

I asked the Fall 06 Freshman to answer the following question at the end of their first semester here at CMU.

What is the most important advice you would give to an incoming freshman about surviving/thriving here at CMU?

Here are all the answers (uncensored) that I received. I don't agree with everything said here, but taken all together, I think the advice is very sound (and at times contradictory).

Don't be afraid to make a lot of friends. You'll regret not doing it.

Have Fun!

Pass out of as many courses as they let you, even ones where your advisor is on the fence about you passing out. Go to SI and/or office hours, even if it's just to check your homework.

C.S. is NOT JUST CODING!!! If you think it is, prepare to be "proven" wrong.

Take 21-127. Attend all classes unless you're sure you don't need them. Some TAs are really good, and some teach absolute rubbish. Make sure you know the difference and do not learn the wrong thing!

Don't think you're too good for SI, especially in Concepts (seek help). Don't underestimate your first test. If you didn't study much in high school, that's about to change. Explore before classes get too difficult. It's IC points and it's fun.
NEVER MISS CTFwS!!!

RELAX!!! It will be hard. It will be so for you, and for everyone else. You're all going through it together. Talk to your advisor. Don't skip class. Get 8 hours of sleep even if you think you don't need it. Don't worry about grades too much yet. Be ready and open to changes. Listen to the advice people give you. They know.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT GPA GOING DOWN!!!

Make the most out of orientation week, in terms of getting to know people and having fun. After orientation, learn to manage your time well or else the work will really build up and you will find yourself pulling a lot of all-nighters. **GO TO ALL OF YOUR CLASSES!!!**

Do a lot of stuff outside of studying.

Don't get so caught up in working that you forget to eat... god I'm starving...

In order to survive CMU, you only need to show up for exams. In order to actually do well you must, absolutely, honestly must go to class, start your assignments early, and sleep at least 6 hrs per day. Also, meet with your professors- make sure they know who you are, even if you're making an A in the course.

Many people make C.S. out to be impossible. It is not impossible but requires a lot of work.

There are so many opportunities provided to you. Challenge yourself and try to achieve as much as possible.

Suck it up. Drink more coffee and keep on truckin'! Or, just suck it up- it's worth it.

All (of) you(r) chances to get a boyfriend are in orientation. That's it!

Do not procrastinate. This can kill you. Pittsburgh is not the most exciting city, so have a lot of friends around you.

As shocking as it may seem, SCS students have friends and social lives. Just talk to people.

See more places, and be skeptical.

Time management.

Don't limit yourself to your major.

The most important thing is TIME MANAGEMENT! In high school, you have teachers keeping an eye on you, and even then, you can pull off procrastinating. Here, you have huge assignments due periodically, and if you push them off, they pile up. Learn what classes you can and can't skip. Join clubs (Go Greek!) and have fun. Leave campus and explore Pittsburgh. Make sure you're keeping healthy. Have homework and study parties! Make good friends and when you're checking out some girl or guy, make sure they're actually single first.

Just like you, everybody else here was the smartest in their high school. The faster you realize this the better. If you hate English and you're worried about 76-101 (the mandatory writing class)... don't be. I'm a dumbass and it's my highest grade so far. Meet with Pattis. HIS CHOCOLATE IS THE BEST. If you find yourself averaging at 1 hour of sleep per day, you're doing something wrong. Playfair sucks. You don't know what that is yet, but just remember that it sucks. Use up your DineX. Always. Just do it. Or you fail. We have an "In the Groove" machine in the game room. If you're decent. COME PLAY. Seriously. You must be bored if you're reading this. Go get a life... or come to CMU and meet others who don't have lives.

Be organized. Get your work done as fast as you can.

If your room is missing something, consider building it, though think about transportation. City busses are sometimes hesitant about letting lumber on the bus.

Don't slack off. The people you meet here, especially during Orientation Week, will be your best friends but be sure to balance fun and academics.

Get into a schedule based on several shorter naps rather than one large period of sleep per day.

First, congratulations for getting into the most amazing program in CMU. Life here is going to be rough, but if you hang in there, you'll get what you want. Go to office hours, and start homework early. We've made it, so there is no reason you cannot. Good luck!
☺

Don't fall behind in your work! Manage your time well; make a schedule; have time for fun but stay productive! As long as you work a bit each day, the course load really isn't that bad.

Learn to work earnestly toward a 4.0 but accept calmly that you will fail.

Never put off work until the last minute. As long as this is done, you'll have no problems.

If you remember you have to do something, do it as soon as possible. Assignments and stuff pile up EXTREMELY quickly here and they are hard too. Join a non-computer related student organization. You have no idea how much it helps with meeting interesting and cool people. You'll meet enough geeks in your classes. They suck!

Get in the habit of understanding course material at a deeper level than expected in high school.

Keep on tasks; take courses you find interesting.

