

Ed's Top Ten List "How to Survive University"

engl 131 / composition / university of washington / chang

NO.10: THOMAS KUHN SAYS, "IT'S ALL ABOUT PARADIGM SHIFT!"

This isn't Kansas anymore, Toto. In other words, the glory days of high school are best left to memory, nostalgia, and John Hughes films. The transition from high school to university is a paradigm shift, a punctuated significant change in thought, in exigence, and for some, in geography. The past should inform the present and future but not necessarily be a blueprint for it. Never utter the phrase, "In high school I used to..." College is an opportunity. Change what you can, let go what you can't, and reinvent when necessary.

NO.9: GET A LAY OF THE LAND.

Get to know your surroundings: your dorm, your quad, your dining hall, your gym, your greenspace, your campus. Life at university should not be a series of bee lines, of straight shots from Point A to Point B to Point C back to Point A. Wind a little, curve a little. Get to know where things are located, especially buildings where you don't have classes. Have lunch in a different dining hall than your usual. See what the art gallery on campus has to offer. Watch a practice game. Find the different places you can return books to the library. Corollary to knowing your university, get to know what's off campus. The world is not flat, and the world does not end at the edge of school. Most colleges are surrounded by college towns. See what the town and nearby burbs have to offer: restaurants, dive bars, museums, coffee houses, shops, live music, public transportation, hotels, landmarks.

NO.8: GO TO CLASS.

Common sense would argue that an imperative to go to class need not be said. But, common sense is often last thing that people listen to. Go to class. Go every day. Go to your morning classes. Go to your afternoon discussions. Go to your late-Friday-before-a-long-weekend lectures. Your presence, even in a large class, can and is often noticed. Your absence is noticed even more. Going means you are engaging, you are listening, you are absorbing, you are experiencing. Just being in class is better than missing class entirely. Even if you are not prepared for class, don't short-change yourself twice, thrice, manifold by missing class, too. Go to class. You can spare the few hours out of a single day.

NO.7: SLEEP.

Rest is important. Sleep is important. The only way you will have the energy to face the world, go to your classes, study for exams, write your papers, and party as hard as you work is with enough shut-eye, Zs, REM-time, visiting Mr. Sandman. Sleep deprivation affects everything: mood, memory, attention, retention, coordination, health, and overall well-being. Sometimes getting sleep is more important and more efficient than pulling an all-nighter to get something done you should have done much earlier. Loss of sleep incurs other costs than just not getting enough rest. Of course, don't sleep too much—that would infringe on rule No.8.

NO.6: LIFE IS A COMMUNITY.

The clichés have it: no man or woman is an island, it takes a village to raise a child, there is no "I" in "team", there is strength in numbers, think locally but act globally. All these maxims remind us that university life is about participating in and exploring a community. Whether you are a commuter or a resident, the university is a collaboration, a cohabitation, an intersection of spaces, places, people, and ideas. Get to know your roommate. Get to know your dorm mates. Get to know your classmates. Get to know the person sitting next to you right now. Get to know your TAs, your teachers, and your advisors. You don't have to like everyone you meet, but you should meet and greet as many people as possible.

NO.5: READ AND WRITE.

Central to the university experience is reading and writing. Whether you're reading a textbook on economics or Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* or the student newspaper, reading opens your eyes, your mind, and your vocabulary. Whether you're writing a paper for English Composition or a lab report for organic chemistry or an algorithm for a Computer Science program, writing opens your eyes, your mind, and your vocabulary. There are very few guarantees in life, but one of them is: "Good readers make good writers. Good writers are good readers." Find some pleasure in reading, and discover that you can write with authority.

NO.4: EXPLORE. EXPAND. INCLUDE.

We pay a lot of lip service to the notion of diversity or multiculturalism or "melting pots". Now is the time that we put our actions, our ideologies, and our voices to the test. Rule No. 6 tells you that the university is one big community made up of many different, distinct, overlapping, and occasionally conflicting communities. Get out there. Explore and encourage diversity. Expand and push your own boundaries and comfort zones. Include difference and interest in your life. Homogeneity is the enemy. No one wants to live in a homogenous world. Don't accept the status quo. Refuse mediocrity. Don't hate, celebrate. Walk a few miles in another person's shoes.

NO.3: HAVE FUN.

This rule is self-explanatory. You might have many good reasons for being at university—learning, training, exploring possibilities, making friends, getting a degree, job security, getting out of the house, obeying your parents. However, university should also be about having fun, doing what you really enjoy, making friends, and—yes—partying. Remember, though, that you must work as hard (if not harder) as much as you play hard. Also remember that learning is in a deep sense play. Chase dreams, materialize aspirations, and love what you do and do what you love.

NO.2: PROCRASTINATION IS NO EXCUSE.

If J. Wellington Wimpy, who said famously, "I will gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today," prosopopoeically spoke about time management, he'd probably say, "Why wait till Tuesday to make a hamburger today?" Get started early. Identify how long things take. Expend an appropriate amount of effort. Plan accordingly. Remember due dates. Part of university life is realizing that time can be your friend or it can be a woeful adversary. At first, there is the illusion that you have a lot more time on your hands. Classes only meet a handful of times a week. There are no parents breathing down your neck. You can set your own schedule. But that illusion soon evaporates in a cloud of exams, study sessions, team practices, club meetings, band practices, long walks, catnaps, hangovers, late-night dinners, instant messaging, and plain old "contemplating your navel." Find a system that works for you and be fastidious. Control what you can and let go of what you can't. Remember that, in the end, we are liberated by deadlines. See also rule No. 8 and rule No. 5 and make sure it's not all about rule No. 3.

NO.1: BE PROACTIVE. BE YOUR OWN ADVOCATE.

The whole point of a top ten list is to give you ideas, a map of possibilities, to consider, take in, and employ. Use what you like, modify what you don't like, and leave behind what doesn't work for you. But the trick is to do it—just like Nike says. If you have questions, ask them. If you have doubts, assuage them by asking questions. If you need help, ask for it. If you have a plan, find a way to make it work. Learning isn't a passive activity. Life isn't a spectator sport. There isn't enough time and pity party supplies for everyone to be a wallflower or an armchair warrior. Be confident. Be secure. And if you have to fake it till you make, then do so with gusto. This is your life. Live it.