U1-Reading A

**Life at College: The Most Glorious Phase of One’s Life**

Hari Eswar

    One of the most interesting stages in life that gives you an opportunity to explore is the “college phase.” Life at college is the time when the teenage years end and we all dive deep into the ocean of new beginnings and possibilities. This golden period better equips you for all the challenges you’ll face in life and creates a strong foundation of knowledge.

     My experience at IIT Roorkee has taught me one fundamental thing—life is unpredictable. It might be good, it might be bad, it might be weird, and it might not interest you, but you should expect anything to happen. For example, you might have a wonderful job this moment, and be fired the very next moment. College life prepares you for all of this. It is a perfect blend of joy and hardships. You meet different people, you interact with them, you learn about their cultures and you grow as a person. You will understand how to talk to different people, how to judge their behavior, thus learning important life skills.

    You learn to sit through a boring lecture; you try to cope with the surprisingly strenuous syllabus, and you have the opportunity to learn from some great research minds. Academia, as they say, never lets you go free. People might try to comfort you by saying that you need to study only through your school years and chill during college life, but that isn’t true.

    Another life lesson you will remember—learning never ends. You find campus groups or student groups where you can explore your co-curricular skills along with many other students like you. You share common interests, and thus you share common ideas. There might have been a time where you would have had to give up drawing for your JEE Advanced preparation. Trust me, once you get into a good college, you will get an opportunity to be the artist you always wanted to be through probably a fine arts campus group. You could be that director, you could be that vocalist, and you could be the dancer of your dreams—college is the Santa Claus that keeps on giving all these wonderful opportunities while you’re in it. There are also campus festivals, which draw a lot of fun crowds from other colleges and let you show off your skills. You could also enjoy being with the celebrities who are invited to perform, or even show off your technical prowess in a tech festival.

    Life at college is a time when you can decide your career. It’s a time of dreams and innumerable paths. You can still be as good a programmer as the JEE Advanced topper who majors in Computer Science and has the option to take courses outside of your major. You can work for a nonprofit organization and even gain the satisfaction of being a humanitarian. The point is that you are free to try out these new things and no one is going to forcefully control the decisions you make. Every nook and corner of the college you’d find a peaceful spot full of natural surroundings, whose value you will only realize once you graduate from your college. You will always remember the early morning fog, your hostel’s adorable “puppy” or even your grumpy stationery shopkeeper.

    So, remember that there will be moments that carry a lot of sentimental value and you can’t help but miss them even years later. The friendships you make in college life are the most important aspect. These people will give you strength and be your knights in shining armor all your life. The time you spend with your friends, playing Mafia, Poker, or arguing about any random topic, your regular lecture “bunking” to watch a new release of your favorite star, will always stay in your heart. Planning road trips, occasional adventure surges, and impulsive journeys—all these things make you more emotional when you bid adieu to the institution.

    So, one fine day when you see pictures of you and your college friends having a good time, you’ll definitely land up smiling silently. That’s the beauty of college life. It stays with you long after you’ve climbed those ladders of success and forgotten the name of that cute crush you used to drool over.

    Life at college is a wild mishmash of experiences, what with all sorts of hilarious stuff going down in the hostels!

U1-Reading B

**A Day-by-Day Guide to Your First Year of College Life**

Susan Fitzgerald and J. Lee Peters

Your bags are unpacked, your parents are weeping (and maybe cheering a little on the inside), and your head is spinning. You are at college, um, now what?

It’s cliché as anything, but know that these will be the best years of your life so far. You will make lifelong friends and perhaps meet your soulmate. You will try new things, learn valuable skills, and be challenged to figure out who you really are and what you stand for. You will fall in love with some of your classes (and perhaps classmates), deeply discuss serious issues with peers and professors, and enjoy many moments of quiet reflection.

You’ll read thousands of pages and process dense information for class discussions and presentations. You’ll also write hundreds of pages in essays, reports, and exams. There will be more concerts, parties, and cultural events than you have time to attend. You will have a full range of athletics to watch or participate in, a new community to explore, nearby exercise facilities to work out in, and perhaps even natural resources such as hiking trails, beaches, or ski mountains to enjoy. You will meet and live with interesting people, some from places you have never visited, with very different backgrounds and experiences than yours. By developing these new friendships, you’ll learn more about yourself and what you want out of life.

By the time you finish college, you’ll be prepared for a job in a field that may become a career. You’ll also be prepared to change jobs if necessary, and you will still have college resources available to help you make that change. Your education in the classroom will be represented by your degree, but your education outside of the classroom will shine on your résumé and in job interviews. Leadership experiences, internships, and semesters spent abroad will all help shape your approach to life and your contribution to the adult world.

What follows is a guide for you, as an incoming college freshman, to take you through your first year of collegiate life. The topics covered will help you think about and prepare for the remarkable experience that is college. Each day from September to May is broken down into themes:

Mondays: Be Smarter

You may think you know it all, but get ready for college to change your mind pretty quickly. These entries have tips and techniques you can adopt to be a smarter, more attentive, and successful student—from making use of office hours to researching to acing the final exam.

Tuesdays: Be Financially Savvy

Unless you’re rich, college will be a wonderful whirlwind of ramen noodles and paying for things with pocket change. These entries will help you learn ways to make extra cash, make your money last, and turn it into more money—all while staying out of the dreaded debt cycle.

Wednesdays: Be Healthier

Pssh, forget the Freshman 15! From avoiding fatty foods in the dining hall to exercise and taking care of your body, these entries will teach you to be a healthier, happier, and fitter college student.

Thursdays: Be Aware

As awesome as college can be, it can also present situations that can be dangerous, awkward, or difficult. These entries will provide tips on how to stay safe (on and off campus, at parties, and on the town), make careful decisions, spot warning signs of trouble, and be a well-rounded, responsible, and accountable college student, roommate, and person.

Fridays: Be Active

Contrary to popular belief, friends and activities won’t come to you. Fridays are for getting up, getting out, losing the headphones and the slouchy walk, and getting involved in campus life. From how to join clubs to making friends to widening your social horizons, these entries offer ways to rise to the challenge of your college experience.

Saturdays: Be Adventurous

College is about breaking out of your typical comfort zone. Saturday entries encourage you to try new things, strike up conversations and friendships, experience new places, eat new foods, and stretch your wings. Let go of the ridiculous fears of “being uncool” and break the mold!

Sundays: Be More Relaxed

College is a busy and stressful time, between classes, friends, activities, and clubs. Making time for yourself is not only important, it’s essential. With entries on deep breathing, simple meditation, coping with homesickness and other issues, and taking care of yourself, Sunday entries are all about staying calm, healthy, and happy.

College is whatever you want it to be, so wake up every day and make the best of it. Regardless of your background or future plans, you are about to embark on a priceless journey. Good luck, and enjoy every minute!

U2-Reading A

**Advice from a Formerly Lonely College Student**

Emery Bergmann

Being known as “the girl with no friends” wasn’t my favorite part about having made a video that went viral—but you take what you can get.

