

I asked the Fall 05 Freshman to answer the following question at the end of their first semester here at CMU.

What is the most important advice you would give to an incoming freshman about surviving/thriving here at CMU?

Here are all the answers (uncensored) that I received. I don't agree with everything said here, but taken all together, I think the advice is very sound (and at times contradictory).

Use your time wisely –that determines whether you are going to be successful at CMU or not.

Change work habits!!!

Wait a few weeks before trying to figure out if you like it here or not. The first few weeks are too much of a transition.

Don't have a big head. If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. Stay bold, stay hungry. Play outside while it's warm –you'll miss it.

Stick it out. Shit happens.

Go to office hours and study with classmates.

Slow Down. This isn't a race, you don't have to fulfill your requirements early, and there's no good reason to let your pride cloud your judgment and push you too hard during your first semester.

Put down the videogames and go outside.

Learn how to balance your time. Make lots of diverse friends.

The end of the semester gets much harder than the beginning. So, if you have an easy time at the beginning of your first semester, don't get cocky – it will get much harder around November, and the next semester will be a lot harder than the first.

Shower daily.

Actually go to class. If you don't go to lecture or recitation, read the book or do homework, you shouldn't expect to pass the class, especially if you've never covered the material before. Some people don't understand this concept.

Do your work REALLY EARLY!! It is harder than high school.

Learn what the professors expect and adjust to their style instead of doing everything how you would have in High School.

Be prepared to realize that you are no longer the smartest person.

Don't lounge. Don't relax. Ever!

Balance the 3 S's: Socialize, Sleep, Study.

Leave your rooms. Don't worry about grades.

Go to class, but most importantly, find more enjoyable things to do. Insanity is worse than a C.

Don't take it too seriously.

When using the Tartan's scheduler, make sure the times it has listed match the times on the official website.

Breathe, don't stop it, cause you forget it when you get stressed.

Unit count isn't the amount of hours you might spend doing work, it's the amount you should spend. And don't play Warcraft.

Don't get yourself in too deep with courses if you want to have a social life.

Don't use "someone has to be in the bottom 50%" as an excuse.

Start early.

Getting a couple of B's is a small price to pay for seeing Pittsburgh and making friends. Make friends early. Meet upperclassmen. Get a research job. Make a commitment to activities to force yourself out of your room. I think I made the right choice by not drinking. **GET OUT OF YOUR ROOM!!!** Get sleep, exercise. You can ride the bus for free. Be spontaneous.

Accept that you're not the smartest person here, lose your ego before you get here, and don't try to show off.

CMU students are by nature success-driven people. If you're here, you've got the drive –people just get lost in the stress. Keep yourself happy and the success will follow.

Become friends with people in your classes, especially upperclassmen (since they have valuable things to say). Friends are very important, and will help you come up with excuses to leave your dorm room.

Live on campus (in dorm). Also, it's ok to fail ☺

Get help when you need it, and don't be afraid to talk to someone about any problems.

Just get involved.

Don't take 21-341. Take a small amount of courses to start, add later.

Just because others aren't always studying, it doesn't mean that you shouldn't.

Work hard, but don't forget to eat, sleep and make friends ☺ Showers are optional.

4.0 is not everything but if it is within your ability to get it without sacrificing other stuff, don't let it slip by. Sit back and enjoy before coming to CMU!

Even if you think you're a genius, once you get here, you find you're not nearly as great as you think you are. *Don't be afraid to ask for help.*

Discuss your living style with your roommate at the beginning of the year. If your living styles are too different, switch as soon as possible before you make friends with the people across the hall and don't want to leave.

Timing and office hours are the ways to survive at CMU.

Don't worry if you don't know much about programming.

Do the optional homework. They aren't kidding when they say you won't learn without it.

If you live in off-campus housing, make sure you leave extra early for classes...winter-walk can be harsh due to a lot of snow piles on the road.

Study.

Do what you need to do first, and then do what you want to do next.

Even though CMU is harder than HS and you shouldn't expect the same level of grades, don't necessarily let your guard down or settle for less than you should.

Everyone here is probably smarter or harder working than you...either find a way to compensate for it or suffer from an extreme inferiority complex.

THINK TWICE ABOUT IF YOU ACTUALLY WANT TO BE HERE – CMU is not a joke & so don't take it lightly. At Carnegie Mellon, nothing will come to you easily, you will have to make an effort, so make the effort & don't lose hope. We did it; so you can.

Do your homework.

Skip as far ahead as possible to avoid BS in 200, 100, 127, etc. If you can, get into research now. If you care about non-CS things, consider moving away from Pittsburgh & CMU.

Go to class, pay attention, keep up with your work, and don't relax too much.

Maintain a balance. Work hard, but play hard.

Class seem easy at first, but don't slack off because then you fall behind and new more challenging work builds upon the older material.

Though classes may seem easy at first, getting a little lazy can cause one to fall behind very quickly.

