



Making the Most of Your College Years: Memo to New Students

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Understand why you are going to college. Make it your dream and no one else's. Then align your life and your habits with your boldest aspirations.

“Meaning is not something you stumble across, like the answer to a riddle or the prize in a treasure hunt,” writes John W. Gardner. “Meaning is something you build into your life. You build it out of your past, out of your affections and loyalties, out of your experience of humankind as it is passed on to you, out of your own talent and understanding, out of the things and people you love, out of the values for which you are willing to sacrifice something.” The elements are all there. But you are the only one who can put them into the special pattern that can define your unique life.

Really learn to listen—to yourself, friends, lecturers, classmates, authors, music, and the natural environment.

Listen with an inner ear to both the spoken message and to what is not being said.

When someone writes or says something of note, stop and ask yourself: what if the opposite is the case?

Be surprised by something every day. Notice things like a flower or a butterfly, generous people, inspired writing, music that moves you.

Dumb questions, curiosity, and doubt are essential for learning. Remember that we all stop learning if we stop being willing to risk failure.

Ask a lot of Why, What If, What For, and What's Really Important questions.

Develop your capacity for wonder, imagination, intuition, curiosity, questioning and exploring.

Creativity involves playfulness, resisting conformity or conventional wisdom, questioning standard operating procedures, and recombining and re-contextualizing different ideas.

Learning requires freedom and space to allow the mind and heart to wander into unexpected places, to cross boundaries, to explore new territory, and discover new perspectives.

Humility is a virtue, but too much can paralyze. Believing in yourself can give you the courage to experience new ideas and to discard old prejudices. Self-confidence can breed its own luck.

Think of yourself as an architect, designing your own dreams and aspirations—set high expectations for yourself, and occasionally make unreasonable demands on yourself.

Make a list of the five values that most accurately define who you are and the five values that define the person you want to become.

Much is expected from you -- because you, and we, are among the most privileged individuals anywhere. Our obligation for service beyond self comes not just because each of us has been given so much but because each of us have so much to offer.

Be prepared to embrace paradox and complexity in college---be prepared to fight for your beliefs, but first understand what you believe and why. As a friend suggests, “be bold in what you stand for, but careful in what you fall for.”

Set aside time for reflection, meditation, friends, family, exercise, good music, passions, compassion and love. Time is one of your crucial resources in college. Prepare “Not To Do” lists-- eliminate waste-makers in your life, and learn the art of politely saying no.

You will enjoy greater freedom in college than you have ever had. But with freedom comes responsibility. Respect your fellow students and honor generosity, openness and courage when you find it. Remember it is a privilege and not a right to be part of a college community.

Remember, too, that the unexamined, uncreative and uncommitted life is less worthwhile.

Discover your own voice as a writer, a debater, poet, musician and citizen.

Remember the old proverb: “It’s never a disgrace to reach for the stars, only to have no stars to reach for.”

Get adopted by a handful of mentors, including student and faculty advisors. Go to office hours even if you don’t have a problem; invite a professor to lunch with a small group of your friends.

Be aggressive in seeking out internships and research opportunities. Ask all your professors, friends of the family and your Career Center.

Get involved, yet beware of over-committing yourself. You only have 168 hours in a week—set smart expectations and take good care of your health. We make ourselves whole only by accepting our limits—and not trying to be gods.

Diversify your friendships—reach out and befriend those whose backgrounds are different from your own. The painter Georgia O’Keeffe noted that nobody really sees a flower. It’s so small and most of us really don’t have the time. “And to see takes time -- like to have a friend takes time.”

Expect challenges and setbacks in college—everyone experiences them. Have the courage to be patient in the face of complexity and difficulty. Remember that perfection is the enemy of the good. As a friend suggests, a lot of disappointed people have been waiting forever on the street corner for the bus marked “Perfection”.

And remember:

- **YOU ALWAYS MISS 100% OF THE SHOTS YOU NEVER TAKE.**
- Be efficient and reasonably quick, yet don’t hurry.
- *Be yourself—everyone else is taken.*
- **If you can’t be on time, be early!**
- *It’s never too late to have a happy childhood!*

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