About a year ago, as a college freshman at Cornell, I was assigned a short video project for my Intro to Digital Media course. I decided to focus on my disappointment with the early weeks of college: How I couldn’t get past superficial conversation, how I couldn’t seem to enjoy parties, feel comfortable on campus, or just meet people who I wanted to spend more time around. I felt so lost and beyond confused. I had been a pretty social person in high school and I fully expected to make great friends right away when I got to college. It’s supposed to be the time of your life, right?

I had been looking forward to college for years. I started studying for standardized tests in the 10th year, hammering out extracurricular activities and A.P. courses all through the 11th year, and spent my senior year typing applications till my fingers practically bled. I got into a great school, pleasing myself and my family. This was not the payoff I expected.

The worst part was that I felt as if I were the only one who was this lonely. I’d see all these freshmen walk in packs—just massive groups of friends already formed in the first two weeks of school. I couldn’t muster the courage to ask people to get lunch. It was so frustrating. I immediately turned on myself—criticized and blamed myself for being weird and unapproachable.

I spent a ton of time on social media, constantly checking in on my high school friends and seeing how they were getting along at their colleges. They’d post more and text me less. I really tried to put myself out there, but the more people I met, the more defeated I felt. I wasn’t interested in forging fake relationships out of necessity, I wanted genuine friendships that I could treasure. Why couldn’t I find them in my first month on campus?

I poured my loneliness into the four-and-a-half-minute film I made, called “My College Transition”. I posted it on YouTube expecting only my professor and a couple of friends to see it. It now has over 275,000 views and hundreds of comments. I had students from all over the country reach out to me and express their experiences, thanking me for making them feel less alone. It was overwhelming in the most beautiful way, and was further proof that I wasn’t alone in my experience. It also showed how necessary it was for people to be open about isolation on college campuses.

Now a sophomore, I see how ridiculous my expectations were for my first year. To assume I could instantly meet my New Best Friends while also getting used to a new place, starting a new academic career, and learning how to adjust to life away from home—that’s a full plate already. Some of the high school friends I was missing had been my friends for my whole life.

Expecting close relationships like the ones that had taken years to develop was unfair to myself and the people around me. Going to college is a massive change—so many students are being uprooted from the familiar comforts of their homes and thrust into a completely new place. It was unrealistic for me to anticipate a seamless transition.

After I posted the video, I had people of all ages and genders reaching out to me, explaining how they felt the same way when they started a new job, when they moved to a new place, even when they started retirement. Loneliness is too often paired with self-blame and self-criticism: “I can’t find my place among these people, so it must be my fault.” My social life became a big game of trial and error, slowly learning in which groups I felt welcome and included. It was hard! It was draining! But by putting myself out there, I found so many communities on campus to invest myself in, and where I knew I would be happily received.

U2-Reading B

**Reflections on True Friendship**

Andrew O’Hagan

Is childhood the golden era of friendship? And can you get those relationships back? The other day, I took down from the shelf a beautiful novel by William Maxwell—So Long, See You Tomorrow—and I realized the title alone summons the unspoken bond, the constant availability, the relentless promise that friendship is when you are 12. My great friend at that age was Mark MacDonald. We would be up at the crack of dawn to wander over the fields, scan the beaches for coins, climb the hills together and sit in the graveyard comparing our plans for world domination. Mark had Crohn’s disease; he was often in hospital, and we’d write to each other planning our adventures for the summer. He told me I was a good writer and I told him he was a great painter, before we disappeared from each other’s lives. I haven’t seen him for 30 years.

When I recently tried to find Mark again, he didn’t appear to exist. Like the boys in Maxwell’s novel, he seemed like a figment, or a fragile piece of memory that crumbles when you turn it in your hands. He wasn’t to be found at the old address I had for him in the seaside town of Saltcoats. His name is a popular one on Facebook, but none of the Marks I found was the one I knew, and he wasn’t on Twitter or Instagram either. None of the search engines reveal anything about Mark. I tried death certificates, fearing, as I have for a long time, that my old friend might have died. I asked my mother if any of her friends had kept in touch with the family but none had. I could remember two of his sisters’ names but they didn’t show up on the Internet either. When I went back to Scotland recently, I drove to the square where we once lived, and I looked up at the window of my old house, remembering how I used to shine a torch from there to Mark’s bedroom. Two flashes meant “good night”. Three flashes meant “see you tomorrow”.

I wonder if technology has changed the meaning of friendship. My daughter is 12 and most things that happen to her are photographed. She and her friends get together and spend hours trying out poses, making videos, retouching them, setting them to music and posting them on this or that social media network. I’m sure the girls are bonded in many of the traditional ways, but I also wonder if they’ll ever lose sight of each other. I think we always knew we would move on in life and that our great friendships would be a matter of memory. I don’t have a single photograph of Mark MacDonald. I don’t think we were ever photographed together, and that adds to the notion that our friendship was a fiction.

As a contrast, a pair of excellent youngsters in my wider family have over 1,000 Facebook “friends” between them. They say they don’t know half of them. The social network gives them the option of corralling people into “close friends” or “acquaintances,” and, naturally, they always have the option of clicking “unfriend.” But are the majority of these people friends or are they just names? You can know everything that’s going on in people’s lives without knowing a single thing going on in their hearts. But is that friendship? People now in their 20s have a lot of self-advertising talent, but are they, I wonder, close to the point where a bad breakup, say, or a death in the family, isn’t a moment of opportunity for the protective and dignifying balms of old friendship, but simply a quiet day on social media?

The times we live in are big on loyalty. Technology has driven us wild with questions of loyalty to flags, to nations, to a “way of life” or to brands who give out “loyalty points” to those who stay tight. But the only kind of loyalty that matters is to know your friends and stick with them.

U3-Reading A

**Top Four Reasons Students Use Their College Library**

Tami Stang

The college library is an important hub of campus life. There, you can check out books, conduct your research, find a quiet place to study, and maybe even flip through a magazine. What’s more, today’s college libraries extend their reach out into the Internet, making many services and resources accessible right from their websites.

But how are students using this great wealth of resources?

To better understand college students’ study habits, we wanted to explore how and why they use their school’s library. So, in a student engagement survey we conducted in the Spring of 2015, we asked: What do you do when you’re at your college library? Nearly 3,000 students responded. Here are their top four reasons for spending time there.

A. Study alone. By far the most popular response at 77%, the clear majority of our surveyed students head to the library to focus on their studies by themselves. To us, this response shows that, no matter what kinds of resources are offered by the library, its learning space is (and will probably always be) regarded as a great place to get serious about schoolwork.

It also means that, during peak study periods (such as the finals week), students would do well to get to the library early to secure the study spot of their choice!

B. Use the online databases. More than half (51%) of the students said that they’re at the library to use the online databases, indicating that a good portion of their research work is completed at the library.

Unfortunately, many students will often find themselves in front of a looming deadline and a closed library. Or perhaps they can’t make it to the campus library for other reasons (such as parenting responsibilities, a lack of transportation options, or a need to travel away from home). They can access their college’s databases from their own computer. Typically, all they’ll need is Internet access and a username and password.

