

# What to Know **BEFORE** You Head Off to College

by Juli Shulem, MS, CPC, PCC



**S**TUDENTS HEADING OFF TO COLLEGE FOR THE FIRST TIME confront a plethora of new and challenging experiences, but those with ADHD and similar issues may find those experiences completely overwhelming. Coaching college students has allowed me to understand the problems they are up against. Let's take a look at some of the biggest challenges and how to overcome them with less overwhelm and stress.

One of the most obvious difficulties for students going from high school to college is that there is very little structure. This newfound freedom can be way too much to handle. The former support system from high school is not there any more. There is no one to help hold the student accountable.

Knowing what to expect can make a huge difference in the success a student experiences. Here are some techniques that will help equip you with the tools and skills you will need to flourish at this crucial juncture in your life.

## **High school is so different from college**

Just the way students attend classes is different from high school. College classes are primarily lectures, so students don't typically do assignments in class. In high school you often do assignments during class, but in college your time is spent taking notes on what is said. The assignments follow the lecture. *Therefore, **all** the work is homework!*

IN HIGH SCHOOL...	IN COLLEGE...
A regular school schedule goes from around 8 am until maybe 3 pm.	Classes can occur any time from 8 am until 10 pm.
Regular homework is due daily or weekly for each class.	Some classes don't even have homework. Classes that do will post it on a syllabus/website to find on your own.
Many tests or quizzes are given that count toward your grade.	Some classes may have only a midterm and final exam, which will determine your grade for that class. Nothing else.
You are often given step-by-step guidance and milestone deadlines for larger projects and papers.	Often no reminders for the steps due on a project or paper—just a deadline.
Attendance and participation are monitored and expected. Miss classes and you will hear from the school.	No one may even know you exist in the larger lecture classes, and unless they monitor by clickers, missing class is not noticed.
Teachers know you by name. They know your family, your siblings, and say hello in the halls.	Professors don't know who you are unless you go out of your way to introduce yourself or you attend a small college with fewer students.
Teachers will sometimes help you after or before class if they see you are struggling.	Professors have office hours and you often need to make appointments to see them between your classes. They are there, but you have to seek them out if you are struggling or have a question.
Your curriculum is pretty much determined and you are placed in your classes by the school.	There are deadlines regarding withdrawing, dropping, and registering for classes. You must determine what you need and enroll on time.
Your parents provide food and meals for you along with the family.	You need to seek out your own food and schedule when you are going to eat.
Classes ramp up and there are review classes at the beginning.	Courses go quickly and start the first day—it is assumed you are prepared for that class from day one.
Books are carried from class to class all day long.	Laptop, note-taking paper, writing instruments, and only necessary items for that class are carried.
Weekly knowledge of what is expected to read, study and prepare for. Homework assigned often daily and due the next day.	Syllabus showing the entire coursework to be covered. Huge reading requirements.
Parents could advocate for you, speak to your teachers and counselors to get you what you need.	With FERPA you are on your own. Legally your parents can't speak for you any longer and are out of the picture.
Homework and reading is monitored by teachers via quizzes and exams.	No one will know if you did or didn't do the reading—you must self-monitor and stay on track.
Parents often make sure you have clean clothes, snacks and clean rooms to keep you going	Yeah, those days are over!
They cannot kick you out for bad grades. (They may even keep you there longer!)	Academic probation is a reality and the college can keep you from returning if your grades falter after just two semesters/quarters.

## Things you can do this summer for college this fall

### 1. Learn to eat well—feed your brain.

Learning how to make balanced nutritional choices is essential for good brain functioning, focusing, energy, memory, recall, and balanced moods—all required for college success. Eating well is just as important as getting enough sleep and exercise. Plan a good diet—yes, this can be accomplished even in college. Read labels. Make good choices. If you already know what is good for your body—stick with that.

Since you will need to seek out your own food, schedule when you will eat, cook, buy groceries, and prepare meals. This all falls into the category of proper time management. Even if you are taking part in a meal plan and eating at the cafeteria on campus, there are designated times those places are open. If you are not accustomed to waking up in time to make it to the breakfast offering, start adjusting your sleep schedule this summer to do so.



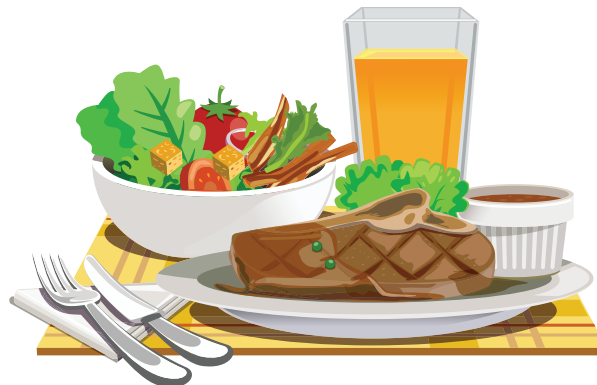
### 2. Learn to do laundry.

Being responsible for taking care of your clothing, your health, and your personal hygiene is part of becoming a responsible adult. If you leave your clothes all over your room at home—stop doing that.

