**Directions: *As we read through the mentor text below, highlight some of the things you like. What neat writing techniques do you see? What claims or statements do you like/agree with?***

**What I wish I'd known before going to college**

By Taylor Swaak, Special to CNN

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*(CNN)*As I enter my junior year at the University of Maryland, I'm armed with the experience and confidence that were sorely lacking when I left home to start my college career. After learning valuable lessons about everything from friendship to food in the past few years, I feel qualified to give a little advice. To all of the incoming freshmen who want their college experience to be the best it can be, here's what I wish I had known before heading off for the first time:

**You're not going to miss home as much as you think you will.**

Leading up to my departure, I became nostalgic. I skimmed through my long-forgotten baby book and all of my family's photo albums and posted a Facebook message (typical) about how much I was going to miss my family and home. Despite my excitement about going to college, there was an underlying fear that I'd be lost without my parents, siblings and childhood friends.

In reality, that fear probably lasted for a minute or two after my parents left campus. Then my new roommate and I went out to explore, and independence coupled with the unknown suddenly felt like sweet, sweet freedom.

**No one else has friends, either.**

My fear of feeling lost away from home partially stemmed from the realization that I was entering an environment without the security of built-in friends. I had to create my relationships from scratch.

What if I wasn't able to make friends? What if no one liked me? What if everyone else already had friends by the time I got there?

These qualms had no basis. What I failed to grasp was that almost every single freshman (except those who lived 15 minutes from campus) was in the same position I was in. They were coming from all over -- Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts -- and they were just as eager to make friends as I was.

Everyone's doors were always open.

**DON'T bring your entire wardrobe.**

It has taken me until my junior year to understand this concept. When packing for college the first two years, I gave myself ridiculous reasons to pack every single item in my closet:

"I haven't worn this in years, but there is going to be an occasion where this will be the only thing I can wear."

"I know it's August and it won't be cold at all, but what if a 'snowpocalypse' happens and I'm not prepared? Better pack all my jeans, my weather boots, my sweaters, my jacket, my bigger jacket, my gloves ..."

Believe me, if you have not worn it for a year, you are probably never going to wear it at school. And it will eat up space you don't have in your tiny closet. I repeat: If you don't attend North Pole University, don't bring your parka jacket and gloves in August.

**Don't drink? That's OK.**

When I was a freshman, I didn't drink. But I was worried other people would try to peer pressure me to drink or shun me and not invite me to parties if I didn't.

Surprisingly, the reactions were the complete opposite. Not only was there no pressure to drink, but complete strangers would even compliment me when I politely declined alcohol.

"You know what? That's actually really cool. Good for you. I respect that."

It was refreshing to know I would be able to be myself without people judging me (well, not to my face at least).

You have every right to say no. If, for whatever reason, someone has a problem with your drinking preferences, it's time to book it. That's not the crowd you want to be around.

**Think it's OK to borrow? Think again.**

So you've been living at home for the past 18 years. You have lifelong friends you've known since you were in diapers.

These people love you unconditionally. When you leave something in their space, they rarely complain. And you share things to the point where you think it's okay to borrow without asking if you plan to give it back in prime condition.

You've been warned: It's not OK at college.

You and your new friends might jibe well -- and they might seem like your best friends within only a couple of weeks -- but respect their space. These are not people you have known for years, and even if you think you know them inside and out, you don't.

Always make sure to ask before you borrow or take anything, even if it's a tissue or a snack. And if they say they don't care, ask anyway.

**That sandwich you really like? Stop eating it.**

If you are living in a dorm, chances are you have a mandatory dining plan. At first, this might seem like a blessing: food available all the time, and all you have to do is swipe your school ID card.

It's great at first. You'll find grilled chicken and a wrap station that could compete with mom's cooking. So you latch on and decide to eat it for almost every single meal.

Then you realize a month later that the sight of grilled chicken makes you lose your appetite -- and that you're not really a fan of anything else on the menu. And then you realize this is your life, probably until the end of sophomore year.

Prepare yourself for the food to get old. Try to expand your palate and change up what you're eating each day if you can.

**Befriend early and often.**

Even if you nail down a tight-knit group of friends, always look to expand your circle. There's no guarantee all friendships will last, and by sophomore year, it's already harder to make friends: The social buzz has died down, and the dorm's open-door policy may no longer be in full effect.

If you make an effort early on to be open to as many friends as possible, you'll be happier. And it'll be easier to let some relationships fall through the cracks if they're just not working anymore.

Best of luck, freshmen!

<http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/01/living/advice-for-college-freshmen-feat/index.html>

Reactions/Reflections:



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