



TRANSITION TO UNIVERSITY

What to Know to be Successful

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Dr. Melinda Harper has been actively involved in teaching and research in higher education and providing clinical services since 2000. Currently, she is a licensed psychologist and clinical partner with Charlotte Psychotherapy & Consultation Group in Charlotte, NC. She provides psychological services, including individual and group psychotherapy to adolescents and adults. She also offers comprehensive psychological evaluations assessing a variety of issues, including educational assessment of intellectual abilities and diagnostic testing. In addition to her clinical practice, she is employed and tenured as Professor of Psychology at Queens University of Charlotte.

At Queens, she teaches courses on General Psychology, Child & Adolescent Psychopathology, Group Dynamics, and Practicum in Leadership Skills. She is also actively involved in research and application of those findings to improve young adult adjustment. Specifically, her current research endeavors include understanding the variables that contribute to a successful transition from high school to college for high school seniors and college freshmen. She is the Director of the **Transition to University (T2U)** program held at Queens University of Charlotte. This program teaches both rising and current first-year college students a variety of skills necessary to facilitate their adjustment to university life. Her work is financially supported by a Title III Grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Education (# P031A140010) to Queens University of Charlotte. Her research on this important developmental transition in young adult life has been recognized in the two-book series by Momentum Press, ***Transition to Success: Training Students to Lead Peer Groups in Higher Education*** (Harper & Allegretti, 2018) and ***Transition to Success: The Transition to University Program*** (Harper & Allegretti, 2018). In addition, she has published numerous research papers in journals, including *Teaching of Psychology*, *Journal of Women's Health Physical Therapy*, *The Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* and *The Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. She has contributed articles and interviews to the *Charlotte Observer*, *Charlotte Parent Magazine*, *Charlotte Magazine*, and local news including *WCNC* and *WCCB*.

Dr. Harper graduated with distinction with a Bachelor of Arts in psychology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. During her doctoral graduate training at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, she was involved in a number of clinical and research projects, including the Study of Tennessee Adolescent Romantic Relationships (STARR) project. Her dissertation focused on the behavior of self-silencing and its association with relational and individual functioning among adolescent romantic couples. She completed her clinical internship at Yale University School of Medicine. At Yale, she worked for the Adolescent Inpatient/Outpatient Program and for the Dual Diagnosis Partial Hospitalization Program, specializing in the treatment of substance addiction comorbid with mood disorders. Following her pre-doctoral internship, she accepted a post-doctoral fellowship with Yale University Health Services providing individual, couples, and group therapy and assessment to the Yale University academic community.



FIRST YEAR IN FIVE STAGES

1. The Honeymoon Period. Anxiety, anticipation, and an initial sense of freedom are common. Homesickness and the desire for frequent contact with family are common. You may be getting to know roommates, making new friends on campus, and finding your way around. This period tends to be a time when you might incur many expenses for items such as textbooks, school supplies, and room decorations/furnishings.

2. Culture Shock. You begin to grasp the realities of adjusting to college. You begin to get feedback on your progress in class. You might experience shock at the workload, grades on first exams, or time management problems. You may feel out of place and anxious. For example, you might be dealing with the following items for the first time:

- Sharing a room with strangers.
- Budgeting time and money.
- Finding support and being a self-advocate.
- Managing a commute from home to school.
- Navigating a new community.
- Managing challenging coursework and a job.

This phase will pass. This feeling is very typical. There are free resources on campus to help-- you just need to ask.

3. Initial Adjustment. As the year goes on, you will begin to develop a routine. You will become familiar with campus life and new academic and social environments. If you are living on a campus, it is also completely normal for conflict to develop between roommates. You may be sharing a room with someone who is quite different from you. Most students are able to work things out when they discuss issues directly with one another or with a Resident Advisor.

If you are a commuter, you may have feel like you don't fit in with the campus community or know the campus and its resources as well as your peers. Commuters also must balance their responsibilities at home and at school. It is important that you work to build relationships with your instructors and classmates. You can depend on outside support systems and also access the school's academic and social services.

