
THE FRESHMAN FIFTEEN

Fifteen Must-Do's (and some don'ts!) For Your College Experience

After high school graduation life gets exciting and scary all at the same time. The friends you've known and grown up next to will all be going their separate ways. You'll be living outside of your home for the first time. Things are known and unknown simultaneously. You become responsible for yourself in a whole new way. You'll experience a new sense of freedom. And you'll fall into a community group very quickly. Going to college is like the first day of kindergarten. It's everyone's first day. So initially it won't be hard to make friends. But figuring out who will build you up, who will encourage you to be the best you, who will really love you well, and who will be a friend that lasts - that takes time and wisdom. Navigating college can prove to be difficult, if it's ok with you, some of us would like to impart some lessons we've learned along the way.

Based on the opinions of about 20 female Christian college graduations, here are fifteen things to remember throughout your college career.

1 - Be brave. Leaving your family might freak you out. Going to another school or living in a different town than your boyfriend might freak you out. Paying for college might freak you out. Leaving your friends, again, might freak you out. Before you freak out, pray about ALL OF IT. Ask God to open the right

doors and close the wrong ones. Tell Him your fears and worries. Ask for wisdom and discernment. Know that your prayers may not be answered in the ways that you think they should. *"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."* Isaiah 55:9. If you haven't started the application process for applying to college, ask your parents or a trusted adult in your life to help you navigate pursuing a college and the financial aid part. If you've already been accepted, follow through on this commitment, it's a good habit to make. Be brave. Eleanor Roosevelt once famously said: *Do one thing every day that scares you.*

2 - Don't isolate yourself from a faith community.

Find a church. If you grew up in the church there may be a strong temptation to rebel or just pull away and *'find yourself'*. With this new freedom you get to decide whether you even go to church anymore. The choice is yours to make. But resist the temptation to fall away and blend in. Not because your parents are going to ask you every Sunday night whether or not you were at church that morning. But because you recognize that church community and united worship is a vital part of the faith experience. There are ways to take your own path without withdrawing just because you can. Ask around see if there is a local Salvation Army corps in the area or experience another Bible teaching church.

3 - Join (or start!) a faith-based campus community group .

Leaving your family's home and leaving your church community will feel like starting over and will leave you wondering where are the *others*? Others meaning other Christians your age, of course. There are campus ministries available at most campuses including community colleges. Groups such as: Campus Crusade for Christ, Christians on

Campus and Intersarsity. And of course you can start your own Embrace: Campus group among other young women on campus.

4 - Branch out. In the first three years of high school I cared way too much about what people thought. Part of me wanted to join some after-school groups. Like Diversity Club or Yearbook. But I thought it would look nerdy. Finally I did join something my senior year, called Destination Imagination, Di for short. DI teaches the creative process from imagination to innovation. I wasn't really good at it, but I'm glad I did it. I wish I did it all four years. The group was made of up a few friends and a few individuals I didn't know. Being in this group showed me it was ok to be different, to be smart, to do something not everyone was doing and to just not care what others thought. This impacted my approach to friend-making in college. In my college experience nothing you could do, or be, or join was weird or nerdy. I hope that other colleges are like that, a place that fosters freedom to be, engage and experience new avenues of learning, creating and being. That freedom opens friendship doors that you wouldn't necessarily walk through if there wasn't an existing culture of accepting differences.

Be brave, and make new friends wherever you are. Talk to someone that looks and dresses different than you. Sit with different people in the cafeteria, join an extracurricular group. Someone is waiting for your friendship; don't deny anyone the opportunity to know you better.

5 - Take school seriously. Not just because you (or someone) is paying for it, but also because these four years are literally, educating you for your future. Don't take that fact lightly. Read the notes, join the study groups and actually study, don't skip, and talk to your professors. Get your professors to

know you. Stay after class, email them with questions. Believe me, there will be a time when you will need an educational reference, and you'll realize you didn't invest enough face-time with your professors. During your freshman year shadow someone that is employed in the profession you are majoring in. A professor may be able to recommend someone. This can quickly help you determine if this is something you could do for life.

6 - Pursue leadership. Not everyone is a leader. But college is a great time to experiment with leading. Whether it's starting and leading an Embrace: Campus group of fellow female students, volunteering at a church and leading a group, or being a co-leader of a campus extra-curricular activity. Take initiative, be bold and see if this is your gift. Even if it is, it will take years to develop this skill.

7 - Study abroad. This is number 7, but it is the number one response in the *"In college I wish I would have..."* category in a survey we shared with female graduates. I've seen fellow classmates chose not to study abroad because they were in a relationship (that didn't last, btw), or because they were afraid of what they'd miss at their campus. Believe me (seriously, you should, I studied broad in London) the things you'll do, see, experience will greatly surpass any parties/gatherings/all-nighters you *might* experience that semester. Those moments on campus are special, but living in another country for one semester out of eight (ten if you're like me) semesters will be what you tell people about, what will impact you and influence the way you see the world. It will also be what the interviewers ask you about on your resume. Really.

