



MARLBOROUGH COLLEGE

Going to University

ADVICE FOR COLLEGE LEAVERS

Going to university is one of the most challenging and interesting experiences in life, and if you have researched the course you have chosen, and obtained a place to pursue it, you should go forward with confidence and enthusiasm. This document is intended to support you in this major transition from life at home and at school, and to guide you so that you can take in your stride the challenges and sometimes the problems that can arise.

Those who have worked with you and cared for you at Marlborough are still interested in your progress and happiness, and you can always be in touch with us while you are at university if you so need or wish. Feel free to contact Kate Lady Cayley (cmc@marlboroughcollege.org) or Revd. Douglas Dales (douglas.dales@btopenworld.com).

Contents

Useful books for students & their families	2
Some early practical matters	2
A different teaching environment	2
Misconduct by supervisors	2
Being organised	3
Using Information Technology	3
Achieving balance	3
Making friends	4
Caring for yourself	4
Finding independent accommodation	4
Beyond university	5
Dealing with problems	5
Alcohol & drugs	6
Sexual relationships	6
Helping others	6

Useful books for students & their families

Everything you need to know about going to University
Sally Longson (Kogan Page, 2003)
ISBN 0 7494 3985 8

Student Survival Guide
L Clarke & J Hawkins (How To Books, Oxford, 2001)
ISBN 1 85703 766 9
www.studentsurvivalguide.co.uk
email: studentsurvival@howtobooks.co.uk

The Virgin University Survival Guide
Karla Fitzhugh (Virgin Books, 2004)
ISBN 0 7535 0818 4

Student Life: a Survival Guide
Natasha Roe (UCAS, Lifetime Careers publishing, 2002)
ISBN 1 902876 36 9

Some Early Practical Matters

Certain practical steps need to be taken on arrival at university: these may include getting a student rail card and local travel passes, a student union card, and taking out adequate insurance for your property, and perhaps personal accident insurance as well. You should register with a university doctor and possibly a dentist too, making sure that you get the free medical care to which you are entitled as a student, despite the paperwork involved. You need to consider also whether you need inoculations against influenza, meningitis, tetanus and other illnesses if you do not already have them.

A Different Teaching Environment

One of the sharpest contrasts between being at Marlborough and at university may well be the feeling that the adults who are teaching you are remote and not all that interested in relating to you. It arises partly because of the vast numbers to be taught at university these days, and because many academics are more interested in their research than in teaching. But it can also arise because students do not bother to respond to invitations by tutors and others, preferring to keep their distance and independence.

It is important to build up – if you can – a proper relationship with your tutor, or with some other adult with whom you can communicate.

If you are concerned about the quality or lack of teaching or supervision, or if you find that the goal-posts have been moved in terms of what is now available in the course for which you originally applied, you should not hesitate to raise such issues immediately through your tutor with a senior member of your university/college/faculty. A parental letter of enquiry to the vice-chancellor can sometimes ensure that such issues are properly addressed and resolved.

Misconduct by Supervisors

Do not hesitate to report immediately any improper conduct, bullying or harassment from a teacher or supervisor. Keep your parents fully in the picture from the beginning: don't bottle it up or think that it is your fault – it is not! You are an adult: stand your ground firmly and objectively, and keep a careful note of any relevant conversations or incidents.

Being Organised

You will have to organise your own week from the beginning, unless you are doing medicine, law or sciences in which case you may find it organised for you!

You will need to construct a practical timetable for academic work: four hours private academic work per day is a good rule of thumb: keep weekends free for other things. Try to avoid working late into the night.

You will need to find out where lectures/seminars are being held, and make sure that you take adequate notes, as well as collecting any handouts or on-line summaries of lectures with graphs and diagrams.

You will not need to buy every book that is recommended, but you should keep every booklist that is issued. You will probably be able to find many books you need second-hand if you are quick off the mark. *Amazon.com* and *Abe.com* are useful internet sites for this.

You will need to locate quickly libraries and other facilities relevant to your particular course of study. Some universities will monitor your attendance at lectures/seminars from the beginning.

Be properly organised from the beginning, using suitable files: many courses have multiple units running alongside each other, and muddle is a deadly enemy!