Online games absolutely RUIN you! Do not play any and all online games!

Know what you want & why you came to college.

Find a good place to study on your own with *no distractions*.

Do the work. No two ways about it. Don't give up because you're a little behind, don't not bother trying just because you don't think you'll succeed. Everything is made to be done.

Work hard & play hard.

Talk to upperclassmen about things; don't depend only on your advisor, because they aren't a student. Also, don't be afraid to talk to people to get what you want, and don't underestimate yourself or overestimate your ability to get lots of work done.

Enjoy CMU. Do as much as you can.

Try to keep a constant sleep schedule, you'll miss classes if you don't.

Expect nothing.

Eat and sleep. Too many students, especially CS students, seem to ignore the basic health needs of their bodies. They wonder why they are sickly, and unhappy the entire semester. Taking basic care of yourself is more important than getting an assignment finished. In the long run you will be much better off.

Despite all the warnings that you're not going to be the best here, if you are here, you are capable of doing well. If you work hard and don't slack off, you'll get the grades you want.

Don't overload yourself first semester. Get easy requisites out of the way first, so you have more time in the future to focus on specialization.

Do not procrastinate! Even if it worked in high school, it WON'T here! I was probably one of the biggest procrastinators in high school and still got all A's and one B. It doesn't work here.

Work hard, but play hard too.

Find an activity to get involved in (try the No Parking Players Improv workshop!)

Care about stuff. Stuff is important. And, as if it weren't abundantly clear, by "stuff" I mean your classes, grades, schoolwork...also having a life. Sure, you could hang out all day every day playing Super Smash Bros. Melee until you can rightfully claim your title of '1337 master,' but...do your homework first. Don't be a slacker like me. Don't be eager to settle for mediocrity. You're the man now, dog. It's peanut butter jelly time.

Do not skip classes, do not register for early morning classes. Go to your IC/freshmen seminar (don't be like me). Do go to frat or sorority rushes even if you have anti-Greek life mind set because from my experience, it's nothing like what's on TV. Also don't be a tool and whine about less than 3.5 GPA. Because you will end up skipping few classes and slacking off in few courses unless you are one of those lucky "hard-working type."

Sleep & do stuff outside of CS related things. Get the lowest meal block plan, you'll NEVER use it...

Act like 1st semester is pass/fail. If you aren't failing, you're in good shape.

Attend all your classes and recitations! I fell behind. Coming in and going to all the classes was the best way to "catch up" on what you missed in high school. BUT make sure to remember that classes are important but not the only thing to do here. There is tons of free stuff to enjoy/explore, so don't let the work keep you shut in.

Come with an open mind. Don't expect much sleep, work never gets completed, but enjoy every moment of it.

Do your work early. Go off campus to eat. Watch internet bandwidth.

Fill out your forms early. I got put in an all male dorm because I turned in my housing form just before the deadline. Do stuff early so it doesn't bite you later.

Procrastination and masturbation are both great until you realize you are screwing *yourself*.

C's get degrees.

Get out of your dorm room!

Don't take academics too seriously.

Don't take too many courses in your first semester, and use your free time well.

Get things done as soon as you can, it reduces stress and you'll have more enjoyable free time.

Hakkuna Mattatah.

Don't expect to ride on your high school reputation.
Everyone's starting from scratch.

Don't get 8:30 classes, they are very easy to sleep through.

You are not the most brilliant person in the world. You don't have to remember this, you'll find out quickly.

If you're taking mostly core classes and intro classes, then you might find it easy.
If you're taking more advanced classes to begin with because of receiving AP credit or other type of credit, then you might want to brace yourself for some hard stuff ahead, especially if you have more than 4 main classes.

Get involved. Try to meet as many people as possible in the first weeks.

Don't worry about grades – follow your passion and challenge yourself.

Go for whatever you want to learn. Don't give up on that.

Take at least 1 class in everything you are interested in or curious about. You'd be surprised what classes you find the most interesting and how they change your career plans.

If you aren't excited about going to college, talk to someone; and if you are, make sure you don't forget that you are, halfway through the semester.

Make sure you go to bed early and go to class. Living in New House will give you a better experience.

Don't hide in your room. Come out more often, there are lots of interesting activities, be it sports or seminars. (I am not exactly heeding my own advice either).

Choose your 76-101 section wisely! (I had to work about 20 hrs a week for some weeks).

Ask other students about the instructors that you have no idea about. Choose the right instructor can make your life much easier!

A lot of normal people do geeky things, so you don't have to live the stereotype.
Don't eat the fries at the O.

Don't develop bad habits and even if you do, take corrective measures soon. If you are not doing well in a class, talk to the professor. Most professors here are very willing and eager to help students.

Do not get the gold or silver meal plan. You will not use all the blocks.

Try everything. At CMU, you are presented with many opportunities to grow and some may change the rest of your life! Also, get the meal plan with the most dine-xtra and least blocks, the school takes too much of your money as it is!