C. Use reference materials. Whether they’re in need of general resources such as encyclopedias and dictionaries, specialized publications such as field-specific bibliographical guides and indexes, or other references that simply aren’t available in electronic formats, students visit the library to access non-circulating materials that they need to complete their projects.

Even so, given that only 39% of students stating that they use the reference materials, we recognize that many students may not even be aware of these materials’ existence. (Or, if they do, they may not know the valuable role they can play in the research process.) If your course includes a research project, encourage your students to make use of them. Students may also appreciate being reminded that, if they aren’t sure how to use these helpful reference tools, their campus librarian will be able to assist them.

To further guide your students, you may even wish to make a bibliography that lists the reference materials that would be of most use to them. But first, you might want to check your library’s website; in many cases, the librarians have already created subject guides that describe the resources available for specific fields and disciplines. Your librarian may also be able to create a course guide that lists the reference materials (and other resources) that suit the specific needs of your class.

D. Meet their study groups. Whether it’s for the luxury of having a big table, the convenience of accessing nearby scholarly and reference materials, or the simplicity of having a central place to meet that’s not their own homes, the library is a popular place for students to gather for study and group projects. More than one third (34%) of students said that’s why they visit their library.

Are you assigning group projects for your course, or do you recommend that students get together in groups to study? If you know students will use the library as a meeting space, advise them to reserve a study room. There they can talk over the details of their projects without worrying that their conversation is disturbing other students.

Of course, the college library offers many benefits beyond the four explored above. They can access databases from home, request books through interlibrary loan, chat with an online librarian, or use the library’s website to discover videos, tutorials, and other materials that will help them conduct their research efficiently and effectively.

U3-Reading B

**Growing Up in the Library Learning and Relearning What It Means to Have a Book on Borrowed Time**

Susan Orlean

I grew up in libraries, or at least it feels that way. My family lived in the suburbs of Cleveland, about a mile from the brick-faced Bertram Woods Branch of the Shaker Heights Public Library system. Throughout my childhood, starting when I was very young, my mother drove me there a couple of times a week. We walked in together, but, as soon as we passed through the door, we split up, each heading to our favorite section. The library might have been the first place that I was ever given independence. Even when I was maybe four or five years old, I was allowed to go off on my own. Then, after a while, my mother and I reunited at the checkout counter with our finds. Together, we waited as the librarian pulled out each date card and, with a loud chunk-chunk, stamped a crooked due date on it, below a score of previous crooked due dates that belonged to other people, other times.

Our visits were never long enough for me—the library was so bountiful. I loved wandering around the shelves, scanning the spines of the books until something happened to catch my eye. Those trips were dreamy, frictionless interludes that promised I would leave richer than I arrived. On the way home, I loved having the books stacked on my lap, pressing me under their solid, warm weight, their Mylar covers sticking to my thighs. It was such a thrill leaving a place with things you hadn’t paid for; such a thrill anticipating the new books we would read. We both thought that all the librarians at the Bertram Woods branch were beautiful. For a few minutes, we discussed their beauty.

When I was older, I usually walked to the library by myself, lugging as many books as I could carry. Occasionally, I did go with my mother, and the trip remained as enchanted as it had been when I was small. Even when I was in my last year of high school and could drive to the library, my mother and I still went together now and then, and the trip unfolded exactly as it used to, with all the same beats and pauses and comments and reveries, the same pensive rhythm. My mother died two years ago, and since then, when I miss her, I like to picture us in the car together, going for one more magnificent trip to Bertram Woods.

My family was big on the library. We were very much a reading family, but we were more a borrow-a-book-from-the-library family than a bookshelves full-of-books family. My parents valued books, but they had grown up in the Depression, aware of the quicksilver nature of money, and they had learned the hard way that you shouldn’t buy what you could borrow. Because of that frugality, or perhaps despite it, they also believed that you should read a book for the experience of reading it. You shouldn’t read it in order to have an object that had to be housed and looked after forever, a memento of the purpose for which it was obtained. The reading of the book was a journey. There was no need for souvenirs.

By the time I was born, my parents’ financial circumstances were comfortable, and they learned how to splurge a little, but their Depression-era mentality adhered stubbornly to certain economies, which included not buying books that could be obtained easily from the library. Our uncrowded bookshelves at home had several sets of encyclopedias (an example of something not easily borrowed) and an assortment of other books that, for one reason or another, my parents had ended up buying. There were also some travel guides, some coffee-table books, a few of my father’s law books, and a dozen or so novels that were either gifts or somehow managed to justify being owned outright.

When I left for college—I went to the University of Michigan—one of the many ways I differentiated myself from my parents was that I went wild for owning books. I think buying textbooks was what got me going. All I know is that I lost my appreciation for the slow pace of making your way through a library and for having books on borrowed time. I wanted to have my books in piles around me, forming totem poles of the narratives I’d visited. In my junior year, I moved into an apartment, lined it with bookcases, and loaded them with hardcovers. I used the college library for research, but otherwise I turned into a ravenous buyer of books. I couldn’t walk into a bookstore without leaving with something, or several somethings.

Once I was done with college, and done with researching term papers in the stacks of the Harold T. and Vivian B. Shapiro Undergraduate Library, I sloughed off the memory of those marvelous childhood trips to the Bertram Woods branch, and began, for the first time in my life, to wonder what libraries were for. Libraries might have become just a bookmark of memory more than an actual place, a way to call up an emotion of a moment that occurred long ago, something that was fused with “mother” and “the past” in my mind.

U4-Reading A

**Mother Tongue**

Amy Tan

Lately, I’ve been giving more thought to the kind of English my mother speaks. Like others, I have described it to people as “broken” or “fractured”. But I wince when I say that. It has always bothered me that I can think of no way to describe it other than “broken,” as if it were damaged and needed to be fixed, as if it lacked a certain wholeness and soundness. I’ve heard other terms used, “limited English,” for example. But they seem just as bad, as if everything is limited, including people’s perceptions of the limited English speaker.

I know this for a fact, because when I was growing up, my mother’s “limited” English limited my perception of her. I was ashamed of her English. I believed that her English reflected the quality of what she had to say. That is, because she expressed them imperfectly her thoughts were imperfect. And I had plenty of empirical evidence to support me: the fact that people in department stores, at banks, and at restaurants did not take her seriously, did not give her good service, pretended not to understand her, or even acted as if they did not hear her.

My mother has long realized the limitations of her English as well. When I was fifteen, she used to have me call people on the phone to pretend I was she. In this guise, I was forced to ask for information or even to complain and yell at people who had been rude to her. One time it was a call to her stockbroker in New York. She had cashed out her small portfolio and it just so happened we were going to go to New York the next week. I had to get on the phone and say in an adolescent voice that was not very convincing, “This is Mrs. Tan.”

And my mother was standing in the back whispering loudly, “Why he don’t send me check, already two weeks late. So mad he lie to me, losing me money.”

And then I said in perfect English, “Yes, I’m getting rather concerned. You had agreed to send the check two weeks ago, but it hasn’t arrived.”