When you share a dorm room, aside from your roommate not appreciating your stuff all over the floor, you run the risk of your things becoming lost, merging with a roommate's stuff, or even completely ruined. One student I worked with was actually kicked out of her apartment by the other three girls because she left piles of clothes all over. Putting everything away will create better harmony with future roommates. You will also not waste time searching for items you need when time is tight—which it will be. And if nothing else, properly caring for your clothing will allow you to keep and use your items longer.

Here is a quick laundry management process—and you might as well get used to it because you will have clothes the rest of your life.

- Select a **place** that dirty clothing will go (tall narrow hampers fit in dorms well).
- Pick a **day** that you can use the washer and dryer (Friday and Saturday nights and early mornings are when machines are most available).
- **Finish** the job—don't create another floor pile. Schedule not only the time to wash and dry the clothes, but to fold them, hang them, and put them all away.



**True Story:** I was standing in line at the Kmart near campus the weekend before final exams at UCSB, and the guy ahead of me had one item on the belt: a super pack of boxers. The checkout girl looked at the underwear, looked at the guy, and said, “Finals week?” To which the guy replied, “Yep! This is way faster than doing the laundry I forgot about.”

### 3. To bring or not to bring? That is the question!

Here is what to bring with you to college:

- **Emergency kit**, including Band-Aids, hydrogen peroxide, tweezers, matches, flashlight, batteries
- **Medical kit**, including pain relievers, cold care medicines, throat lozenges, vitamin C, personal medications. When you feel a cold coming on when you're away at college, having these things handy is really wonderful. So many of my student clients wake up with a sore throat and only then realize they have no cold care products with them. If you have to walk through rain to get to the student store or health clinic on campus to get an OTC—you won't be getting the rest you need instead. ***SUPER IMPORTANT:** Students must be sure they have access to renew any prescriptions. Be sure to sort this out in advance.*
- **School supplies**, stock up for three months of work. Remember you will go home for breaks, so re-stock then. Campus stores are usually pricey—shop beforehand.
- **Don't bring** your entire life's collections from home. There will be limited space, not to mention that valuables will not do well in a college dorm. Take only what you will need and use—including clothing for just three to four months. Change out during breaks.
- **Label everything** (even computer and phone chargers) so they don't get mixed up with those belonging to your roommates or on campus. Anything you care about should have your name and phone number on it.



## Strategies for college success

Ultimately, solidifying your personal skills before you head off to college will help you to adapt much faster and more easily. When you get settled on campus, prepare for the expectations of coursework and don't just get caught up with all the parties and orientations.

Start by figuring out where all your classes are located. Find out the best way to get there, and if you'll ride a bike, determine where you'll park it. Be sure you have the proper locks.

Next, go to the school's website and find the online location for each course. Download the syllabi for all your classes, so you don't rely on accessing them online each time you need to reference them. You may need the information quickly, and if the internet goes down, you're out of luck. I recommend you up a new folder on your computer desktop labeled with the term and year (Fall 2019, etc.) and place a digital copy of each syllabus into the folder for quick access.

It's also a good idea to print a copy of each syllabus and highlight the important points, such as:

- all exam dates and times
- names of all books (which you should order immediately if you have not done so already)
- how grading is done—know what percentage participation, exams, and assignments count toward your grade
- note the office hours for professors and teaching assistants. Plan to pop in during office hours early in the term, especially if you're unclear about a lecture or concept in the class. Waiting until you "might" figure it out is usually too late.

Here is a tip successful students adhere to: Read the assigned material BEFORE the class. Course syllabi lay out the entire term of work. You can get ahead if you set your mind to do so. When you do this, lectures make more sense, you have an idea of what will be covered, you can take notes more easily, and you can learn what the professor deems important from the reading, as the key items will stand out. Reading in advance allows you to be familiar with the material and and you will have a general idea about what may wind up on the midterm and final exams.

Taking time this summer to learn skills you've not yet mastered while still at home will give you the time you will need to do your schoolwork once at college. You want to avoid wasting time, because in college there is little time to waste—ever. It's very easy to get behind from the beginning, so do all you can to avoid that possibility. Do everything in your

power to avoid missing a class, too. Skipping even one or two classes in the quarter system can put you behind.

If you qualify for accommodations, you must get your paperwork into the appropriate office within the first 1-2 weeks of the term. Most exam accommodations need to be requested two weeks prior to the exam dates. In the quarter system, midterms can be just three weeks into the term, so you need to get on top of this quickly. To offer you those accommodations, the school needs to hire proctors. If you need note-taking services, find out where and how you can get that accommodation early on. Some professors agree to extending assignment deadlines when you ask. But remember: Even if you have accommodations you still have to do the work.

These steps should prepare the college-bound student for the first year at college nicely. Take the summer months to become comfortable with tasks for which you need to be completely responsible once you're on your own. Then once you arrive at school, you can focus on your classes and the college experience. Mastering skills while you're still at home will make for time very well spent. **A**

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**Juli Shulem, MS, CPC, PCC**, is a professional productivity life coach, speaker, and author focused on helping adults, entrepreneurs, and high school or college students with ADHD. Having started her work over thirty years ago as a professional organizer and time management consultant, Shulem has been helping individuals and companies improve their productivity and levels of success for many years. She holds a master of science degree in industrial organizational psychology, allowing her to work with clients worldwide in a variety of capacities. Her articles have been featured in magazines, websites, and blogs, and she has been a featured expert on podcasts and radio shows. Learn more at [www.coachjuli.com](http://www.coachjuli.com).