Get involved in things un-CS-related. Get involved in things that *are* CS-related. Try new things. Don't restrict yourself.

Join an organization or two. In college, you have more free time and less to do with it. Always make plans for weekends, because sometimes they can be really boring. And make sure to meet a lot of people so that you usually have people to eat lunch with.

Learn effective time management! You should constantly be asking yourself what are the most important things I need to be doing.

Everyone comes here expecting it to be difficult. At first it isn't. It won't stay that way. Get a rhythm going early with classes, homework, friends, activities, and sleep (yes, all five are important!) so that when that first week from hell hits you in the face, you won't even feel it. Don't worry if you fall behind, though – you can just catch back up over the weekend

Join clubs. Seriously.

Don't be afraid to jump into extra-curricular activities right away. It's nearly a necessity to have something to be involved in other than school work; otherwise you may go crazy.

Get an apartment so you don't have to be on the full meal plan. Try very hard not to take all 8:30 classes, being able to sleep in one day will do wonders, even if you are a morning person you'll find out you aren't so much when you go to sleep at 2AM.

Come with right expectations of your level of intelligence. If you think you're smart humble yourself; don't be afraid to ask questions, don't be afraid to embarrass yourself as the only one who does not understand what is going on in the lecture, granted that you were paying attention and coming to class. Please do not think of professors, even the super genius ones, as supreme beings and that your questions as a freshman one too measly to be heard. Stay awake in class, you realize that the moment you fall asleep or stop coming is when your homework becomes 10x harder and your test scorers reach an all time low. In that sense, even though the professor may have a thick accent, or the most boringest lecture, stick with it and take it *seriously*. Discipline.

Have fun!

Get involved in clubs and organizations and meet people on your floor in your dorm and outside your major.

Relax in your first semester. Work hard to learn, not for the grades. Do not get caught in the freshman GPA trap.

Make your top priority: programming/math (focus on this only once you are satisfied with your grades in other classes). This is my biased attitude toward staying happy regarding grades.

Time management – do your assignments in a timely manner. Try to stay ahead, even. This way, you spread work out evenly, and you are much less stressed when you get slammed with a bunch of work.

You come here to work hard. The sooner you accept and learn to live with that, the better. Also, don't assume social life will come to you. You have to put in an effort on that front. Professors are not scary. Talk to them outside of class. They won't bite.

Make sure you manage time well, both for work and having fun. Having fun is arguably the more important of these 2 goals. Do stuff you enjoy.

Never delude yourself into thinking you can survive on no sleep, it really hurts, both physically and your GPA.

Keep sane by *not* working *all* the time.

Don't worry. It takes awhile to get adjusted at first to the work at CMU.

Don't go to CSW, just read the website an hour before the test. (Except first lecture & don't forget the two homework assignments.)

Join something that doesn't involve being a CS nerd, like plays, newspapers, buggly, political, religious clubs, and sports groups. Robotics, programming, computer, game, math, quiz, and other such clubs don't count for the above.

Don't come here unless you really love the area you are majoring in, it's the only thing keeping me here (I'm obviously not still here for the grades or the money or the social life).

Get the cheapest meal plan, get science AP credits if possible, and challenge yourself (What's the point of paying \$40,000 to learn material you already know and throw off the curve for your classmates?) And don't procrastinate, it's bad!

Don't underestimate your courses. Don't slack off. Enjoy every second, academic or otherwise, take full advantage of all the activities available, do everything with drive & motivation. If you don't enjoy what you are studying, look around, there's a million more things to study.

Make friends with people in your major. You will share a lot of classes so you can share books (\$) and help each other study.

Try sitting in the front row of classes, you would be amazed how much more you will get out of the lecture.

College is fun. Remember that, and you'll have the time of your life.

Try to settle into a rhythm with work, classes & new friends. Plus, make friends wherever you can, even if they aren't your best friends. These people will make your first semester easier.

The incoming freshmen must work hard on their courses. Most courses that they will take are not so difficult; if they spend reasonable time, they will get good grades. But the most important thing is self-management. I think most of the freshmen did not experience dorm-life yet. It's so easy for freshmen to go away from academic stuff. In light of drinking, playing and etc. Thus self-determination is so crucial to be successful in this "tough" CMU life.

Keep up-to-date with your classes even if it seems easy or like review.

Remember the days in high school when you were at the top of your class? Don't forget that. This school is populated with ridiculously smart people, and if you're not a super-genius, it's easy to start feeling like an idiot. But you're not. There's a reason why you're here; never forget that.

Don't take a lot of units 1st semester, moving away from home is hard enough. If you do then adjusting will be so much easier and you'll have time to experiment with different activities and find the one's you like.

Sleeping in class is a bad habit.

Relax, if you can't survive the heat, you wouldn't be here.

Don't get cocky, humble yourself in everything you do here (study, party, whatever).