What They Don't Tell You About Doing College Online Freshman Year

When I first heard that my freshman year of college would be entirely online, I thought it sounded like a dream come true. No early morning commutes, no awkward dorm room experiences, and the freedom to attend classes in my pajamas. But, as with many things in life, the reality of doing college online was far more complex than I had imagined.

What they don't tell you about doing college online your freshman year is that it requires an immense amount of self-discipline. In high school, there were teachers, parents, and peers to keep you on track. Online college, however, places the responsibility entirely on your shoulders. There's no one to remind you to wake up for that 8 a.m. lecture or to nudge you into starting that 10-page paper due next week. It's all on you. I quickly learned that without a strict schedule and a dedicated workspace, it was easy to fall behind. The allure of Netflix, social media, and even just the comfort of my bed were constant temptations.

Another thing they don't tell you is how isolating it can feel. College is supposed to be a time to meet new people, make lifelong friends, and experience new things. But when you're attending classes from your bedroom, those opportunities are significantly reduced. I missed out on the spontaneous conversations before and after class, the study groups in the library, and the social events that help build a sense of community. Instead, I found myself staring at a screen for hours on end, with only the occasional breakout room or group project to break the monotony.

The lack of physical presence also made it harder to connect with professors. In a traditional classroom setting, you can stay after class to ask questions or visit during office hours. Online, those interactions are limited to scheduled Zoom meetings or email exchanges, which can feel impersonal and less immediate. I often felt like just another face in a sea of virtual squares, making it harder to stand out or form meaningful connections with my instructors.

Despite these challenges, there were also unexpected benefits. The flexibility of online learning allowed me to create a schedule that worked best for me. I could watch recorded lectures at my own pace, pause and rewind when I needed to, and take breaks whenever I felt overwhelmed. This level of control over my learning process was empowering and helped me to better understand and retain the material.

Moreover, the experience taught me valuable skills that I might not have developed otherwise. Time management, self-motivation, and digital literacy became second nature. I learned how to navigate various online platforms, troubleshoot technical issues, and communicate effectively in a virtual environment. These skills are not only essential for online learning but are also highly valued in the modern workforce.

One of the most surprising aspects of doing college online was the sense of resilience it fostered. The initial shock of transitioning to online learning and the subsequent challenges forced me to adapt and persevere. I learned to seek out resources and support, whether it was through virtual tutoring, online study groups, or mental health services. This experience showed me that I could overcome obstacles and thrive in unexpected circumstances.

However, the most profound lesson I learned was the importance of balance. With the boundaries between school and home blurred, it was easy to let one take over the other. I had to consciously set aside time for self-care, hobbies, and social interactions, even if they were virtual. This balance was crucial for maintaining my mental and emotional well-being, which in turn, positively impacted my academic performance.

In conclusion, what they don't tell you about doing college online your freshman year is that it's a multifaceted experience, filled with both challenges and opportunities. It requires a level of self-discipline and independence that can be daunting but also incredibly rewarding. It can feel isolating, but it also offers a unique flexibility and the chance to develop valuable skills. Ultimately, it's an experience that teaches resilience, adaptability, and the importance of balance. While it may not be the traditional college experience, it is a journey of growth and self-discovery that I wouldn't trade for anything.