, and the form is returned to DSS in case a professor violates accommodations. If a professor refuses to sign an AL, then seeing the head of DSS is recommended.

Entitled to Accommodations by Law

Problems with professors do occur. If you feel a professor is discriminating against you because of your disability or accommodation, you are not obliged to be silent, and there are protections in place to prevent retaliation. Generally a good place to start is the head of DSS.

The head of DSS is who deals with all the accommodations. S/he is responsible for education on accommodations, teaching about disabilities, and liaising with the school. It is a good idea to actually meet with the head of DSS each semester to discuss classes, how accommodations are working out, and how the environment is in general. This forms a personal relationship as well as serving as a checkup for how school is going.

Academics

Generally university academics are meant to be challenging. This means that actually doing the academic work and readings is important to maintaining decent grades in most classes. It is also recommended to apply significant amounts of time management skills to avoid rushes to get things done.

Class Attendance

Some professors grade class attendance, other professors do not. It is strongly advised to turn up to all classes anyway, even if you do not feel learning is occurring. Many professors will make remarks in class regarding what to study for tests and quizzes, in addition to the potential for 'pop' quizzes which students are not allowed to make up if they are absent. Taking notes is highly recommended – especially as your classes become more difficult. Unlike high school, it will become impossible for even the most brilliant student to excel much beyond freshman year without a practice of note taking.

Homework

Homework is another important facet of academics which may not have been a big concern in high school. Many college professors actually expect at least a minimal knowledge of the class subject to be reviewed before class, so the class period can be spent going over problem areas of the concept rather than explaining stuff that could just be read. To this end, professors expect the assigned reading for a given day to be completed before class begins, and any homework assigned to at least have been considered.

Allotting time to review material and complete homework is important, particularly for major specific classes. Since college is most likely an independent experience, specifying academic study times allows for better time management. Good time management prevents academics from being swept aside by gaming or social activities, and can eliminate the necessity of repeating classes.

Academic Advisors

An academic or "faculty" advisor is a professor you're assigned to who reviews your progress towards graduation requirements and advises which classes to take when. At a minimum, you will need to meet with your adviser once a semester, since ERAU places holds on all student accounts prior to registration that require the adviser to remove (this can be done up to 2 weeks prior to registration). It is advisable to touch base more often, and to keep track of how on course you are. They can also serve as an academic mentor and guide for you if you are struggling.

Scheduling Classes

Scheduling classes requires thought and planning. Disorders and diseases effecting circadian rhythm should be considered. Consider also whether or not you may need time in between

classes for extended testing time or restoration. Sometimes the only time a given class is offered is at 8am. Properly planning out classes and schedules to match your lifestyle and health requirements does make academics easier. If you have to compromise on a class time, try to make sure you build in recovery time as well.

Academic Coaching

Academic coaching is available through DSS. Academic coaching can be a variety of things including: assistance with time management; organization of long and multiple assignments; and even help with writing assignments. If you think it would help, contact the head of Disabilities Support.

Tutoring

Group and individual tutoring is available through another department. It is free to all ERAU students and highly recommended early on in the semester if only to meet and verify that you are on the right track. Especially valuable are student tutors who have experienced your particular professor's class before. Tutor contact information by class is posted in Ernie under Student Support.

Your Graduation Requirements

Your graduation requirements are from the course calendar of the year you first came to ERAU, not the year you graduate. Therefore it is possible to plan out all your classes from your first semester, and adjust according to when classes are actually offered. This is called a four year plan. It is advisable to create one, and then review it with your adviser. An example format is:

Spring 2015

SIS 100	MWF 8-9	Major
LCH 102	MWF 3-4	Minor (Chinese)
SIS 210	TTH 2:40 - 4:05	Major
SS 200	TTH 12:30 – 2	Major
RS 300	MWF 4-5	Minor (Chinese)

Fall 2015

SIS 310		Major
EC 210		Major
SIS 315		Major
LCH 201		Minor (Chinese)
CS 110		Minor (computer)

It is important to declare a minor as soon as you decide you would like to do it. Minor requirements change each academic year. Minors take their requirements from the year they are

declared, not the year you started or the year of your graduation. You may always drop minors later with no penalty.

Living Independently

Most universities require freshmen to live on campus. This is designed to increase retention and to assist in the transition to college. This initially provides some structure, though it certainly has its downfalls as well.

