

ADVICE FOR INCOMING STUDENTS FROM A RECENT PH.D. GRADUATE

FINDING YOUR FOOTING

It's the first day of the Fall quarter. You are (mostly) settled into your dorm or figured out your commute, you've met your roommates, and you've gotten to experience the wonders of on-campus dining. Now you're ready to take advantage of everything UC San Diego has to offer:

- UC San Diego is a big place. Get acquainted with the campus map and plan out your route to classes. Give yourself extra time to get to class - it's better to be early than late.
- Get to know your classmates in your Freshman writing classes or other required First-year courses. Your classmates are also trying to make friends and make sense out of this new experience.

MAKING THE MOST OUT OF CLASS

You're going to experience different kinds of classes and teaching styles: Large lectures and small discussion sections, general-education requirements and major-specific courses, instructors that tell you what you need to know and instructors who get you to figure it all out. Here are some guidelines to help you navigate any class:

- Read the syllabus. Seriously. Read it. Even a sparse syllabus will provide essential information about the course and tell you what you can expect about the class and instructor. You will also set yourself miles apart from your colleagues by not asking a question that can be answered by, "It's on the syllabus."
- Go to class. This may seem like a no-brainer, but as the quarter progresses you may think your time could be better spent doing other things. Ignore those thoughts. You'll retain information better hearing it in-person and then again on a podcast (if the instructor does this). Also instructors take note of who shows up. If your grade is borderline, having a record of attending class may be the deciding factor.

DEVELOPING STUDY HABITS

You'll quickly see that a lot of study skills that worked in high school don't translate to college. So it's important to start early on figuring out what works for you.

- Do the assigned reading and problem sets. Even if these are never graded, engaging with the course material is how you learn it.
- Experiment with different study settings. You might discover you work best in study groups in Geisel's group study room or you might find you do best in your own Fortress of Solitude (also known as Geisel Library's 8th Floor).

ASKING FOR HELP

Contrary to popular belief, asking for help is an act of strength. It is okay to not know something! In fact, you are in college because you have things to learn. As you go along, you'll realize that if you don't know or understand something, chances are a lot of people don't get it either and will be grateful if you speak up.

- Ask your instructors and instructional assistants for help. They want to help you and talk to you. If you are uncomfortable asking in front of the class, go to office hours. People LOVE it when students come to their office hours. If you are nervous about going by yourself, bring one of your classmates along.
- Make use of one of the many MANY tutoring and study programs on campus. You can find more information about many of the services on the Teaching + Learning Commons website, and here: <https://students.ucsd.edu/>, or ask us: commons@ucsd.edu.

GETTING INTO THE GROOVE

You've found your classes, you've made some friends, you may even be enjoying topics you didn't think you would. You've made a huge transition in your life and have thrived - time to say "yes" to everything, right? Not so fast.

- College is a marathon, not a sprint. Pace yourself. Figure out the rhythm of an academic year before signing up for that additional co-curricular activity, taking on another class, or going on that trip with your new friends right before midterms.
- Prioritize your wellbeing. Late nights, roommates, and stress is the perfect recipe for getting sick and falling behind. Carve out time for yourself to make sure you are sleeping, eating actual food, and disinfecting your environment.

APPROACHING CHALLENGES

In every relationship, there is a honeymoon period and your relationship with your college experience is no different. After the sparkly-newness of your first quarter fades, you will start to really notice the challenging aspects of being a college student.

- If your grades aren't what you want them to be, it's time to reflect on what may have contributed to that. Maybe your study practices didn't work for you, maybe you would benefit from tutoring, or maybe you signed on for too much. Reflect without judgment and try different tactics for the next quarter.
- You are going to encounter diverse points of view that may challenge your ideas and beliefs. When that happens, slow down and put your developing critical thinking skills to work. Examine the evidence and try to understand where the other person is coming from. Always remember to engage respectfully and challenge ideas, not people.

PLANNING AHEAD

4 years may seem like a long time, but it will speed by very quickly. Because of this, it's important to start thinking ahead about what you want to accomplish.

- Determine if your choice of major is setting you up for what you want to do after college and how you can pursue other activities that support your future plans.
- Take regular stock of how you feel about your college journey. Do you like the young professional you are becoming? Would you regret not taking that class outside of your major? Have you always wanted to join a choir or a dance team? Now is the time to figure out what you want and go after it!
- Remember that while these years will be intense, you are not alone. Reach out to your support system and resources on campus such as the Career Center or CAPS for career and personal development. Also, get to know us in the Teaching + Learning Commons!

This compilation of advice was written by recent Ph.D. graduate and current Engaged Teaching Postdoctoral Scholar Rebecca Hardesty

Get support for challenging courses, subjects, and projects. Whether in a group setting, through one-on-one assistance, or independently, our resources will help you develop effective learning and problem-solving strategies.



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