

Hitting the Pool, and the Books, in College

Take preparatory steps to make the journey a success

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So your child is all grown up.

Almost.

Headed to college, going to swim, on scholarship or not, at a Division I powerhouse or at a D-III school. Or perhaps on a club team.

Life is about to change for your pride and joy. And it's a good thing in every way imaginable.

However, just like you helped them along the way with warm meals, encouragement and hard work, make sure you help them prepare properly for the challenge ahead. You made them meals, gave them that ride, brought them that dry towel, and that sweatshirt with the knit cap when it had turned cold and windy.

And now, all of that is on them.

High school was easy, even with the practices and everything. The school requires the kids to be there.

That won't be the case in college. In fact, the way the structure is at some schools, the freshmen level classes are so big, no one will know if they skip class.

Point Number One: Encourage your child to go to all classes, no matter how boring, how inane, or how hard the teacher is to understand or get a read on. Fact is, if a student goes to class and sits up front, statistics show they are far, far more likely to get an A or B than others. Plus, professors notoriously throw out test answers during lectures. Go to class, above all, go to every class. Taking notes in class is important, because it shows what the focus is going to be on

tests, even which parts of the reading can be skimmed over – or paid less attention to.

Point Number Two: Get all the homework done – on time. This is pretty easy, because in a lot of classes, they will have only two or three tests plus a final. So don't get behind. Staying up to date on readings keeps the workload from becoming insurmountable as finals approach. Just get it done. Read during lunch.

Point Number Three: Check out the teacher's rating to get a grasp – but don't take it as gospel. Most of these are available internally once your child is enrolled, allowing them to see grade disbursements and instructor evaluations. A lot of the online ratings can be helpful, but those can also be used as axes to grind by students who did not do homework or didn't show up to class.

Point Number Four: This one is highly personal. Be wary of "testing" out of classes. One student who tested out of math in high school got to biomechanics her senior year and had no clue on college Algebra or stats, but because she got the minimal grade on the Advanced Placement test in high school, was able to test out of math. As a rule of thumb, use this: Only test out of non-foundational classes. If a student is going to take intermediate macro theory, for example, they should take the intro class (or classes, micro and macro) at college, not test out of them. If they are a science major, they should not test out of any math or science. If, for example – and this varies by major, and interest – they are being held back by a humanities requirement and plan to take no upper-division classes in a particular area, then perhaps consider testing out, but only as long as that is the terminal class level in that subject. If there is concern about the student adapting to the workload in college, do what I did: Have your child take a class in summer term at the local community college. They will get a small class size and great instruction, and will knock out a required class (make sure of this through both the junior college and the one they are enrolling at that fall). Community college credits are very inexpensive for residents compared to four-year schools, so this is a great way to go.

Point Number Five: Make the most of the resources. Your child will have the opportunity to attend study halls, receive tutoring and even to take tests from remote sites. Make the most of EVERY single resource. They are all legal, paid for, and are there to help your child graduate on time. By the time students start asking for help, the slide has usually begun. Have them start out using all the help available, and as their academic skulls harden and they get their intellectual arms around the task at hand, peel back the help to only what they need once they're sure they are fine each term.

Point Number Six: The final point is to divide the workload up once they start their freshman years (they will get help on this from advisors). Students, especially student-athletes, do not want more than one "writing intensive" class in one semester (a writing intensive class requires about 25 pages of papers). Also, the science classes, which are usually worth four credits because of labs, can be tough if taking more than one. Take that freshman comp with one math class. Be aware, though, that getting core requirements out of the way is the most important thing, because depending on the major (and required minor), the number of electives students can take is often a very small number.

These points would probably be important for any student. But for a swimmer, and any other student-athlete, time is literally a commodity. Even students who work 20 hours a week don't have the travel and workout – and exhaustion – factors to deal with that student-athletes do. So while you prepare to let go, take a deep breath and help plan that first term. They are diving in the deep end, so they need some direction.

But they're swimmers.

So they'll be just fine.