

# College vs High School: How College is Different from High School

In the movie *Old School*, Luke Wilson and Vince Vaughn start a fake fraternity just so they can relive their college experience. To keep their status as a student organization, they must excel in a wide range of tasks that prove they are true college students. They master everything from academics to community service. Although the tale is just a movie, and you shouldn't believe everything you hear, sometimes Hollywood gets a few things right. College really is the best time of your life. It is a time to be involved in everything your college or university will have to offer. When you reach your 30s, you will likely look back at your college experience and wish you really could do it all over again. College is a time when the "cool kids" disappear. Who you eat lunch with does not define you as a person. There is no such thing as "un-cool." Welcome to college, where you are now considered an adult.

## **High School vs. College: Being a First-Year Student/Orientation**

Being a first-year student is fun! Unlike high school, where your first year is usually filled with anxiety and the occasional wrong-classroom mishap, colleges prepare first-year students with an orientation that builds a strong bond among class members. Many colleges offer additional early orientation programs (usually a camping trip or gathering hosted in a nearby city) to foster relationships before the school year even begins. Attend as many orientations options as possible. It will make your college transition easier if you already have bonds with your classmates. Once orientation is over and the upper-class students are back on campus, you will find that they are excited to meet the first-year students, and you become very comfortable in the college setting very quickly.

## **High School vs. College: The Learning Environment**

Get used to saying "Professor" or "Dr." Your teachers are no longer Mr. or Ms. Brown, but Professor or Dr. Brown, and guess what? You are expected to have an opinion! You are no longer a passive learner who just sits and listens to a teacher, occasionally writes a paper, and takes a test in which you are expected to simply reiterate what you have learned or been told by the teacher. You will not be provided with notes; rather, you are expected to figure out on your own what's important. (Professors are available during their office hours for help if what's important is ever unclear.) In college your professors are expecting you to voice your thoughts, and disagreeing with the professor's opinion is considered an interesting debate, not deviant behavior. Class participation and providing your own perspective and analysis are key to success in the college learning environment.

## **High School vs. College: Your Social Life**

Balancing academic and social life is difficult. This balance is something that most likely your parents helped you with in high school. Now that you are in college, you can no longer rely on your parents for structure, rules, or academic motivation. All of these are now in your hands. Being at college can be socially overwhelming -- an array of evening and weekend activities is open to you, including lectures, club/organization events, formals, dorm events, and of course, parties. In addition, many students go to schools in a locale they have not lived in before, so a lot of time is spent exploring your new surroundings. Some students become so involved in social activities that

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they neglect their academics. While it is good to explore new surroundings and take advantage of social opportunities, it is imperative that you cut out time to focus on your studies. Some students find it helpful to spend studying time in the school library, where they can focus without any interruption. Forming study groups with peers from your classes can also be extremely helpful, as well as agreeing on a daily "study time" with your roommate, where your dorm room will adopt the atmosphere of the library. And speaking of roommates....

## **High School vs. College: Roommates**

Many high school students have their own rooms. If high-school students do share a room, it is usually with a sibling, and not a stranger. Unless you are coming from boarding school, you most likely will need to adapt to life with roommate. Although some think having a roommate is an infringement on privacy, a roommate is actually a great benefit in college. The first few weeks of college can be a lonely time -- you are in a new place with new surroundings. A roommate can keep you company and will help you adapt to college life because you are adapting together. You immediately have someone who can go to the dining hall with you, explore the campus with you, help you find a class location, and share your social network. In addition, with a roommate you can share the costs of college life. You and your roommate can figure out who can bring what into the dorm room, and can split groceries, additional furnishings, and other costs.

## **High School vs. College: Culture**

If you are from anywhere other than a big city, most of your friends are probably a lot like you. You may not all share the same personality, but the things you consider "normal" are probably the same. Your parents are probably a lot like your friends' parents. They probably even share the same tax bracket. You go to the same type of restaurants as your friends. You and your friends probably share similar ideas of what is fun to do on a Friday night. Until you get to college, it rarely occurs to you that life could be any different -- until you find yourself surrounded by hundreds of students just like you, with very different stories. You quickly learn that "normal" simply doesn't exist. One of the best things about going to college is the opportunity to interact with a wide variety of cultures. Students from the other side of the world and the other side of the county will likely both be living on your dorm floor. Take advantage of this amazing multicultural environment that you might never have access to again.

## **High School vs. College: What to Eat/The Freshman 15**

In high school, most likely your parent or guardian did most of the grocery shopping and cooking. Eating healthy was not something that you needed to think about because somebody else was buying and cooking the healthful food. Once in college, you have a wide variety of healthful and unhealthful foods to choose from every meal. Buffets of desserts are offered for both lunch and dinner. Empty carbohydrate snacks are usually staples of a dorm room. People make jokes about the "Freshmen 15," but it is reality for many students. Less important than the weight gain is the unhealthful diet. Remember that it is very easy to eat healthfully while at college; you just need to make that effort. There are just as many nutritious foods in dining halls as there are junk foods. You need to make the decision to eat healthfully on your own.

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## **High School vs. College: Making Your Own Choices**

When you are in high school, your parents are often there to stand between you and temptations. Once parents are removed from the equation, you are left with you and your choices. Just because your parents said you cannot do something does not mean you cannot do it. However, this is where personal choice and responsibility come in. Once you are in college in many ways you are considered an adult, and you have more opportunities to be sexually active. You might have been exposed to some of these things in high school, but the "barrier" of your parents' rules (or boarding-school regulations) made decisions easier. You choose how to balance your academic and social life. You make all of your own decisions, and you are responsible for the consequences. You choose whether or not you are comfortable with drinking, drugs and/or sex. Remember that being an adult does not mean you need to figure everything out by yourself. Gathering information about these and other decisions, and talking to parents, siblings, and friends can help you make these important decisions. Most campuses also have counselors and health-care workers available to provide information and a listening ear. (And, of course you can also ask your roommate.

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