Roommates

One of the first things about living on campus is roommate(s) and suitemate(s). Usually in the summer prior to starting college, the university sends out an email announcing who's rooming with whom. It is generally advisable that when this email comes in, log in to get your roommate(s) and suitemate(s) personal emails and send something to the effect of the following:

Hi [names of suitemates],

I got an email from ERAU saying we're going to be roommates this next year. I'm looking forward to it and thought we should coordinate some things, like who's bringing the TV and if anyone has allergies we need to consider in the room.

My preferred name is [inset nickname if applicable]. I am from [state where you live].

Some of my hobbies include X, Y, and Z. What about you?

I look forward to meeting you in person,

[Your name]

[Your phone number or Facebook link, whatever way is easier to communicate]

It is important to note that university roommate picking is not omniscient. The system does make mistakes, since people cannot be reduced to data points. You may end up with a best friend or a roommate you simply tolerate. Living with someone else is a life skill though.

Generally universities move their freshmen in several days before classes start. This is a period of adjustment, and usually the university coordinates activities for new students. It is advisable to attend these activities as much as possible, while still spending time ironing out things with your roommates.

The Move

Moving into the dorms is a high activity day. Generally, it is best to bring your stuff already labeled where it goes, such as putting clothes in a bin or three labeled 'clothing'. This prevents some of the difficulty in unpacking the items again and allows others to guess the bins' location if someone else helps with the unpacking. Clothing, bathroom, bedding, and any medical items should be the first things unpacked, since those are the necessities. Office, desk, and kitchen items can be unpacked at a later time if needed. The goal of a move in is to establish/set up where you sleep, along with meeting the people you're going to live with for the next eight months.

Creating Harmony

Cooperating with roommates, even if you don't become instant best friends, makes for a beneficial academic environment. During the first week, writing out a cleaning agreement (who does what how frequently) and sticking it on the fridge really does help with cleanliness, and everyone knows what's expected. The same can be done for food if anyone cooks their own meals, and for quiet time in the dorm. While these agreements may not be followed to the letter, having expectations out there greatly reduces friction in many cases. An example cleaning chart would be:

Chore	Person Performing	Frequency in weeks
Vacuuming	X	1x per week
Mopping	Y	1x per 2 weeks
Toilet/Sink	Z	1x per 2 weeks
Shower	Y	1x per 2 weeks
Kitchen scrub/fridge cleanout	W	1x per week
Clorox wipe touch surfaces	X	1x per week

Generally resident assistants (RAs) are assigned to each floor. The purpose of a resident assistant is to help the floor transition to college and to facilitate floor growth. Resident assistants can also serve as mediators in the case of suite disputes. It is perfectly fine to go to your RA and talk through a suite problem, and many will also help with academic issues. Getting to know your RA is also a fun way to connect to people outside of your suite.

Establish a Routine

Around week four of school, you should be able to predict exactly how your days will go, since that's after activities settle down and classes swing into full gear. This includes ensuring time to

do homework, knowing when clubs meet, planning when you go to the gym, and eating regularly. It is important to establish this routine out of all the new items, it helps with academic success. For many, using a Google calendar to color code activities and block out study time, which helps overall.

Where to Study

Dorms may not ever be quiet spaces, and may not be suitable environments for you to focus in. There are a number of quiet spaces and dedicated study environments around campus. It's advisable to investigate these spaces before you need them. Some places include conference rooms in various buildings, the library, the student union, and major dedicated labs. Knowing what to expect when you go to these places will help you buckle down to work for academic success.

Conflicts and Residence Life

Also, college is a time of relative freedom. There will be people who drink from their first day on campus until their last, regardless of their age. Alcohol has made itself a part of many college careers and beyond, for good or ill. You are not obligated to drink if your friends are, or do any drugs that go around. If confronted on your personal choice, it is appropriate to refuse, and appointing yourself a designated driver is a good excuse in the face of persistence. If it's in your dorm and making you uncomfortable, it is also appropriate to discuss it with your resident assistant.