Then she began to talk more loudly. “What he want, I come to New York tell him front of his boss, you cheating me?” And I was trying to calm her down, make her be quiet, while telling the stockbroker, “I can’t tolerate any more excuses. If I don’t receive the check immediately, I am going to have to speak to your manager when I’m in New York next week.” And sure enough, the following week there we were in front of this astonished stockbroker, and I was sitting there red-faced and quiet, and my mother, the real Mrs. Tan, was shouting at his boss in her impeccable broken English.

I’ve been asked, as a writer, why there are not more Asian Americans represented in American literature. Why are there few Asian Americans enrolled in creative writing programs? Why do so many Chinese students go into engineering? This makes me think that there are other Asian-American students whose English spoken in the home might also be described as “broken” or “limited.” And perhaps they also have teachers who are steering them away from writing and into math and science, which is what happened to me.

Fortunately, I happen to be rebellious in nature and enjoy the challenge of disproving assumptions made about me. I became an English major my first year in college, after being enrolled as pre-med. I started writing nonfiction as a freelancer the week after I was told by my former boss that writing was my worst skill and I should hone my talents toward account management.

But it wasn’t until 1985 that I finally began to write fiction. And at first I wrote using what I thought to be wittily crafted sentences, sentences that would finally prove I had mastery over the English language. Here’s an example from the first draft of a story that later made its way into The Joy Luck Club, but without this line: “That was my mental quandary in its nascent state.” A terrible line, which I can barely pronounce.

Fortunately, I later decided I should envision a reader for the stories I would write. And the reader I decided upon was my mother, because these were stories about mothers. So with this reader in mind, I began to write stories using all the Englishes I grew up with: the English I spoke to my mother, which for lack of a better term might be described as “simple”; the English she used with me, which for lack of a better term might be described as “broken”; my translation of her Chinese, which could certainly be described as “watered down”; and what I imagined to be her translation of her Chinese if she could speak in perfect English, her internal language, and for that I sought to preserve the essence, but neither an English nor a Chinese structure. I wanted to capture what language ability tests can never reveal: her intent, her passion, her imagery, the rhythms of her speech and the nature of her thoughts.

Apart from what any critic had to say about my writing, I knew I had succeeded where it counted when my mother finished reading my book and gave me her verdict: “So easy to read.”

U4-Reading B

**To Write Better Code, Read Virginia Woolf**

J. Bradford Hipps

In a software-run world, what’s wanted are more engineers. At least, so goes the argument in a rising number of states, which have embraced a funding model for higher education that uses tuition “bonuses” to favor hard-skilled degrees like computer science over the humanities. The trend is backed by countless think pieces. “Macbeth does not make my priority list,” wrote Vinod Khosla, a co-founder of Sun Microsystems and the author of a widely shared blog post entitled “Is Majoring in Liberal Arts a Mistake for Students?”

The technologist’s argument begins with a suspicion that the liberal arts are of dubious academic rigor, suited mostly to dreamers. As a liberal-arts major who went on to a career in software, I can only scratch my head.

Fresh out of college in 1993, I signed on with a large technology consultancy. The firm’s idea was that by hiring a certain lunatic fringe of humanities majors, it might cut down on engineering groupthink. After a six-week programming boot camp, we were pitched headfirst into the deep end of software development.

My first project could hardly have been worse. We (mostly engineers, with a spritzing of humanities majors) were attached to an enormous cellular carrier. Our assignment was to rewrite its rating and billing system—a thing that rivaled maritime law in its complexity.

I was assigned to a team charged with one of the hairier programs in the system, which concerned the movement of individual mobile subscribers from one “parent” account plan to another. Each one of these moves caused a lot of plan activations and terminations, carry.overs or forfeitures of accumulated talk minutes, and lots of other causal conditionals that would affect the subscriber’s bill.

This program, thousands of lines of code long and growing by the hour, was passed around our team like an exquisite corpse. The subscribers and their parent accounts were rendered on our screens as a series of S’s and A’s. After we stared at these figures for weeks, they began to infect our dreams. (One I still remember. I was a baby in a vast crib. Just overhead, turning slowly and radiating malice, was an enormous iron mobile whose arms strained under the weight of certain capital letters.)

Our first big break came from a music major. A pianist, I think, who joined our team several months into the project. Within a matter of weeks, she had hit upon a method to make the S’s hold on to the correct attributes even when their parent A was changed.

We had been paralyzed. The minute we tweaked one bit of logic, we realized we’d fouled up another. But our music major moved freely. Instead of freezing up over the logical permutations behind each A and S, she found that these symbols put her in the mind of musical notes. As notes, they could be made to work in concert. They could be orchestrated.

On a subsequent project, our problem was pointers. In programming language, a pointer is an object that refers to some master value stored elsewhere. This might sound straightforward, but pointers are like ghosts in the system. A single misdirected one can crash a program. Our pointer wizard was a philosophy major who had no trouble at all with the idea of a named “thing” being a transient stand-in for some other unseen thing. For a Plato man, this was mother’s milk.

I’ve worked in software for years and, time and again, I’ve seen someone apply the arts to solve a problem of systems. The reason for this is simple. As a practice, software development is far more creative than algorithmic.

The developer stands before her source code editor in the same way the author confronts the blank page. There’s an idea for what is to be created, and the (daunting) knowledge that there are a billion possible ways to go about it. To proceed, each relies on one part training to three parts creative intuition. They may also share a healthy impatience for the ways things “have always been done” and a generative desire to break conventions. When the module is finished or the pages complete, their quality is judged against many of the same standards: elegance, concision, cohesion; the discovery of symmetries where none were seen to exist. Yes, even beauty.

As a great Silicon Valley figure argued, “technology alone is not enough—it’s technology married with liberal arts, married with the humanities, that yields us the result that makes our heart sing.”

His name? Steve Jobs.

U5-Reading A

**21st-Century Campus Culture**

   Almost every academic I know has fond memories of late-night dorm-room bull sessions about the meaning of life. Sometimes fueled by various legal and illegal substances, and sometimes simply the accidental product of everyone coming home from libraries and study lounges at the same time on a Tuesday at midnight, those sessions constitute, for many of us in the profession, a conversational ideal that becomes harder and harder to replicate in our adult lives.

I certainly cling to my memories of those conversations, and sometimes I think I went into graduate school hoping to become the kind of faculty member who could recreate such profound dialogues in my classroom. I envisioned myself sitting in a circle with eager undergraduates debating the vision of the world offered by their favorite writers, and arguing about whether or how to apply it to our own lives.

  But, the book I read this summer, Susan D. Blum's My Word! Plagiarism and College Culture, has left me convinced that I'm living with an outdated picture of late-night life in the dorms—and left me wondering about the implications that a changing campus culture may have for our teaching.

  I would have had a hard time shrugging off those ideas after seeing them described in this carefully researched book, and Blum’s work made it even more difficult for me, since her descriptions of an altered campus culture centered on the students and campus life at the University of Notre Dame, my undergraduate alma mater—the very locus of my fond memories of a thriving late-night intellectual culture.

  The first question I had was about her emotional reaction to the results of her work: Did she find it all as depressing as I did?

