

College Success Skills They Won't Know Until You Tell Them

Views and opinions from school counselors about the counseling profession

By Patrick O'Connor

This is always a hard time for high school counselors. The college application mania that blew through September, October, and November may have been pretty intense, but it also brought a number of really nice students to your office who rarely came in before—and now that they're in at the colleges of their dreams, there's a good chance they won't be by again.

There's no doubt these students are part of the casualty of high counselor caseloads, where the students who tend to get most of our time are either those needing our help or those who take the initiative to ask for our help. Between these two groups is a mass of wonderful students who do a good enough job of taking care of themselves, but they could probably get a little more out of school and life, if you only had, oh, say, a few hundred fewer students on your caseload.

Since that reduction isn't likely to occur soon, these students will return to the comfortable middle and be fine—but because counseling is our calling and not just our job, it's hard to see them go without at least a word or two of advice. To meet that need, here's a list of quick college tips—all fit in a text, a tweet, a poster, or the morning PA announcements—to try and meet their need to make a smooth college transition, and our need to help them. Start sharing them now—June will be here before you know it.

- You didn't share your locker combination; don't share your dorm key or combination. Trust me.
- You'll need two hours outside of class to study for every hour in class. Really.
- No one visits professors during office hours, other than before a test. Go often, with prepared questions.
- Give a professor a rough draft of a paper, and they may read it. Take it to their office, and they will read it—with you there.
- Good roommates bring power strips, strong earphones, study at the library, and keep their underwear in a drawer.
- You don't need a charge card, and your debit card should only let you spend what you have. Just say no to overdraft protection.
- Buy used books, but don't believe the highlighting of the previous owner. They may have flunked the class.
- College deadlines are like plane departure times. Miss it, and it's gone.
- Your parents will try to hold back and cry on the ride home once they drop you off at college. They might not wait. That's OK.
- Blogs that rate professors are sources of catharsis for contributors, not information for viewers.
- Colleges are in towns that need tutors, youth coaches, and soup kitchen workers. Just like here.
- Flash drives should be backed up regularly. Don't find out the hard way.
- Internships usually involve the making and delivery of coffee. Don't focus on what you're doing; focus on who you're serving.
- College is harder. If it isn't, you're doing it the wrong way.
- Of course you're ready. If you weren't, I wouldn't have sent the transcript.