If you don't enjoy your work, prepare to be miserable.

Remember your hardest test you've had. Your first college test is twice as hard. You're not a second semester senior anymore, it's hard again.

The most important thing is time management. College is a great experience but remember you are here to get an education. You will make friends and find your niche, but remember to have your priorities straight.

Life is hard, CMU is harder; good habits should be learned and used ASAP!

Be involved, but be careful not to overburden yourself in the first semester.

Attend Activities! Go out!

Get involved in clubs/sports/activities ASAP. Find something of common interest and pursue it. It is much harder to venture out after you start working 50 hours a week.

Keep your priorities in order: make time to have fun, go out, or do things with other people. Being happy is just as important as getting good grades.

Register as early as possible. Don't take physics.

Set your alarm early enough so that you can eat breakfast before your first class. It's hard to concentrate when you're hungry.

Although CMU seems like it's radically different from other colleges, both academically and socially, expect a great college experience here similar to any other school (only better.)

CMU is the place to learn. You need to learn how to learn. Don't study CS here unless you really love CS and are eager to work hard.

Make plenty of friends outside of CS. It's only a good experience. Plus it smells better.

Learn cooking

CMU is not the place to come if you're looking for an interesting and varied social life. In short, if you don't have an extensive interest in video games and instead tend to interest less technological like say, opera, you will most likely be left wanting. Don't be afraid to explore Pitt on your own. Most people don't get up till like 2 on Saturday anyway.

Be confident in what you know. Do not become frustrated that you do not know what a classmate knows. True learning is not a competition with others, it is an internal competition where you challenge yourself. When you are aggravated that you are the only person who doesn't understand a concept, remember how much you have already challenged yourself.

College is completely about meeting new people, trying new things, expanding your horizons, learning, and... OK I've run out of clichés. Honestly, it is – enjoy college, every single bit of it. But before you run out to get slightly intoxicated, just make sure you finish your homework first.

Try to eat at all the dining locations and find out which ones you like best.

Keep thinking about what you are learning here and challenge!

Find something active to do for a couple for hours a day. It will allow you to forget about all the work you got to do for a little bit.

Manage your time wisely, you can get the grade and a life!

Eat whatever you can, sleep all that you can, shower as often as you can, get out of the dorm as much as possible.

Don't hesitate to take advantage of all the awesome opportunities. True, it's scary being a freshman when everything is intimidating, but you never know until you try.

Don't obsess over classes; there is too much more out there to spend your first semester buried in a textbook. (Note: still work for classes; just don't obsess). Also, avoid 8:30 classes if at all possible; you will not want to wake up that early.

Go to your TA for help. If your TA is incompetent, go to a friend's TA instead. If all fails, go to the professor for help. If even that fails, go to your advisor.

The threshold advice you gave us. ("Cross as many thresholds this week" sent August 20, 2006)

To succeed, try to adjust your high school habit to a CMU one, and study every single day to survive.

Things are hard at first- hard to get use to- but you'll get used to the environment later on- and then your grades will improve.

Start on your weekly homework on the weekend so there is less stress throughout the week. Keep good notes so studying for the final is easier.

Eat something other than pizza and soda. Salads are nice.

Don't let people scare you into not asking questions.

During your first few weeks, expose yourself to everything you possible can. Keep an open mind- you will probably never have so many opportunities to try new things.

Prepare to manage your time. You will find out that you will have a lot of free time and a lot of things to do also.

If you are an international student and your native language is not English, I suggest that you don't take too many courses in the first semester and spend more time cracking the language thing. Believe me, you may get a score 50 above the freshman average on critical reading, but if you didn't speak English in the past few years, it's really something you need to get used to when you come here. Join different groups, find a job, talk to people, pick New House, its setup give you more chances to know other people.

Don't be afraid of frustration, that actually part of the reason you are here. It's really interesting how drastically your attitude toward your own culture may have changed after being here a few months. The process is not very comfortable, but nonetheless, fun.

You should expect lots of workload before coming to CMU.

It's been said a lot, I'm sure, but the amount you get out of your classes and social activities is completely up to you. No one is going to go out of their way to insure your success. If you're interested in something outside of SCS, talk to the professors directly instead of going through the bureaucracy.

Work hard and your efforts will pay off.

Understand the primary focus of your first term is learning how to adjust.

Don't heed the student advice.

DON'T TAKE PHYSICS 2 UNLESS YOU THINKG YOU ARE PREFECTLY OK WITH IMAGINING ABSTRACT FACTS AND APPLICATION OF CALCULUS, it is definitely one of the hardest classes you can take here. **START YOUR WORK EARLIER** so you can go find a help earlier when you have difficulties. **CONCEPTS OF MATH** is awesome.