You may reassess your time-management strategies, begin to explore majors or careers, and make plans with academic advisors. You might begin to plan to move off campus for next fall.

4. Homesickness or Loss of Confidence. With final exams finished, many students return home for winter break, and there may be concerns about how you will adjust to routines at home. For many,



winter break is an opportunity to catch up on sleep and reconnect with old friends. You will also begin to receive your first-semester grades and may experience joy, disappointment, or relief. Homesickness often occurs right after a vacation. You may become a bit insecure and have some misgivings about your new environment. You might wonder if you belong at college or if college is really all it is supposed to be. Homesickness is normal. As with any major transition period, students will have their ups and downs. Many students feel homesick at one time or another during their first year.

5. Acceptance and Integration. You finally feel like you are a part of the college community. You begin to think of it as home. You feel more confident with your time-management skills and experience less stress with exams. You will also be enrolling in classes for the fall and considering options for the summer. You might have mixed feelings about leaving for the summer and decide to stay to take classes and/or pursue summer work opportunities.



University vs. High School: What to expect in College

	High School	College
Class Time	6 hours per day.	12 hours per week.
Study Time	Around 1-2 hours per day.	Rule of Thumb: 2 hours of study per 1 hour of class; if going full time (12 hours). That equals 24 hours of studying per week. AND don't forget your part-time or full-time job! That could easily add up to more than 40 hours a week!
Tests	Weekly quizzes at end of chapter; regular tests throughout semester	2 to 4 exams each semester; final is typically cumulative and can count as much as 50% or more of your final course grade!
Grades	Passing grades (even D's) usually get you by.	To stay off academic probation or have a class count towards major you must keep a C average! C's or better are usually okay.
Teachers	Many times take attendance, may check notebooks, use whiteboard-outlines, imparts knowledge and facts, teach the text. Offer reminders of due dates.	"Professors" (check their title!); rarely teach the text; often lecture nonstop without notes or outlines; require research; require thinking beyond the facts; rarely take attendance. YOUR responsibility to know dates (Drop/Add/Withdraw dates, dates of exams)
Free Time	Usually structured, parents, teachers and other adults set your limits.	Single biggest part of your schedule, and single biggest common problem among college students to manage.



How to Use the Time Management Worksheet

PART 1: Required Commitments & Responsibilities

1. Fill in all of your classes.
2. Fill in the hours you work or study. *Try to commit to “work” Monday-Thursday with Fridays being your “day off” with the exception of classes.
3. Fill in the time it takes to get ready and travel between your home, school, and work.
4. Fill in any other regular appointments (piano lessons or other extracurriculars, sports practice, etc.).
5. Fill in a Lunch and Dinner Break.
6. Establish a set time to go to sleep and get up in the morning.

PART 2: Free Time

1. Assign time for studying for each class.
2. Try to study for classes on the days they meet. If not possible, the day before or right after.
3. Use large blocks for major tasks, smaller blocks for reviews.
4. Schedule regular breaks and rewards for completing a task—don’t marathon study, aka “cramming”. Mass practice is worse than distributive practice (rotate those subjects!).
5. Schedule fun events-- recreation, watching television, going out with friends.

PART 3: Review

1. Have you found “hidden time” you didn’t know you had?
2. Is there enough time available to study for all your classes?
3. If your schedule cannot accommodate all the demands on your time, what can you change in your schedule?
4. Does your schedule look reasonable? Sustainable?



