Student Experiences: Academic Transition

August 25, 2009 was my first day at Marquette, and I naively thought I was fully prepared to face whatever was thrown my way. I came to Marquette from a highly ranked Chicago Public High School, where I attended their accelerated Academic Center for 7th and 8th grade students, and took multiple Advanced Placement courses. I thought that my academic life at Marquette would pretty closely mimic that of my high school career. I couldn’t have been more wrong.

One thing I’ve learned in my three years here is that each person’s approach to tackling college academics is different and not necessarily something that can be taught. With that said, indulge me as I tell you a little bit about my freshmen year here and some critical lessons I’ve learned along the way.

Week 1, rather Day 1: My very first class of college was an introductory business course called LEAD 1000. I overslept and missed half of the class. LESSON 1 – Mom’s not here to wake me up. And there also wasn’t my mom’s nagging voice that said “did you do your homework” or “don’t play the Xbox on school nights, go study” that I had grown accustomed to. I quickly realized that I had to independently create my own system to ensure that I was meeting the goals and expectations that I had set for myself. For me, that meant integrating adequate time into my schedule to study and get homework done while still getting a full night’s rest. LESSON 2 – Figure out what works for you and stick to it. In my time here, I have never pulled an “all-nighter.” For those of you unfamiliar with the term, it is simply staying up all night to study. If ever there is a time when you figure out who you are, it’s college. Very quickly, I figured out that I absolutely need 8 hours of sleep to function – no exceptions. Knowing that created a system that worked for me.

Fast forwarding a little bit to Week 5, Midterms: While I was now used to getting out of bed in time for class, I hadn’t quite figured out that the calendar on the back page of the syllabus wasn’t just there as a pretty graphic on the page. First semester, I decided to take an upper level history class my first semester of college…and I missed my first major essay of my college career. I just didn’t do it, and didn’t realize that it needed to be done. I quickly learned that unlike high school, there aren’t constant reminders about project due dates, nor did professors come around one by one to check and see if I completely understood the assignment. LESSON 3 – Get intimately acquainted with your course syllabus. On the first day of class, all professors will give out a syllabus that outlines the course, important assignments, and other major expectations of the class. Tell your student to take time and transfer these dates to their planner or phone schedule, so that they are constantly reminded of important due dates.

Missing my history essay also taught me something else. LESSON 4 – Don’t wait until you have to go in gravelling and begging to meet your professors one on one for the first time. In college, professor/student relationships are important but usually require some initiative on the part of the student. Every professor has office hours, which are time periods where they will be available in their office to meet with students. It doesn’t hurt to go to these office hours to introduce yourself to the professor. This is really helpful when you find yourself emailing your professor so they can match a face with a name, or when professors are asked for students who may be interested in internships and they are acquainted enough with you to recommend you. I would highly encourage you to recommend to your son or daughter to build these relationships with teachers.

Essentially finding the right balance of personal time and studying is the key to a successful college career. Although college academics are different from high school, your son or daughter is obviously smart and talented, or else they wouldn’t be here. Marquette offers some great academic support resources including free tutoring, academic advising, mentorship programs, and residence hall staff to answer additional questions in the wee hours of the morning. After the first weeks of classes, their adjustment to the fast pace college life will be underway and they will be used to the daily grind before they know it. As a parent, continue to support and reassure them, and if they’re like me tell them to get some rest. I wish your students much success in this next chapter of their life here at Marquette.