If you have a conflict that cannot be resolved with your roommates, it is imperative to solve it. Dorms are meant to build community, not generate additional stress. If you feel continuously stressed or unsafe in your dorm, the first step is to talk to your resident assistant. If the conflict is not resolved in three days, give or take one day, contact housing and copy disabilities support on emails. Student health is a priority on campus, and housing should be able to either resolve the conflict or find you more appropriate living arrangements. This may mean moving, but the temporary stress pays off later. If housing cannot solve the problem in a manner you deem suitable, you can request they break your housing contract at no fee and refund all the housing money so you can move off campus either immediately or at semester break.

Around Campus

Activities and Clubs

Living on campus means that home is a short walk from a wealth of activities. It is essential not to become entirely shut up in your dorm, and to engage with the campus. Going to the activity

fair and signing up for notifications from anything that catches your interest is a good way to start. Attending all these activities the entire semester is impractical, but by signing up you can get more information and attend a meeting or two. This allows you sufficient information to determine which activities are actually things you enjoy or ones that will benefit you professionally. A good rule of thumb for picking activities is one for physical activity, one for hobby/leisure, and one for professional, though yours may not work out that way. Gaining leadership and inter-team collaboration experience will serve you well when applying for internships and a job.

Those two to three activities are the ones which your energy should go into after you're academically set, though you may periodically attend events by other activities.

Dining Services

If you have specific dietary requirements, such as allergies or sensitivity, it is advisable to contact dining services as soon as possible. Since freshmen generally are mandated to have a meal plan at ERAU, working with dining services to get a balanced and appropriate diet is the first step. If dining services fails to provide a balanced, appropriate, and varied diet to your standards, then it is possible to discuss with housing, DSS, and dining services. They can resolve by removing the meal plan and allow you to use the money to purchase groceries for your own cooking instead.

Wellness Center

The Wellness Center on campus essentially functions as a primary care doctor for most students. Those without complicating health factors usually find the wellness center adequate to meet their needs. However, if specialty care is required, chances are you'll have to go off campus. Also, the physician(s) that have hours at the Wellness Center tend to be present in the morning only. Outside of physician hours, care is provided by a nurse practitioner in most cases. To prepare the Wellness Center if you have chronic or life threatening conditions, bring a signed note on letterhead from your primary care doctor at home for them to place in your file.

Budgeting

On the subject of finances, it is important to budget in a financial cushion, as well as to be realistic. College is not likely to be filet mignon every night, but with proper planning it doesn't have to be ramen either. While accurately budgeting for food, clothing, and gas, also include a couple hundred dollars in case you do have a medical or other variety of emergency. This means less stress if something does happen. Parents are likely to help in the case of emergency, but building your own cushion is essential too.

Grievance Procedures

There is the possibility you will need to solve a problem with either other students or with faculty which you cannot work around, and to which the other party refuses to work with you. In this case, the formal conduct process is available. The process can be used with other students and with faculty. It starts with a written complaint to the Dean of Students (ensure formal complaint is in the subject line). Once a complaint is submitted, the Dean of Students office is to file it in the university system and to contact you for further details. If possible, bring a typed outline of the additional details you provide or email one to the Dean after the meeting. It is important to keep all documentation and communication from this process, potentially in a folder on your computer. You do have the right to know the outcome of the process you begin, though you may need to email the Dean of Students to request this. The head of Disabilities Support can help with asking. If the case involves discrimination and you are not satisfied with the outcome, you can file with the Office of Civil Rights, and they will conduct an independent investigation.

Stress Management

This is college, there will be times when it is very stressful. The key is managing that stress, and remembering that your wellbeing is more important than the grades you get. It does not do to run yourself down to finish a paper to the point where you get sick. Effective time management, as in planning out study time and when you're doing long term assignments, is essential. Maintaining some kind of physical fitness also helps with stress. A ten-minute walk around the dorms outside does wonders for concentration if you're short on time. Also remember to make time for the things that are important to you, whether that's a volunteer position, a club, art, or total quiet time in the Chapel's private meditation room, so that there's something to look forward to outside of schoolwork. Basically, managing stress is essential, and self-care when you're stressed is equally important. If this means you eat the pint of ice cream in one sitting, so be it.

Summary

College is one great transition, and managing in college can be complex. It is highly recommended to ask for support if you need it, especially from family, friends, and Disabilities Support. There are ways to resolve conflict, and you do not have to live in a stressful situation. Come to college, study hard, and remember, enjoy life too.