Dear High School Graduate:

Whether you and your college-bound classmates are heading to a research university across the country or a small liberal arts college just up the road, it's exciting (and potentially a bit intimidating) to think about a completely new academic environment.

Accordingly, we have compiled some advice to help guide your success in the next phase of your life. We've distilled some of our own experiences from working at high schools and colleges, along with some of the feedback we've received from college students, to give you the essence of what you need to be successful over the next four years.

Combine these suggestions with your ability and best efforts, and you will succeed brilliantly over the next four years. We wish you the best of luck.

Live in the Academic Moment

A college education is a classic process-versus-product paradigm. Plenty of students complain about their work or obsess about their G.P.A., but that's just wasted energy and time. Don't get caught up in any academic ennui. Instead, focus on your assignments, papers and projects for their intrinsic learning value; the grades will come naturally.

Don't Study in Your Room

Unless you have a spartan single and concentration powers of steel, your room is the worst place to study because of the comfort and the distractions.

Given the realities of dorm life, it's far too easy to wander across the hall and talk to your neighbor, or to have Facebook on while you glance back and forth from your book to the screen.
Find a spot that works for you, and call it your "homework home." A carrel in the upper stacks of the main library usually works perfectly; there are no distractions. Oftentimes, smaller, more lightly used libraries on campus have great study spaces and light traffic. Unoccupied classrooms or common areas with less traffic can have excellent lighting, privacy and plenty of space to spread your materials.

**Find the Working Side of Academia**

Every college has opportunities for undergraduates to do research or to assist in large-scale academic endeavors, so actively seek them out, even if you haven't been on campus very long. You'll be rewarded by the people you'll meet and the insight you'll gain on the institution as a whole.

If your financial aid package includes work-study opportunities, look for employment in departments and libraries instead of going to dining services or the athletic department. The connections you'll make outside the classroom could even lead to study opportunities.

**Choose Professors, Not Classes**

It's a classic picture of undergraduate life: a student leafing through the course guide, picking classes for the next term based on what looks interesting and also fulfills curriculum requirements. Don't follow that model.

Find the best professors on campus and take their classes, even if they don't seem interesting at first read. You may find these professors by talking to your adviser, using the school's faculty review resources and asking older students about their favorite faculty members. Follow their leads.

A good professor will turn neutral subject matter for you into a joy; a poor professor will blunt your interest in a subject area you love. As a corollary, visit several classes the first week or two of a term. Most colleges have some sort of shopping period when the class rosters haven't been finalized. Visit 8 or 10 or even more classes during that time before you settle on your final schedule.

You are only going to take 35 to 40 courses during your time in college. Why waste one on a poorly designed class or a dry, energy-sapping professor?

**Get Connected to Campus Life**

Academic clubs, social organizations and professional associations take on a larger, more applied and energetic meaning in college. You should jump in with both feet, even if it means getting outside your comfort zone a little bit.
The breadth of opportunity for student interaction is outstanding even at the smallest of colleges. Getting involved will dramatically increase your enjoyment and experience.

**Always Go to Class**

It may seem silly to remind you to go to class. But it won't be quite so obvious as you settle into college life, when you realize that there's no detention or punishment for missing classes, when you discover that the professor's lecture notes are online and as your roommate pulls the covers over his head when the alarm clock rings for an 8 a.m. class.

Your class hours drop by more half when you go to college. You have access to some of the most accomplished experts in their field, and you are paying a tremendous amount of money to have access to them. Don't waste it.

**Go to Office Hours**

Professors like talking to students. Seriously. If you go to office hours with questions, ideas or just to find out more about the course material, you'll be surprised at how enthusiastic (most) professors are to sit and talk to you. More important, you may be surprised to learn how they'd like to get to know you beyond the paper or lab assignment you've handed in.

Take advantage of ways to talk to professors outside the classroom. You'll learn more, have a greater appreciation of your academic experience and have more ways to find mentors, professional and academic references, and employers for research projects.

**Take Care of Yourself**

Part of college life is learning how to take care of yourself. Regulate your diet by eating healthy foods and resisting the temptations of the unlimited and unsupervised dining options. Exercise to maintain your physical health: sign up for a gym class, join an intramural team and find people who share your athletic interests. Don't forget to sleep. Keeping your body well cared for will help you stay healthier and be more successful academically.

**Be Patient**

Many students report that their high school experience is both a blessing and a burden as they make the transition to college. Whether you graduated from a comprehensive public high school with 3,000 students or a small private
school with 35 seniors, you will find that college life is simply different and that you'll need resilience to acclimate to the differences.

This next stage for you is about living and learning independently, skills that develop over time. Be patient as you and your classmates settle into college life. Don't expect to be perfect, but draw strength and inspiration from your previous learning experiences. Good luck!

_Do you have any advice for college freshmen? Share your thoughts in the comment box below._