

College: In the Eye of the Beholder

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College! You've heard all about it, haven't you, little sister? I know that you've heard some of my stories, and you've heard your high school teachers say for years, "You'll need to know this for college!" Yes, I know that you've heard a lot of advice from mom and dad, from our relatives, from your friends—from just about everybody. But, we're sisters, and we share everything, so I wanted to give you *my* perspective on the whole "college experience" too. I want to share a few things that I've been thinking about as I've looked back on my freshman year. I'm going to be really open with you because this is just between you and me, right?

What I've discovered about college is that it's all in the eye of the beholder. Two students can be in the same class and have a radically different experience! One huge contributing factor to their divergent experiences happens on the first day. One student will glance over the syllabus and say, "Yes! Look at all of these interesting things that I get to learn about!" The other student will say, "Oh no, look at all of the work that I have to do for this class!" You choose which student you want to be, but which one do you think will get more out of her education? Which one is truly embracing the ideals of a liberal education—which she is paying for, by the way, whether she chooses to take advantage of it or not.

Be open to new ideas, new perspectives. Especially since the political season is heating up, you're going to hear some opinions that will make you crazy inside your head: "What! How can they possibly think that?" But then, if you listen, you might come to an understanding, if not an agreement, with them. The important part is that you become more aware of the diversity of opinions out there, developing a mind that considers such ideas first instead of immediately rejecting them.

On the flip side, question everything. Question your assumptions; question your professors' statements and your friends' ideas. College is a time of discovery—it's a unique environment in which you're free to explore. So go shopping in the marketplace of ideas! Be confident but humble. You know a lot, but there is always more to learn; as a Chinese proverb says, "In a group of three, there is always a teacher."

Take classes just for fun, and explore your options. I had no idea, for example, that I would become so interested in plants, and I had a blast in my anthropology class. Explore your options related to your major—there are opportunities that might fit you much better than your first decision would have. You might change your mind seven times, or you might never change your mind. In any case, you'll have the assurance that your decision was an informed one. Take me for example. During my first week of classes as a freshman, I went to the organizations bash on campus, and I discovered my second minor—also known as my dream job: TESOL, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. It's a career that I *knew* I wanted to pursue, so I added it to my other programs of study. I never would have found it, though, if I had thought to myself, "I'm way too cool to check out the organizations bash."

Sit down with random people in the cafeteria! I know, I know. Speaking of "too cool"—it's totally random and sounds kind of bizarre, but you can meet really great people this way. It keeps you from reverting back to that high school "groupie" mentality. You're in college now; grow up and get to know some new people instead of just hanging around with the people you know and who are just like you! I've met people who have become my really good friends. I've had great conversations, awkward conversations; conversations about spinach and about socialism. You just never know what might transpire over lunch. See college life through the eyes of another beholder.

Join some organizations and get involved in the community. It's yet another way to meet new people and discover new things. You can find a group of people who have the same interests as you, even if it's something totally random! Or, join a group to learn something completely new. Oh, and don't just join "popular" groups—join a little club that interests you; they've got great community!

Study abroad—two words that will change your life if you take advantage of them. This is one earth-shattering experience that you won't want to miss. What could be cooler than going to South Africa, Thailand, or Latvia for a semester? I went to France, which might seem more prosaic, but it removed me from everything that I knew and forced me to actually *use* the language that I had been learning for six years! It rocked my perspective on so many things—like what citizenship is and what my part is in a global society—and it changed me. There's a world of opportunity out there, just waiting to be explored. And whether or not you decide to study abroad, become friends with international students—they are some of the coolest people on campus! Take part in all of the global opportunities that you have available to you.

College. It's a challenge. I'm going to tell you that right now. It will be a new, exciting, invigorating experience. And then it starts to get tedious. There are so many opportunities available that it probably will seem kind of overwhelming—so overwhelming that you might even think about dropping out and running away from school altogether because it would be so much easier. I have. But know this: it's just a passing thought because a new day will come. The sun will rise, and you'll again be glad to be in college because it's worth it. Remember why you're here—to learn, both inside of the classroom and out. Embrace college and the liberal arts experience, and they will embrace you. Wake up every day with a sense of anticipation and

wonder—what could possibly happen today? You never know, so keep your eyes wide open and take advantage of every opportunity!