“My reaction,” she wrote in an e-mail, “was largely relief, fascination, and despair , all entangled. Knowing what college life is like now for many students at residential colleges explained a lot about my experience with students,

and it has ended my tendency to get upset when students didn't seem to be focusing as much attention on their coursework as I thought appropriate. I think my expectations are much more realistic now, so the entire experience of teaching is less depressing than it was when I couldn't understand why I couldn’t motivate students to be absorbed in their work.”

  Blum’s work gave me some measure of that relief as well, since she presented such a clear picture of the challenges we face in drawing students into the important questions and issues of our disciplines. But I will confess to feeling more despair than relief. So I asked Blum whether she thought it was possible still to transform campus culture in order to inject more intellectual life into student life.

   “The short answer,” she wrote back, “is no.”

     But she gave me a longer answer as well: “The more I teach and understand about students’ lives, the more I see their profound curiosity. But we have to connect with it on their terms.

  “I have seen students get excited about things they are learning in their classes, whether it is a project they are

working on or just a new way of thinking about the world. But I think we have to make the case for each subject. It can’t just be fulfilling requirements, if we want it to matter to students. And we are bound to miss a number of them. We are kidding ourselves if we think that all students are likely to become intellectuals. But there are many ways to become moral, productive, contributing human beings besides through the life of academic pursuits.”

    Most important, I wanted to know whether she had changed her teaching practices in any way as a result of her research.

“Absolutely!” she said. “I work very hard now to get to know my students individually and to engage them. I try to think about why my particular subject might be useful or interesting to them, even if they did come to the class because it is a requirement. I constantly rethink both the content and the process of every course. I almost always have students lead some portion of the course, when they have to delve more deeply into a particular topic and to actively involve themselves in directing their learning.”

  Those all seemed like good ideas to me. But her final comment held the most meaning for me.

“I have stopped joining the chorus of complaint about ‘kids these days,’” she said, “lamenting their reading, writing, thinking abilities. My responsibility is to invite them into a fascinating world, and to try to make something happen on the other side of the door.”

  That comment helped remind me that I should not let go of that idealism and enthusiasm for great discussions that inspired me to join the teaching profession. Although I can’t leave behind the practical tasks of helping students become better readers and writers, I should not lose sight of the larger questions that are asked and answered in my discipline, and that I believe can help us live our lives more

richly, more ethically, and more wisely.

U5-Reading B

**Why Should I Get Involved with Campus Organizations?**

                                                                                                                                        Ken Paulsen

   Extracurricular activities—campus clubs and groups—may be the most overlooked indicator of a college’s or university’s quality. Why? Students who get involved may spend more time in those activities than they do in class. And those activities may help them succeed in life as much as their diploma.

   A journalism major who edits her school newspapers leaves college ready to work at a “real” paper, because the difference is minimal in many ways. A student who organizes a charity dance marathon has valuable event-management skills in addition to a bachelor’s degree. Amember of the debate team possesses the invaluable talent of articulating his/her thoughts clearly and persuasively. Even the president of the hacky-sack club has flexed some leadership muscle in college.

   You may not have checked out every extracurricular activity on campus before arriving at school, but your employers notice when you’ve used those activities to improve yourself.

   Grace Choe, a public relations major at the University of Southern California, naturally joins USC’s chapter of the Public Relations Student Society of America. “I’ve met so many P.R. professionals from many of the top agencies in L.A. and have learned a lot about the

industry,” says Grace, who has served as secretary of the group. “I’ve kept in contact with several of them and I do bump into them during P.R. events. This is a great head start in an industry that I am going to pursue and it shows these professionals—since they see me often—that I am serious about my future.”

  Grace hopes to follow in the footsteps of a friend of hers who was president of her school’s accounting club. The friend ended up being recruited by top accounting firms before she graduated because she had networked so successfully at club-related events.

  As a dual major in business marketing and communications, Cody Quintero’s involvement with the Association of University Residence Halls at the University of Kansas has been both rewarding and enriching. “I have had the opportunity to attend national conferences and represent my school in ways that I never thought possible,” says Cody. “I have been able to plan events that affected almost 1,000 students… There are things that I can put on my résumé that I would have never been able to if I had not got involved.”

  The difference between high-school extracurricular activities and those in college, Cody points out, is that the students handle every single responsibility in college clubs, providing practical experience. “Joining campus clubs always gives you opportunities that you will never experience anywhere else,” he adds.

  Elizabeth Flynn (University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Class of 2004) got involved with the annual Dance Marathon during her freshman year simply because she was “looking for things to do.” It seemed like a worthwhile endeavor, and several of her friends had joined up, as well. The event raises funds for East Tennessee Children’s Hospital’s hematology and oncology unit.

   Her interest blossomed into a commitment that spanned her four years at Tennessee, allowing her to give to a highly worthy cause while also having fun and building her career credentials. In her sophomore year, Elizabeth was appointed to the executive committee and oversaw the event’s catering. In her junior and senior years, she handled public relations—her field of study.

 “I took what I was interested in doing as a career and put my skills to work in both these positions,” says Elizabeth. “I was able to learn a lot about fundraising, event planning, and crowd control during my time as director of catering, and I developed a media kit, got articles placed in the campus newspaper, and served as a liaison to the media as director of media relations.”

   Similarly, Jake Liefer (University of Pittsburgh, Class of 2006) gained interpersonal skills as president of the Resident Student Association, a group he initially joined because it was the first thing that jumped out at him and because the meeting was held in his dorm. “It helps with interacting—dealing with people, dealing with situations,” says Jake. “You get outside your comfort zone.”

   Those skills helped when he was named publicity chair for his fraternity, Lambda Chi Alpha, which was hosting a teeter-totter marathon to raise funds for the Big Brother Big Sister organization. While Jake had no formal training in the field, he managed to send out press releases and generate interest among the Pittsburgh media. Eventually, he grew comfortable fielding inquiries and speaking to the press because of his experience with the Resident Student Association.

  All in all, students get involved in extracurricular activities to explore their social interests, meet new people, and have fun, but what follows can often have a broader impact on their college career and even their life.

U6-Reading A

**Your Most Valuable College Class: Personal Finance 101**

                                                                                                                                                      Ryan McVay

   When you head off to college, you’re stepping out of your parents’ bubble of influence, preparing for a career and starting to make some of your own financial decisions.

   The most important subject you study—in the classroom or in the school of hard knocks—could be personal finance. But if your course load is too heavy to fit that in—or if, like most colleges, your school doesn’t offer it—allow us to get you started.

   Your first lesson is to set up a budget and stick to it. This is the best way to take responsibility for your money and avoid falling into debt, which can be a noose around your neck for years to come.

 “Surprisingly, we find that many students have not thought much about these things,” said Brendan Coughlin, head of education finance at Citizens Financial. “Managing your financials, being on your own for the first time is new to most students.”

   No matter what stage of life you’re at, creating a budget and sticking to it can be tedious, but Coughlin and other consumer advisers agree that it’s the key to your financial success.