You don't know me and I sure as hell don't you. However you have no idea what you are dealing with. CMU is a mother of deception, the king of the cornfield, a tricky little SOB. It will lead you on a, and drop in a ditch somewhere in Okalahoma. Trust me, I know. It will start out slow, you will think you're all that like Kenan and Kel, but you're not. CMU will make you feel inferior and frustrated. You'll ask yourself: **WHY? HOW?** What's with this CMU? Then one day it will hit you like a ton of bricks **F***** that **S***** hurts like a **B*****. You will fall in love with the place, and there is nothing you can do about it.

Go with the flow.

Seek help! TA's are a very useful resource, go to their office hours from Day 1!

Go to class and do your homework... it makes life easier and more pleasant.

Get out and do something. If someone asks if you want to go and watch a movie, **GO!** Go to a restaurant, whatever, just say yes. Don't you every say no, other wise you're just gonna do nothing.

People say there is not stuff to do. These are the people who play War Craft 24/7. If you want to do something, you will find it.

Don't be too quick to judge.

Your first instinct isn't always the best vantage form which to view classes, people, or CMU as a whole.

Don't procrastinate! I know you still will (I do) just learn how to manage your work. And be prepared for the first test!!

Register early, and pick late classes. Get as few meal blocks (and the most Dinextra) you can; you won't use them all.

Bring cash for food.

Get your work done as soon as possible and don't party too hard.

Take as many AP/college classes as you can before coming.

Learn to sleep at odd hours of the day (this may or may not include lectures).

Live it up during orientation. Class starts on Monday.

At first the course work may seem hard and overwhelming, but if you stick with it you will do fine.

Spend time with good students, don't spend time with bad students.

Don't be an RA.

Working with friends can be less productive, but if you stay on task it's worth it. Don't be an RA.

Don't join a club!

Don't be lazy! If you're not doing anything else, just do your homework. Get out and party. That is what weekends are for. You will have enough time for work during the week.

Learn to manage your time early in the first semester.

Learn to relax and have some fun, this is college know when to study and when to enjoy a little game of DOTA.

Don't leave milk in your refrigerator for a month.

If there is something you want from CMU, fight for it, it's probably easier to get than you think.

Lighten up! You got into Carnegie-freakin-Mellon. Sure, grades are important, but don't forget to take some time off. Go to some parties, do nothing all weekend, sleep for 18 hours straight. One of the greatest things I learned at CMU is the importance of not working... unwinding is a useful skill.

Even though a class is boring and easy, and you hate going there, you still need to put in effort or you won't get a good grade.

Definitely attend the review sessions that classes offer. They make a lot of the material much clearer.

Buy a planner, preferably an hourly one, and live by it. High school is about getting as with the littlest effort possible; college is about working hard. It has been said that college can't be done with facebook/war craft. Whatever your poison. It can, but you don't need another thing to juggle during those 1st weeks. Delete that stuff until you've got everything else down.

Know how to manage your time! Be able to strap yourself down and focus on what you have to do. If you consistently keep up with class work, taking tests and finals will be much less intimidating (and in math/science courses, they are usually all that really matter- homework is just for your own practice). And... try not to take early morning classes unless you are sure you can concentrate.

Taking a math course? Try to review what you went over in lecture using notes/textbook/whatever to make sure you understand it, and spread homework out over a few days or prepare to spend 4-5 hours on it the night before.

Don't be lazy and register early. Read up on information early.

You belong here- don't let yourself think you can't understand something because you can! Just work hard.

Go to class.

Remember that you paid to be here- that's the major difference between high school and college. This is an opportunity- skipping classes really only hurts you now.

My windows partition dying only after one month (and not letting me reinstall XP) was probably the best thing that happened for my productivity. Be careful with all the games that are easily accessible here.

Bad judgments must come before the judgment day.

Academics are probably not as hard as people say. Don't be afraid to skip classes you know the material for and don't worry too much about eh amount of work.

If you had to work in high school, don't ever expect lightly of the course load here, just because you are only taking 5 courses the first semester. Besides necessary social activities, work harder and more diligently than you ever did in high school.

Get your forms and placement exams done as early as possible. I didn't do this until the last minute and I really regret it. Many of the courses/sections I wanted were filled by the time my registration hold was removed. Don't make the same mistake! Register as early as possible.

CHECK YOUR EMAIL!!!! CARRY AN UMBRELLA!!! USE >3 ALARM CLOCKS!!!

Take your requirements as early as possible, don't schedule 8:30 classes because you will probably be up until 3 every night. You will have to do the programming assignments so finish one day earlier and get extra credit. Enjoy concepts and join Greek life.

It's better to start out strong at the beginning of the semester and maybe ease off toward the end then to fall behind early on and struggle the rest of the way through.

Don't skip classes.

Meet as many people as you can during orientation week. Your peers are probably your best source of help.

Don't procrastinate. Sign up for classes early. Try everything.

If you read this far, make sure you read enough of this to get well-balanced advice.