

## Tips for a healthy transition to university or college life

Starting your first year of university or college is certainly an exciting time in your life. The benefits are clear: greater independence and freedom, intellectual growth, and a full social life (no more parental-induced curfews or chores). This period, however, can also be challenging for new students facing an unprecedented number of choices in how they live, eat, study and manage their time.

We reached out to Susan Lawson, an educational consultant who guides students through the college and university application process in Canada, U.S., and the U.K. Each year, she offers a workshop to help new students smoothly transition to life as a university or college student. She offers these useful tips:

- Engage in the orientation programs being offered. This will help familiarize you with the

campus and make new friends.

- Seek out resources before you need them. This includes help related to academic advising, health, counselling and fitness.

- Refrain from engaging in social media in the early days. Do not compare your experience to others. Remember that this is your experience. Regardless of what others post online, the truth is that you do not know what they are doing the other 23 hours and 59 minutes of the day.

- Get out of your room. Don't be afraid to get involved and meet people by joining activities. What interests you? The options are numerous: sports, clubs, arts, community, volunteering, faith groups. Don't be afraid to try something new – you'll never have so many opportunities at your fingertips again.

- Get to know your professors.

This means taking the time to meet them during office hours. Later in the course, if you are confused, it'll be easier to ask for help; if you're not happy with test or assignment results, ask how to improve.

- Attend class. You've never had this level of freedom before so being disciplined is essential. If you miss a few classes, get right back on track.

- Schedule time for schoolwork. Find a place that is conducive to you being productive and aim to study three hours per day, five days per week.

- Don't be alarmed if you feel homesick. It's normal to feel this way and to feel overwhelmed at times. You are undergoing a big transition. Everyone needs help from time to time so reach out if you need it.

- Try to maintain good eating



and sleep habits. Remember how mom made you eat your vegetables? Nutrition remains important, so don't give up on it.

- Try to refrain from going home too frequently. The best way to start to feel comfortable somewhere is to spend your weekends there. Make plans to

engage, such as attending events (i.e. football games, concerts) so that you feel a sense of belonging.

- Have fun and learn all you can about the school, your academics, your peers and yourself.

For more information about Susan Lawson, visit [www.susanlawsonconsulting.com](http://www.susanlawsonconsulting.com)

## Taking a gap year? Do it right

Gap years are growing in popularity among Canadians. A well-planned year between high school and post-secondary studies can help students better understand what they want to study and what career path to pursue. Many students return to studies after a gap year, with more certainty about their chosen field of study and greater motivation to excel. However, not all gap years are created equal. Here are some tips to make most of a gap year:

### It's not a vacation

A gap year that offers a meaningful experience will be viewed differently from a few months spent travelling for fun by potential employers or university and admis-

sions offices. An extended vacation is exactly that – a vacation.

### Experience cultures

There are abundant opportunities for international experiences that include learning a new language, volunteering and exchanges. University applications and resumes are more likely to shine if they indicate that the applicant has a more culturally diverse perspective on the world based on unique travel experiences.

### Career-oriented opportunities

This isn't always so easy to achieve if a young person is still up in the air about career direction. However, for those who have clear career ambitions, seeking out an

experience that relates to that field of study can be invaluable when time comes to apply for a related program or job. This indicates that applicant is invested, personally, in the program and is motivated to excel.

### Keep a record

When the time comes to describe the experience on an application or resume, it may be difficult to recall one's accomplishments. This can be avoided by maintaining a journal – digital or written – of the experiences. In the moment, it can be tempting to believe that each experience will be remembered clearly; however, relying on memory recall after several months have passed may prove harder than expected.



### Volunteer for a cause

Volunteer opportunities abound for people of all ages, in every region across the globe. Finding a cause that provides personal meaning can create a tremendously rewarding gap year.