Using Information Technology

You will need to utilise university computer facilities as well as your own. Remember that plagiarism and illegal downloading are wrong and can undermine your work, and can even lead to disqualification from your degree. Follow departmental guidelines in this area with care.

Make sure that you always back up your computer work on an independent facility. This is absolutely vital when preparing coursework or dissertations. Take care to observe requirements for referencing, etc.: you may be penalised if you do not.

Achieving Balance

Do not overwork. Some courses are overloaded with examinations and assessments and it is possible to overtax the mind with stress, anxiety and late-night working. More is not better in higher education, and a workaholic mentality is the enemy of true learning and thought.

One of the keys to happiness at university is to lead a balanced lifestyle and to take full advantage of the many facilities and activities that are available. You may make many good friends this way, through sport, music, drama, politics, all of which make up a rich tapestry of activity and fun; but you will have to take the initiative and perhaps have to travel to them.

Finding some voluntary or charitable activity is another way of getting out into the community, as well as doing something useful. Some student unions organise such openings, and an afternoon each week spent helping in a school or hospital can be very rewarding. The government pays students to act as mentors to teenagers having problems with their education at school. These experiences will enhance your CV and may provide useful references.

Making Friends

Living in a hall of residence will not be so very different to living in College, apart from the fact that there will be fewer rules to be obeyed and people will go to sleep at wildly varying times! The key thing in the opening weeks is to get out and mix around as much as possible: keep busy and keep talking!

University is an extension of comprehensive education in the sense that people from every kind of background will be there, and it is wise not to get cooped up with any one clique of students. Get to know people, even if they do not appear at first glance to be the type of person you would normally meet. Finding genuine friends may take some time, but often the relationships first formed in a corridor or on a floor are those that stick for the remaining years at university and beyond.

If you are a Christian, or a member of any other faith, make contact with a congenial church, synagogue, mosque or religious group. University is a good opportunity to deepen your knowledge of your faith and also of other faiths and forming a link with a local church or joining a choir or orchestra may provide you with friendships outside the university.

Caring for Yourself

You will be master of your own affairs in terms of eating properly, getting enough sleep, doing your own laundry and shopping, and establishing a routine that will strike the right balance for you between academic work and a full and varied social life. Remember that poor diet and lack of sleep will pull down both sides of your life and work and may make you vulnerable to depression. Do not neglect your health! Keep basic medicines at hand for if you fall sick.

Take care of your possessions, and always lock windows and doors when leaving your room, even for a few minutes. Don't put yourself at risk after dark and plan and budget for safe transport home with friends.

One of the ways in which you can protect yourself from the onset of illness, isolation or depression is regular sleep. The lifestyle – 'work hard, play hard' can play havoc with your immune system and lead to recurring illness. Balance late nights with early ones, and re-hydrate properly after a night out!

Meanwhile, keep up sport and other reading outside your studies, practise music, drama or art, enjoy the countryside, take regular exercise, go to concerts and plays – cultivate whatever helps you to recreate best while you are at university, and you will have formed valuable habits to counterbalance your life at work in the future.

Finding Independent Accommodation

Moving out of a hall of residence raises the challenge of finding suitable accommodation and congenial friends with whom to share in your second and third years. Many of the books listed at the beginning give useful advice here, as will your student union, which will probably have a list of accredited properties available. It is worth checking the terms of contracts with them too: do not get ripped off. You may have to alter the terms of your insurance as well and take even more conscious care of your own property. You will probably have to start the process of finding rented accommodation shortly after the end of your first term: so make some good friends as soon as you can!

Beyond University

There are often funds available for travel, resources and further courses relevant to your studies while you are at university. But you will need to be proactive in obtaining these if they interest you. Find out where you can get advice about careers, or about further research after graduation. There are many interesting presentations by companies and other employers, and chances to visit work places: make the most of them from the beginning of your second year.

Sometimes a regular job in the vacations can be a useful window into the world of work, and of course any parental connections may well open doors to valuable experience. The contrast to student life offered by such periods of occupation can be a welcome relief and stimulus: you encounter quite a different way of relating to other adults, and if you take a sincere interest and prove reliable you will learn a great deal, perhaps even a job and certainly a useful reference.