   Money In > Money Out

   A budget is a road map (or maybe a road app) to make sure you don’t spend more than you have. In short, it helps you to live within your means. “It starts with understanding your income and understanding your expenses,” according to Coughlin, “[and] having a discipline about spending on discretionary items.”Budget sites like Mint.com and other tools will help you determine how much you can spend each month and semester on essentials—such as food, housing, books and other school supplies—and for fun—usually listed in a budget as entertainment or recreation.

  Then, just make sure you spend less than you’re bringing in from all sources: work, parents, wherever. It comes down to getting into a routine. Compare it to other tasks like going to the gym or losing weight. Yes, it’s easier said than done, but once it becomes second nature, it can pay lifelong dividends. (And if beer and other recreational beverages represent a significant line item in your monthly budget, it may be time to rethink your financial priorities.)

   Credit Cards Are Important, Too

   Early on in your Personal Finance 101 course, you’ll need to learn about credit cards. Some personal finance advisors focus on the negatives of plastic, but let’s start with the positives. Using a credit card means you don’t have to carry around a lot of cash, can give you a leg up on tracking your spending, and can help you establish a good credit history if you pay your bill on time each month. And, if you pay it off in full each time it arrives, the interest won’t become too onerous. But it can be a bit of Catch-22 situation for college students: You’ll need a credit card to establish your credit history, but if you don’t have a credit history, you may not be able to get a credit card without a co-signer, usually a parent.

“We find that parents are very engaged in their kids’ financial lives and helping them manage their money,” said Coughlin. “Parents can help them build up a credit history quicker than they can do so on their own.”

However, you can get into deep trouble if you start to use plastic to buy things you can’t afford. If you miss the payment deadline altogether, whether it’s by one day or one month, you’ll be hit with a fee ranging usually from $24 to $35. And late payments often trigger higher interest rates. If you can’t make a payment, at least call the company before the due date; the card company might be willing to waive the fee or reduce it.

Shopping the Un-sale Rack

But if you get into the habit of just making the minimum payments each month, or carrying a significant balance, the high annual percentage rate charged by card companies can make everything you buy much more expensive. It’s like going to the store and shopping the “un-sale rack”—where everything you buy costs 25 percent more than the list price.

A recent report from Bankrate.com says an average cardholder with a $1,000 balance who makes only their minimum payments will need 73 months to pay off that balance, and that the $1,000 worth of merchandise she bought will end up costing $1,840.

   Coughlin also warns students to watch out for credit card scams and avoid cards with unreasonably high fees and interest rates.

   Other Advice for College Students

  Open a checking account and obtain a debit (not credit) card, but make sure there is at least one branch or affiliated ATM nearby so that you don’t have to pay fees to withdraw your own money. If the bank you and your family used back at home doesn’t have a presence on or near campus, switch to a bank that does.

  Look for discount programs attached to your student ID. Many local businesses give 10 percent to 20 percent discounts to students.

  Get a part-time job. You may find more job openings at the start of each semester.

  Start saving for emergencies and for big purchases you may want to make down the road.

  Buy used books online or from other students at your school. You can save as much as 50 percent.

U6-Reading B

**Whatever Happened toPersonal Finance 101?**

  When you’re in school, learning the state capitals, the multiplication tables, and the periodic table is important business. I can still see my third-grade teacher with those flash cards, running through the six tables. You just had to know those tables, remember? Had you not learned them and all that other must-have information, you probably would have ended up repeating a grade.

  Things weren’t too much different in college, either. You couldn’t move to the next college history level until you were able to speak with authority about the political situation of early 20th century Russia or advance in the English program without being able to analyze at least three Shakespearean sonnets. But I bet money, personal finance, and financial planning weren’t even part of the curriculum.

   A recent survey of high school seniors showed that more than half of them thought U.S. Savings Bonds had a better potential for returns over time than the stock market. More than a quarter of the seniors said you’d get the most back on your money by putting it in a savings account. Almost one-third of those surveyed thought that social security is what you get from your former employer when you retire, and half of them thought that income from interest on a savings account wouldn’t be taxed.

  This lack of knowledge, experts say, should not be a surprise. Kids can’t know what they’ve never been taught. If no one tells you that personal finance is important, how are you supposed to know it? Granted, the subject of money will arise if you happen to take an economics class, but it is more likely to be in relation to the Great Depression than to your bank account or retirement fund. The theories of simple and compound interests are taught in some schools, but they are rarely applied to the students’ savings accounts. These concepts are taught in the abstract, so kids have little incentive to remember them once the class ends.

   But America’s schools can’t bear the blame for financial ignorance all by themselves. Experts say that kids aren’t learning responsible personal finance from their parents either. Kids often pick up bad money habits at home and continue in those habits when they’re on their own.

  Before you get too depressed about the sad state of financial education, though, it looks as though things might be starting to change. Although it will take some time to know for sure, there is encouraging news concerning attitudes toward teaching and learning about finance.

  The Jump Start Coalition for Personal Financial Literacy, a group advocating that financial education be taught in schools, was founded in 1997. Based in Washington, D.C., it’s made up of 25 organizations, including non-profit groups and universities. Its goal is to fight financial illiteracy, which is called one of America’s worst enemies. It hopes that by 2025 every student coming out of high school will have been taught the skills necessary for financial competency. The group is lobbying individual states to make financial education required in public schools from kindergarten through high school.

 Still, too many people just don’t understand that personal finance is important. They have no idea that their financial future is at risk. Those who do realize the importance of financial planning, like you (after all, you bought this book), are to be congratulated. By taking time to learn how to make the most of your money, you’re giving yourself a huge advantage over those who aren’t paying attention.

U7-Reading A

**Time Flies When You Are Having…Fun**

Deadlines. They strike fear into some, while others seem to  blithely ignore them. What do they do to you? If you find  yourself working through the night to finish an assignment  that you could have prepared over a couple of weeks, or if  you are constantly getting hassled from your tutors to hand  in your overdue work, then you should read on…

There will always be many things you want to do at  university. Balancing your social life with study, and  balancing the many extra-curricular activities available with  essay and exam commitments, can be a challenge in itself.  It is easy in a course with relatively few “contact” hours to  see these few hours as the total of your academic week. Too  often, however, a week or so away from the day an essay  is due or an exam is scheduled, students are “surprised”  to discover that they are not prepared. Provided you have  nothing else to do that week, you may get through it. But life  doesn’t have to be such a series of small heart attacks.

Now let’s debunk some of the myths, and outline some  useful strategies for managing your time more effectively.

Myth No. 1: I work best under pressure.

Few people genuinely work “best” under pressure. Instead  it is a case of finding it difficult to work at all without that  pressure. This is one of the major issues confronted by students  who come to university from a highly supervised secondary  education; without teachers to hassle you constantly, it is easy  to believe that there is no work to be done.

Planning ahead to allocate time in advance of deadlines doesn’t  mean sacrificing your social life. It does mean learning that a  consistent amount of work throughout the academic year will  earn you better results than a few frantic weeks at the end of  the semester. In fact, you need to start thinking of yourself as a  professional already. It’s now totally up to you to balance your  study tasks (regular tasks and special assessment-related ones),  work if you have it, social activities, family commitments, sports  and leisure.

