

# The First Year: How to Support a Student

The first year: How to support a student in college or university

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## How to prepare for post-secondary

### For Students

Academic preparation is an important part of being ready for college or university. Taking the right courses in high school, and succeeding in them, is vital for admission into the post-secondary programs of your choice as well as success in those programs. There are, however, many other facets of your college or university life that you should also be prepared for.

- Remember to study what you love – if you didn't obtain a very good mark in 12U Biology, you will not like or succeed in university biology classes.
- Understand credit and finances – talk to your parents about money, credit, and budgeting.
- Be aware of the services and resources that are and will be available to you – in your research of academic programs, also seek out what student services are available like health and counseling services, academic skills support, financial aid advising, academic advising, etc.
- VISIT the schools you are considering applying to – there is no better way to determine how you feel about a particular institution.
  - Campus tours
  - On-campus events – fall open houses, March break, etc.
  - University and College Fairs
  - High School information sessions
- READ, READ, READ! Pay close attention to websites, social media pages (i.e. Facebook, Twitter), publications and other relevant information
- Explore the idea of living in residence (if it is offered at the institution you want to attend). This is a big decision that you and your parents have to make together. Here are a few of many aspects to consider:
  - Am I ready to live away from home?
  - Is there a meal plan?
  - How much does it cost? And can I afford it?
  - What are the rules?
  - What are the residence options (single rooms, shared apartments, dorms)?
  - Do I have restrictions that I need to consider? (Physical disabilities, food restrictions, cultural expectations, etc)
- Apply for scholarships from the schools you are interested in as well as outside organizations
- Become familiar with the OSAP ([osap.gov.on.ca](http://osap.gov.on.ca)) website and the rules and regulations within it – especially if you need assistance paying for school
- Get your own no-fee student bank account and start tracking your own finances. Where is your money coming from and what are you spending it on?

There is much more to attending post-secondary than going to class, reading text books, doing assignments and exams.

### For Parents

The vast majority of young people today rely on their parents and other family members to help them make the right decision and support them in the decisions they do make. The best advice we can offer to parents is reflective of what we have already said to students.

- Remember to encourage and allow your child to study what he/she loves. The student will not succeed at the post-secondary level with subjects they struggled with in high school.
- There are many career paths that students can follow after obtaining a post-secondary education. Some types of education are directly related to a specific career path and some types of education are more focused on higher learning. All post-secondary routes can lead in many different directions.
- Be part of the decision making process, but encourage your child to make their own decisions.
- Understand and teach your child about the family finances, credit and how financial matters work.
- Visit the schools with your child and encourage them to ask questions.

Preparation for post-secondary education involves life-skills that your child may not have needed to develop in the past. You can help them get on the

right track by helping them make their own decisions.

## What to expect in first year

### For Students

Once you have gained admission and made a decision about which post-secondary institution you are going to attend, there are several more things that you should be prepared for. While your class work is important, there are many rules, regulations and other guidelines that you will need to follow.

For some students, the transition into college or university is an easy one. Some students feel confident, prepared and are ready for new challenges in their lives. However, many students and their families find this change a little overwhelming. Most institutions have made significant efforts to create programming and communications designed to ease the intimidation for new students. Some things to be aware of are:

- Find out what programs and services are offered — ESPECIALLY to first-year students — orientation, information sessions, transition programs, writing labs, workshops, and information fairs are just a few of the ways institutions try to reach their first-year students
- READ, READ, READ — This is just like researching before applying for school - you need to continue reading everything you can find — bulletin boards, website, e-mails and other communications
- Every institution is different — the rules, regulations and guidelines for one school will be different from the others.
- Every institution will have a set of rules and regulations about student conduct, academic integrity, academic expectations, examinations, etc. This information is often contained in a "Calendar." The Calendar often also contains program information and descriptions of each course.
- The Calendar does not include ALL of the information that you need to know about registration, tuition fees, deadlines, etc. This information may be found in many different places like website, portals, registration guides, handbooks, etc.
- Ask questions — there are many experts on campus who can answer your questions or who will know the right people to ask
- Remember that you have more responsibilities as a post-secondary student:
  - you must register on time
  - pay your tuition fees and manage your finances carefully
  - meet academic and administrative deadlines — these are strict. Even missing a deadline by and day or two can have significant academic and/or financial penalties
  - follow new rules
  - meet all of your instructor's expectations
- Manage your time wisely — classes aren't always held during the day. Your schedule might include evening or weekend classes, workplace experience, labs or tutorials
- Seek help early — if you are struggling in a course or if you can't make your payments (tuition, books, rent, food) then make sure you seek help right away
- Get involved! The more you participate in the student life of your school, the more enriching your experience will be. Seek out student clubs and societies, events, intramural sports, and other student groups to be a part of
- Consider getting a job on campus — there are many opportunities to work on campus and university or college employers are mindful of the fact that you are a student first. An on-campus job can help you build strong workplace skills for your resume, and keep you connected on campus

These are just a few of the things to be mindful of as you begin your post-secondary journey. There is much more to attending post-secondary than going to class, reading text books, doing assignments and exams. This is an exciting time of change in your life. Enjoy!

### For Parents

Watching your son or daughter head off to school evokes a whole range of feelings. You might feel happy, excited, proud, worried, anxious and protective along with several other emotions. It is especially difficult when they are entering into a system that you are unfamiliar with.

It is important to remember that this is a time of transition for your child as well as for your family. Here are some things that you might not expect during your child's first year of post-secondary education:

- The law considers your child to be independent and information about his/her registration, studies, grades, courses, financials and other information belong to your child. This information is protected under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (For more information, please visit [www.accessandprivacy.gov.on.ca](http://www.accessandprivacy.gov.on.ca)). Academic advisors, administrative staff, professors, instructors and any other staff member of the institution cannot release information about your son or daughter to you unless he or she has given permission to do so or unless the safety of your child (or others) is in immediate danger.
- It is important that your son or daughter is the one to complete applications, forms and other processes that are important to their academic or financial well-being. There is no harm in helping or reviewing a submission, but it is imperative that the student knows and understands what they are responsible for.
- Encourage your student to seek out the information that they require at any given time. Try not to find the information for them, but help them discover it for themselves. This will help them develop their own problem-solving skills.
- Read newsletters, websites and other information that the institution provides for parents. Many schools have developed a means by which to communicate with parents on a regular basis.
- Talk to your child on a regular basis whether they live at home or away from home. Sometimes it is hard to find a balance between a good amount of communication and being overly involved. The best way to find this balance is to, in fact, communicate!
- Ensure that your student has the appropriate time and space to complete their academic work. Quiet and private study space at home is essential for the success of your student. Just as important is the freedom to spend time on campus outside of the classroom. Students will often be involved in group study or assignments, participate in on-campus groups or societies, among other academic and extra-curricular

activities. Students who are involved and engaged on campus are more successful students in all aspects of their personal growth.

As with any life transition, this will be a time of growth and change in your family. Your child is making a transition into adulthood and discovering who they are and who they want to be. You have raised them and given them the foundation for this important time in their lives.