Try and enrich your studies by interesting travel at home or abroad while you are a student. Travel and accommodation abroad are often cheap and subsidised for students; and as Dr Johnson said, "To travel is to live!"

Dealing with Problems

It is a sad fact that the incidence of mental illness among the general population, including students, is rising and this poses considerable problems for their friends and families, as well as for those running the universities.

For some students, some of their time at university can be quite unhappy, lonely or confusing, especially in the early months. While it is tempting to think that having escaped school, and being away from home, all will go well, and help will not be needed, experience shows that difficulties can arise for anyone, or for their friends with whom they may be living at quite close quarters.

Loneliness, overtiredness and depression as well as other difficulties can lead to serious problems - as can eating disorders; for some people these can cause long-term psychological harm.

An important step towards avoiding problems is not to become isolated or out of contact with friends outside university, or with your own family. Your university or college will provide you with information on how to handle things and where to turn for help and advice if needed: so too will the student union.

You should be able to locate advertised medical and counselling services and help-lines. You may feel that admitting to being depressed reflects badly on your integrity as a person, or your academic progress but help and medical support are readily available and often swiftly effective. Think of depression as another illness and it will seem more objective and less threatening.

You may feel that your problems are your own, or that admitting to being depressed reflects badly on your integrity as a person, or your academic progress. But depression, however caused, is an illness: help and medical support are readily available and often swiftly effective. Think of depression as another illness and it will seem more objective and less threatening.

For more help on the subject of depression, see www.cwmt.org and www.studentdepression.org

Alcohol & Drugs

Alcohol and drugs are obvious problems among young people, in school and at university. Spiking drinks is unfortunately becoming more frequent among students, and avoiding it requires common sense and constant vigilance. Socialise with friends you can trust. Safeguard your own health, physical and mental, and do not feel pressured by how others are behaving. Take the long view and do not heap up problems for later life.

Sexual Relationships

One of the most challenging issues is deciding your own sexual ethics and sticking to them while you are at university. Opportunities for casual sexual relationships abound, and too much alcohol can reduce inhibitions and render people vulnerable to unwanted advances. Strong romantic attachments may well lead people to engage in full sexual relationships with a stable partner for some time. You need to remember, however, that embarking on such a sexual relationship entails considerable emotional investment and risk, and that this needs to be taken into consideration before making any decisions in this area.

You should already be aware of the risks of unwanted pregnancies, the impact of abortion, and the high level of sexually transmitted diseases. You have the right to choose what is the right course for you. Remember that you have the right to reject unwanted sexual advances, heterosexual or homosexual, and that, if you do decide to have sex, contraception is always best used unless you want to have a baby. If you need help or advice in this area do not hesitate to seek it from a doctor, counsellor or chaplain, or from your parents.

Helping Others

Do not turn a blind eye to behaviour in your friends that might have a destructive outcome and lead to such problems as self-harm or attempted suicide. Know the signs and be aware of possible depression or other problems but, at the same time, remember that your friends are also adults and that, while you may feel responsibility towards them, you cannot be responsible for them. Also remember that a good friend cannot be an effective therapist. If people need medical or psychological help, you must try and steer them in that direction.

In the unlikely event that the worst does happen, and someone close to you, or near you in your hall of residence, attempts suicide, you must act immediately to get medical help, probably at a hospital, and stay with them if possible. Friends at hand can help stave off a deepening sense of isolation and remorse. You should inform the appropriate college/university authorities (and possibly the chaplain) that a serious situation has arisen, without immediately going into precise details that may be confidential. The hospital should communicate these to the college/university and to their family with their consent.

You would do well to take the same discreet approach with other sympathetic friends until the situation has been stabilised. This situation is too serious for student gossip, and with others you must try and reassure the person involved that they still have the respect and affection of their friends. At the same time, you will probably need some moral support yourself, and perhaps counselling, to help you cope with the inevitable feelings of alarm and anger that can arise. Realise that shock takes some time to work through the system, and that mixed feelings are no sign of disloyalty to your friend.