Myth No. 2: Deadlines just creep up and surprise me.

Except in the extremely unlikely case where a lecturer actively  conceals the due date of an essay, there is no excuse for  “forgetting” that an essay due date is coming up. Some students  still cry “Nobody told me that…” Well, it’s up to you to find out  what assessments you have and when they are due. Get into the  habit of checking noticeboards and reading ALL of your class  handouts.

Myth No. 3: I don’t need a draft/plan.

It’s tempting to tell yourself that you haven’t got anything on  paper because you have it all worked out in your head and  you’ll be able to sit down and write the whole assignment on  the night before it’s due. At university, more than ever you’ll  find that a professional level of presentation is required, and that’s impossible to do without at least one draft and a heap  of high quality editing. Just getting the references right can  take hours. And that goes double for the content of the essay:  you’ll need to draft your ideas and responses and work on  them to ensure that your essay is well-structured, has good  links between and within sections, has good balance between  references and originality, and so on.

Myth No. 4: Inspiration will come.

Perhaps inspiration will arrive, but it’s unlikely that she  will come along armed with all the references you should  have read in the weeks before the due date. Start your  investigations early—you can talk over the topics or the  readings with friends or with a lecturer or tutor. You don’t  need to know exactly what you’re going to say in the  assignment when you start; it’s meant to be a developmental  process, during which your understanding of the issues and  complexities grows along with your ability to discuss them  in a well-presented essay.

Myth No. 5: I’ll do it after X.

Students are the world’s best procrastinators: some of them  have worked it into an art form. Sometimes it’s a sign of  confusion about what is involved in the assignment itself,  but usually procrastination is a kind of lazy habit. You may  have been training yourself to perform only under extreme  pressure (see Myth No. 1). There are better ways to live! You  could even try doing something before X, or making sure X  is timetabled sensibly into your week.

U7-Reading B

**Principles of Effective Time  Management for Balance, Well-being,  and Success**

The principles below are derived from research on time management, motivation theory and  much experience working with university students. Think of time management techniques  as tools to help you do what you value the most. Make these tools into an expression of your  values—what’s most important to you—not just a schedule to get more stuff done. Try to  keep these principles in mind as you schedule and calendar your time, and when making the  moment-to-moment decisions that are crucial to effective time management for balance and  well-being.

Commitment—if you can’t commit to devoting time to a task, don’t put it in your schedule.  Only schedule tasks you WILL do. Be brutally realistic, not idealistic when making your  schedule. Creating a schedule you  can’t actually keep is setting yourself  up for frustration. If you don’t  actually stick to your schedule it will  soon become useless. This may have  happened to you in the past.

Pursue fun with a vengeance— Make time for enjoyable ,  rejuvenating and satisfying  activities like organizations, sports,  and entertainment. Organize your  academic and other obligations AROUND these commitments to fun.

Time vs. task focus—Think of your day in terms of time, not the tasks you have to do. Devote  time to important tasks every day. It’s hard to predict how long a task will take, so it’s hard  to schedule with great precision. But you can reliably schedule regular intervals of time and  get into a routine. Make an appointment with yourself for a particular time period, and when  playing or working, set your purpose “I’ll get the most out of this time”.

One thing at a time—Current research shows us that multi-tasking is a myth. In actuality, we  are switching back and forth between tasks. With each switch we pay a cognitive cost and a  time cost: It takes time to get mentally back into the task, thus making us less efficient. When  switching we lose the depth of our engagement, absorption. This depth is necessary where  you are expected to gain conceptual mastery, not merely a superficial understanding.

Block out time—devote, on a regular basis, chunks of time to a specific class. Make it part  of your schedule, your routine. Estimate how many hours per week you want to devote to  a class. Set aside these many hours for working tasks in the course. Slice up your task into  pieces and allow specific blocks of time for specific pieces of a big project.

First Things First—if you can do so, schedule the things that are most important to you first  thing in the day, or at the first available time slot. Anything that gets scheduled later in the day  has a greater chance of getting interrupted, put off and never gotten to. You won’t be thinking  or worrying about your work during your leisure time if you get academic tasks done first.

Routine—It takes 30 days to create a habit, but good habits make your life easier. With good  habits in place you don’t have to make as many hard decisions, thus you are less likely to  make unproductive ones such as talking yourself out of doing what you had planned.

Flexibility—How do you incorporate flexibility into your schedule? Don’t schedule every  hour of the day, leave empty time slots, and schedule in recreation time. Create a two-hour  or three-hour block on Friday as a catch-all makeup time. When things come up and you are  deciding whether to diverge from your established schedule, survey future hours and days  to see where you can make up lost time. Switch blocks of time so that your schedule reflects  your new commitments.

Respond vs. react—In the moment of decision-making, when faced with a decision or an  impulse to diverge from your schedule, don’t just react, RESPOND. Pause, take a moment to  think. Remember what’s most important to you and do what will help you get it. For example,  if exercise is a top priority for you, don’t let a sudden fear about a grade prevent you from  exercising. Be ready to reduce the amount of time, but don’t compromise on your health.  Don’t let “mind games”, in which you create justifications, get in the way or lead you astray.

Organize your environment—both physical and social—for success, for support—be creative.

a. Choose carefully where you study and do other tasks: minimize distraction; maximize focus.

b. Use physical reminders. If you want to work out more, but are getting bogged down in  email or Facebook, put your running shoes on top of your laptop. Make it harder to get off  track and easier to stick to your plan by changing your environment.

c. Instead of friends being a “distraction”, enlist their support. i. Study buddy/group—work on problem sets, readings, etc. in your shared course together. ii. Get a study/writing partner—same place and time, but not the same course. iii. Ask friends NOT to call you at specific times. Ask them to help you stick to your  schedule. Say, “Tell me to leave your room” or the dining hall after one hour, etc.

U8-Reading A

**The Return of the Natives**

Jan Hoffman

Steven and Loraine Summer adore their sons Jason, 20, a  junior at the University of Maryland, and Ari, 22, a graduate  student at the University of Colorado. When the boys  returned home in suburban Denver to visit at Thanksgiving,  their parents enjoyed the adult conversation and learning  about their sons’ career ambitions and new interests.

And would this wonderfulness be even more special during  the monthlong winter break? “Three days at Thanksgiving is just right,” Mr. Summer  said.“Then the turkey runs out and you think, hmmm,  time to go back to school! We couldn’t survive four weeks  together.”

When they arrive home, they burrow in their beds, and  delight over home-cooked meals. But then they are wideawake at 2 a.m., feeling dislocated because they can’t wander  down the hall and find someone who is also up, bored and  ready to get something to eat. Or drink.

Who is this alien creature, with the circadian rhythms of a  bat? “Some parents do expect the person who comes home  to be the one they dropped off in September,” said Vicki  Nelson, a communications professor at Curry College in  Massachusetts. “They don’t realize how much that person  has changed by winter break.”

After living at home and chafing at parental boundaries,  students have been learning how to handle a school’s banquet  of freedoms and responsibilities. Winter break is when  students and parents try to determine what to retain, what to  reframe.