Time	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
7:00							
8:00							
9:00		PSY 101 9:00-9:50		PSY 101 9:00-9:50		PSY 101 9:00-9:50	
10:00			CHEM 101 10:00-11:30		CHEM 101 10:00-11:30	FYE class 10:00-10:50	
11:00			↓		↓		
12:00		ENG 101 12:00-1:20		ENG 101 12:00-1:20			
1:00		Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Football Game/Day Event
2:00							/
3:00			CHEM 101 LAB 3:00-5:30				\
4:00			↓				/
5:00					Dinner/Shower		\
6:00	Dinner/Shower	Dinner/Shower	Dinner/Shower	Dinner/Shower	SPAN 101 6:00-8:30 pm	Dinner/Shower	/
7:00	Chapter Meeting				↓		\
8:00	↓				↓	Greek Social (Mixer)	/
9:00						↓	\
10:00	↓			(College Night)	(College Night)		/
11:00				↓	↓	↓	/



Course Load and How to Manage your Schedule

The most recognized formula for college course load is:

- 3 credit hours (1 course) = 3 hours in class per week = 6-9 hours study time per week.
- 12 credit hours (4 courses) = 12 hours in class per week = 24-36 hours study time per week.

Full time students enroll in 12 - 18 credit hours per semester. Part time students enroll in 1 - 11 credit hours per semester. The course load that is best for you depends on a variety of factors, such as other commitments, study skills, time management skills, and self-discipline. To determine the course load which is most appropriate for you, please refer to the guidelines indicated:

Employment Obligations: Course Load if Working

Less than 20 hrs -- 12-18 credit hours
20 hrs per week -- 6-12 credit hours
30 hrs per week -- 3-9 credit hours
40 hrs per week -- 3-5 credit hours

How many courses should I take?

I work ____ hours per week. Therefore, I should take ____ credit hours.

It is important to remember that there are only **24 hours in each day and only 168 hours in each week**. It is common for college students to try to participate in more activities than their time allows and, as a result, perform poorly in many of the activities. Unfortunately, this poor performance often includes school work. Make your choices with all possible variables being considered.

What other variables make up my day?

- Healthy sleep is considered to be 8-10 hours per night. If you sleep less than 8 hours a night, you are already in sleep debt/sleep-deprivation.
- Eating alone takes approximately 30 minutes (with no food prep required); eating with others can take 1-1 ½ hours per meal. Ideally, you will have 3 meals a day so approximately 1 ½-3 hours per day are spent with food preparation and eating.
- Social obligations or spontaneous activities: average 6 hours a day (social media!); face-to-face socializing can range from less than 5 hours a week to more than 16 hours a week.



Parent – College Student Contract

Complete the following questions to establish a contact together. Please adapt any of the questions to fit your individual situation.

1. How many times a week will we talk on the phone?
2. How many times per day will we text?
3. Will we be friends on FaceBook or other social media?
4. How much money per month will I have for incidental expenses?
5. What will be the consequences if I accidentally spend more than the monthly expense money?
 - a. The first time:
 - b. Additional times:
6. What are your thoughts about me applying for my own credit card?
7. What will my curfew be when I come home for vacations or weekends?
8. Do you expect me to come home on fall/spring break? Holidays?
9. When I come home to visit, what are your expectations for family time versus social time for my friends?
10. Will we have “pop-and-stop?” (unexpected campus visits)? How much notification should be given?
11. Will you be in contact with my RA and/or academic advisor without my knowledge?
12. Grades are protected by federal law; how private will my grades be, and how informed will you want to be about my grades? What are your expectations for cumulative GPA?
13. Will I have a car on campus? If so, who will pay for the gas when I am on campus? Who will pay for the gas when I come home?



Planning Ahead: Check-list of what to do!

First 24 hours

- Unpack and actually move-in. Everyone else is doing this also so you're not missing out on anything just yet 😊 On the short list: organize your bathroom items, make your bed, organize your closet, and set up your desk/study area.
- Invite your roommate/suitemate to join you and introduce yourselves to your immediate neighbors (beside you, across the hall from you). You may never know that you're about to meet your future best friend, or the best neighbor who watches out for your room when you're gone for the weekend.
- Offer to help one person on your hall with a move-in task. A great (and non-awkward!) technique to introduce yourself to someone on your hall.
- Introduce yourself to your RA.