8 - Learn how to handle money. Getting a credit card as a student is not a good idea. Debit cards connected to a bank

account are good. Credit cards that you pay off monthly – not so good. Credit cards confuse reality. With a credit card you can pay for it now without concern and much thought. Just swipe it. And the next thing you know the pay-off balance is \$500.00. How did that happen? Then the next thing you know after that is the pay-off balance is \$1,500.00 and so-on and so-on. It's a vicious cycle that can leave you in debt and in tears. So don't even go there.

Open a savings account, and put money in it often and then don't touch it.

While you're at it start shopping smart. Care about where the things you buy come from and who is making it. Buy second-hand, recycle, and use cloth bags. This website is one of my favorite sources for shopping better:

<http://www.betterworldshopper.com/rankings.html>

9 - Don't compromise. There is real pressure to experiment in the drinking culture of the college experience – even at a Christian college! You will be weird for not doing it. And I pray that you're ok with being weird (standing out). Participating in the party scene will leave you with regrets; it will leave you with a false sense of fun, a false sense of comradeship and a false sense of belonging to a community, a false sense of adulthood. Physically it will leave you dehydrated and tired. But it also puts your safety at risk. *"When men are in a blackout (temporary alcohol induced amnesia), they do things to the world. When women are in a blackout, things are done to them."* - [Aaron White](#), an expert on college drinking and a senior scientific adviser at the US National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

Remember that not all 'adults' drink and have sex. And that doing those things doesn't mean you are now an adult, nor does

it mean that you are now mature and experienced. Don't compromise your values to fit in.

10 – Wait. The amount of cuties you meet at college might blow your mind and give you endless butterflies. If you're boy crazy, college maybe a real trigger for your temptations. But wait, wait, wait. Wait to jump into a relationship. Give yourself a chance to establish yourself as *you*, not to be known for one half of a relationship. Seriously, there's no rush. And we can't go without saying, wait on sex. As someone that did wait, I can tell you I don't regret waiting.

11- Make time for Jesus. As you make relationships in college, make sure that your relationship with Jesus is the relationship you nurture and care for the most. If you haven't noticed yet - people will let you down, disappoint you and break your heart. Not to say you shouldn't form relationships with people, God gave us each other! But don't make any person or thing or major or goal more important than your relationship with Christ. Carve out time every day to pray and read scripture. A good rule of thumb is: *No Bible no breakfast or No Bible no bed.* Try to practice one of these methods to discipline yourself in seeking Christ daily.

12 – Learn to eat right. I'm not going to tell you not to order a pizza at midnight and eat it all by yourself, because that's gonna happen. But I do strongly encourage you not to make it a habit. Don't only eat junk food. The freshman 15 is a thing, and not only will excess junk food consumption cause you to outgrow your clothes, it's not healthy to eat processed food in excess and it creates poor eating habits that are hard to break. Fruit, veggies, healthy proteins and items with 5 ingredients or less are your friend and worth making a habit of eating.

13 - Stand up for what's right. Once you enter college you won't see bullying like you did in high school. People seem to chill out a bit more once they hit college - for the most part. But there will be loads and loads of strong opinions and loud voices. Hear people out, but stand up for what you believe in. Don't let anyone tell you you're unintelligent because you are a Christian, and certainly don't believe it. Know why you're a Christian and be ready to share it, *"but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,"* 1 Peter 3:15 And if you do see bullying stand up and speak against it.

14 - Finish. College maybe one of the harder things in life you do. The work load and the cost can derail a student who may be facing crisis or whose support system is stressed. If at all possible, don't stop until you're done. Finishing college will always be one of your biggest accomplishments; it is worth fighting for, don't give up!

15 - Grow up. Sometimes growing up stinks and sometimes it's really great. It does mean new responsibilities and owning things. I don't mean owning possessions, but owning your behavior and how you handle situations. Learning how to say sorry will benefit you in huge ways. Say sorry when you're late to meet up with someone and you made them wait. Recognize you may have caused a bad situation - and you can't blame anyone else. Say you're sorry and you didn't mean for that to happen. Own up to things. Write thank you notes. Recognize the things others (such as your parents!) do for you to succeed and grow and say thanks. Recognize now if you're a complainer and nip-it-in-the-bud before it becomes a life-long habit. Develop some self-awareness and recognize if and when you use your friends. Use them to get who and what you need, use them to appear a

certain way. Realize as soon as possible that the world doesn't revolve around you. Show people that you love them; show them they are valuable to you. Treat others the way you want to be treated and put God before all things and feelings.