At that first reunion in Austin, Laurie Allen was startled by  her daughter, Patricia. “Teenagers hunch, trying not to be  noticed,” Ms. Allen recalled. “But her eyes were brighter, she  stood up tall, she had confidence. She had been making all  these decisions on her own. It was  interesting to get to know her as a  more adult Patricia.”

This metamorphosis was likely  true for parents who attended  college themselves. When they  first returned home, they probably  confounded their own parents.

But these first months can be  upending for parents, too.

Out of sight, out of their control.  “It was hard to send her off,”  Laurie Allen said of Patricia,  her only child. “It would have  taken us a full day to get to her if  something happened.”

Initially, Patricia’s parents constantly texted and called her.  But as they realized how happy she was, they wistfully  backed off. “

We were having a nervous breakdown,” Ms. Allen said. “We  live in a small house—two bedrooms, one bathroom—but  suddenly it felt too big. Patricia used to drop her backpack  anywhere, leave her stuff all over. It drove me crazy. But now  the house was too tidy and quiet. I wanted that mess and to  hear the tramping on the floor.”

September seemed endless.

“Then one day we looked at each other,” Ms. Allen said of  her husband Andy. The couple reignited their romance. They  rejoiced at the end of the workday, watched the TV shows they wanted, sneaked out to movies at lunch hour.

When freshmen return for winter break with August’s images of home in mind, they can be as  stunned by their family’s transformation as their family may be by theirs.

“They had swapped bedrooms with me because I had the bigger one,” Patricia said. “My  mother had replaced my bedding, repainted the room, and rearranged everything. She threw  out my things that were, admittedly, old and gross, but I was shocked. My childhood bedroom  was gone.”

And there was another surprise. “Now I come back and my parents are saying, ‘Let’s make a  cocktail!’ I said, ‘You’ve turned to drink? This is terrible. I had no idea these shenanigans were  going on when I wasn’t here to supervise.’”

Winter reunions are mostly joyous and easygoing. But toward the end—particularly with  some schools scheduling breaks from the weekend before Thanksgiving through early  January—nerves can fray.

For students, local friends may have returned to college. Fake IDs have been confiscated. The  respite of home cooking has been replaced by reality, including pots to scrub. Without the  structure of school routine, boredom seeps in.

They miss the freedom, friends and frenzy of campus life. “Students will say they are ready  to go ‘home,’ when they are at home,” said Mr. Watkins of the University of Maryland. “But  they mean school. As much as it can hurt parents, it’s good to know the student feels that way  about college.”

By now, parents may also be restive. They love their children, but they also love order and  sleep. Like the Allens, the Summers savor empty nesting. But at break, Mr. Summer said, “My  wife and I realized we had to sacrifice our new freedoms if we wanted to spend time with our  kids.”

Ever since their sons’ freshmen winter breaks, the Summers have insisted that the boys  volunteer or work during subsequent breaks to keep a schedule. This year, one has an  internship in Denver, the other in Washington.

The family has found a satisfying balance. When they gather, everyone adapts to the  temporary new normal. The parents have let go of curfews; their sons call when they’re going  to be late. And as winter break nears its conclusion, everyone has come to appreciate “home”  in all its iterations—the holiday pop-up version and the one they will each be returning to.

U8-Reading B

**The Other Nine Months:  When Your College Student  Returns Home for the First Time**

Susan Bonifant

Very soon, after being away for almost nine months, college freshmen everywhere will come  home for the summer. If the reunion goes like ours did, there will be a happy night of dinner  and staying up late and reminiscing. Then, the now-sophomore will grab the keys and say  “Okay, heading out. See you in the morning.” It will be close to midnight when this happens.

There may be many reactions to this, but one of them probably won’t be: “Wait a second.  Where do you think you’re going at this hour?” Because, if nothing changes our kids like the  first year in college, nothing changes our auto-parenting like living with them again in the  summer that follows.

I caught glimpses of those changes during the holidays when they were home for the first  time since the drop off. Something was different. I wasn’t quite sure what “it” was, but I  knew “it” wasn’t there before. The college-aged children were wistful. They hugged more.  They smiled easily. They seemed peaceful. They kept me company when I was cooking, and came into the living room when I was writing to say, “So, what’s  up?”

Eventually, I realized the “it” was not behaviour, but maturity.  Not maturity in the wash-their-own-clothes and make-theirown-meals sense. Maturity in that, whether they had chosen to  perform beyond their own expectations while away, or screw  up magnificently, they had lived through their decisions. Some  of those decisions, I imagined, rewarded them with a feeling of  competence. Others, I imagined, I would hear about over some  Thanksgiving dinner many years from now.

It was an awkward little dance we did with all of our children  at the start of that first summer back home. We didn’t want to  enforce curfews or nag them to eat better or tell them when to get  up. We were not those parents anymore. Now we were more like  the aunt and uncle they were always partial to, encouraging and  supportive, but more a witness to their decision making than a  participant in it.

Maturity, like any kind of growth, is most strikingly apparent  after a separation. In our children, we observed classic indicators:  They didn’t need rules now—they were self-governed—but they  did want advice. They looked at us when we were speaking. They  disagreed with tact, even humour. They respected our space and  our changed lives. If they answered to themselves now, it was  not to flaunt their independence; it was because they’d learned a  thing or two about the cause and effect of choices.

Most special were the unique and fleeting moments in  reorientation to our children when I glimpsed them as others  might, who they’d become, and what they’d achieved under  their own influence. Our son, once a social senior who never  missed a party or met a deadline he couldn’t extend, made it a  goal to appear on the dean’s list each semester, and then did it.  “Don’t get me wrong,” he said, “I party like everyone else on the  weekend. But Monday through Friday, this is my job.” Then, our  daughter, after seeing friends take on the burden of loans and  struggle to pay for shampoo and pizza, told me she would not  waste a day of a funded education, and did not.

There were glimpses of who they might be in the future, as well. On his last summer night at home, our son spent a good portion  of it on the phone comforting a small boy he’d mentored over the summer at a local Boys and Girls Club. When the truth of our son’s departure sank in, the boy  cried inconsolably until a staff member finally called on our son to assist.

“Hey, buddy,” I heard him say, “I’m coming back at Thanksgiving. You know how fast the  summer went, right? That’s how long it will be. It’s going to fly by!” And then, “No, buddy, I  promise. I swear to God, I will not forget you.”

One day, I thought, there may be another small child in our son’s life who needs that comfort, and will have it.

If we’re open to it, a certain equality can be reached with our children after they return  from college, when all of us have stretched our lives, found our freedom, and pursued new  projects. We saw what they had managed to accomplish without someone clicking on the  lights, opening the shade and saying “time to get up.” And, they saw our excitement over new  passions which had nothing to do with parenting.

“Update your blog,” said my daughter.

  “Where are you on the novel?” asked my son.

Parents who have spent nearly a year apart from their college freshman may find it a little  dizzying to reorient to life together. But as the normalcy returns, may their thoughts now and  then turn to that other nine months, long ago, which passed equally fast and in the end, left us  just as dazzled by the new person who came home to live with us.