EllenBremen.com August 16, 2012

Five Must-Say Tips for Week One of College Classes

During my fifth visit to Women's View Radio, I was recently had this call-in question, **"What are the first steps that a student should take when going to college?"**

I'm sure that others' answers would vary, depending on if you are living on or off-campus, if you've left home, etc., but as a prof, my job is to focus on academics and classes. So, in the spirit of my telling you what questionable college success advice I've found out there, let me counter that with what I believe **you must say early on to increase your chances of success**. One of my recommendations, you can even say to *yourself* (silently!). Let's go!

1. **"What type of class load can I handle at once?"**

An adviser is going to suggest what classes you need to take and help you create a recommended schedule, but all too often, I have seen students become overwhelmed with a schedule or a combination of classes that does not work for them. If you look at the class list that is laid out for you and break out into some sort of rash or sweat because the classes seem like the wrong combination, or occur at times that you know will be a challenge, then the time to make changes is *before those classes actually begin*.

Go to profs who teach the classes you're considering and say, **"I'm scheduled to take this class and trying to make sure I can handle it with the rest of my schedule. Can I take a look at a syllabus? One from last term is fine."** Believe me, profs don't want you in over your head either. Checking out a syllabus is a great way to get the flavor of the course. Can't find a prof? Ask the Department Admin if there is a syllabus on file or online.

2. **"Hello, my name is _____." (to your new profs).**

Many students *never* introduce themselves to their profs. Mistake! But you do have a choice on this one: You can either find your potential profs in their offices before your class ever begins, shake a hand, ask for a syllabus, and briefly introduce yourself… then ask to schedule a later meeting after your first class. (Don't linger because your prof is probably busy with meetings or prepping for classes.) Or, you can simply wait until your first class occurs and then go up to the prof afterwards.

If you catch up with a prof before you walk into that first class, you might feel a little more comfortable about taking those first steps. Even if the prof isn't totally welcoming and warm, that's okay. He/she may be busy, but even a minute hello will at least familiarize you with that person. You don't have to love them in the moment–you just have to hopefully feel a little better knowing who they are.

3. **"I'd like to meet with you to discuss _____."**

Once you are in class, I recommend that you read your syllabus **at least three times**. That's right! You must read it more than once because a syllabus is your guide to tell you what the what the course is about and will answer many of your questions! Look at your syllabus to find out when the prof's office hours are. Either make a note for yourself to go visit the prof during office hours (that day or within the first week), or go up to the prof right after class and say that you'd like to schedule a meeting.

What will you talk about? First thing would be **grade goals**. Too many students save this conversation for the end of the term when they know right at the beginning that they have a certain grade they want/need. Telling your prof, **"I'm striving for a 4.0 in this class. I plan to work hard and submit work in advance if you'll review it early. I'd like to ask questions about doing that"** is the absolute thing to do in the first week, rather than waiting. Get the tone of your work ethic established now. Then, you can check in with your prof incrementally to ensure that you are on track.

If you have any concerns about the class, this first meeting is *the* time to raise those issues. I can't say this enough: Proactive is the only way to go. Do not wait and think that problems will magically dissolve. They don't. Issues only compound as the term continues. Your prof can do so much more for you early, rather than later.

4. **"I need help with my password/e-mail/course management system."**

I can't begin to tell you how many students are not sure of a) which e-mail address the college is using (or just don't check their e-mail at all and then miss important information!); b) if the college assigns them an e-mail address; or c) how to get into critical technology associated with their classes.

-First and most obvious, find out if your college will assign you an e-mail address. If not, make sure that the one they have on file is one that you will, indeed, check.

-Next, remember that if your course uses BlackBoard, Canvas, Moodle, or other course management system, your college e-mail or personal e-mail may be associated with it. No lie: I have gone an entire term with students swearing that they did not receive e-mail from me because I was e-mailing them through the CMS and the CMS was sending e-mail to their college account–which they didn't realize they had!

-Finally, the minute that you know that you have an e-mail account and a CMS, log into both and make sure you can safely move about the cabin! You do *not* want to get into week two and scramble to catch up, or worse, week 10, when it is nearly impossible to catch up (and your professor will not be very happy when you ask about trying).

5. **"Did you take summer classes?"/"What other classes are you taking?" (or any other small talk)**

I'm going to outright **beg** you to put your phone and laptop *away* when you are in common areas on campus or when you first find your seat in class. Do not bury yourself in them because they feel safer than actually making eye contact and meeting someone new. College is the time to branch out and make connections. You can't do that if you are texting a friend or parent; you can't do that if you are updating your status on Facebook. If the prof walks in a little early and does a little chatting (I actually looooooove that before class time), you will want to experience those moments of early community-building.

Please take my word for this: Start your time in college off right. Look at those around you and talk to them. College is a place for face-to-face connections and you need to start practicing those interactions for all the times you'll need them later (as in… for interviews, work, etc.).

I wish all of you the most incredible first days and weeks of college possible!