First 48 hours of move-in (before classes start)

- Say hi to your dorm neighbors and RA.
- Review options for signing up for campus alerts via email/text/phone. Put Campus Security in your phone, maybe even on speed dial.
- Go on your personalized campus tour of your class schedule. Pay attention to how long it takes to walk from your dorm to the classroom. Look for Blue Light/Campus Security areas for emergency services.
- Visit the bookstore, even if you don't buy books from there. Professors may not provide textbook information until the first day of class; however, they provided textbook information to the campus bookstore *last* semester. Books are ordered and labeled by course and section in the campus bookstore, so you have a chance to get an early peek to order online.
- Visit the library, and not just from the outside. Walk inside, scan the library and locate the study carrels, and don't forget to pick up information on the library's hours of operation.
- Wander past the Student Health Center, Campus Police or Security office, and the Academic Resource (Tutor) Center. You don't need to go inside, but it's worth getting a casual glimpse of the buildings.
- Buy dorm essentials: living or cleaning supplies from Target (just in case you didn't pack laundry detergent in your moving boxes), snacks and drinks for on-the-go or quick morning breakfast, any additional school supplies (essential is calendar; I recommend the one that you can see the entire week across both pages)



- Set your schedule: with your new calendar, go ahead and outline your class schedule and get an idea of what your week ahead may look like. Use the Time Management Sheet 😊
- Provide your parents with your personally identified emergency on-campus contact. This may be your roommate or suitemate, not necessarily your RA.

First week of college

- Over-estimate how long it will take to get to each classroom on the first day of each class.
- Make sure to get a copy of the syllabus, even if it is posted only online—**PRINT IT OUT!** Your syllabus is the only contract you have between you and your professor. It clearly outlines the class expectations, projects (graded or not graded), exams, and most importantly, attendance policy. You should familiarize yourself ASAP with each class's scheduled exams (goes right into your calendar) and also attendance policy. Attendance points can be the different in your final grade, or help you decide which class to skip for much-needed rest (if there is no penalty for absences).
- For each class, make sure to check the syllabus for required assignments/tests submitted online versus in-class.
- **Check your university's Drop-Add dates and Withdrawal dates.**
- Visit the Office of Disability/Academic Resource Center for accommodations documentation.
- Take the time to introduce yourself to your professor, ideally during office hours. If you can't make office hours, arrive early or stay a few minutes after class to say hello. Quick script: "Hi, my name is _____. I just wanted to introduce myself and say how excited I am to be in your course. See you next week/class."
- By the end of the first week, commit to saying hello to at least one person sitting beside or near you in *each* class.
- Pace yourself socially; commit to at least one social activity but *no more than three nights* out in the first week. This number includes weekend nights (please see tips on first college weekend).
- Keep saying hi to your neighbors. Stop by your RA's room (if the door is open) and say hi and wave. 😊
- Invite your roommate/suitemate/neighbor to dinner with you.
- Attend as many informational sessions for clubs/organizations as you can. You never know which group may unexpectedly grab your interest. And there's usually free food and drinks!
- Although not mandatory, attend at least one dorm event or meeting. Great follow-up to say hello (again) to your neighbors.



First college weekend (after classes have started)

- Friday after class:
 - Run errands (Target or grocery run, pick up mail/books)
 - Take care of “you”: great time to exercise, clean your room, laundry (during day!), etc.

- Saturday
 - Plan on one social activity; invite a NEW friend to join you
 - Review schedule for upcoming week
 - Plan when to take time to visit library and do first study round (that afternoon, Sunday afternoon?)

- Sunday before 2nd week of classes:
 - Study afternoon for at least 2 hours; complete homework
 - review your weekly calendar and make sure your classes are written down for the week
 - review your class syllabi to see if anything is due this week
 - plan on attending office hours (possibly for first time)
 - Get a good night’s sleep!