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Orientation is Key for First-Year Students

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Orientation is key for first-year students

Students start with a clean slate in college, says Mary O’Rawe

The focus on college drop-out rates, particularly in first year, and debates around fees and funding, remind us to consider why students find it so difficult to make the transition from secondary school to higher education.

So how can incoming students prepare themselves to make the best academic transition?

The key to getting a good start is attending the orientation. This is a day, days or even weeks depending on the type and size of the institution.

The transition into third level education is complex — exciting and scary all at the same time for both students and parents. It is a transition for you as well as for your student. When they are in college there are a few things you can do to make the transition and adjustment easier.

1. Attend your orientation and any follow-up support meetings.
2. Get to know your tutor — they can help you with problems settling in, or point you in the right direction.
3. Submit everything. It might be only 5 or 10pc of the module, but can mean the difference between progressing to second year and repeating.
4. Engage — with your programme, other students and your lecturing team.
5. Readjust expectations when necessary. Everyone is in the same boat. It takes time to develop new relationships.
6. Attend your orientation and any follow-up support meetings.
7. Turn up to all lectures and tutorials — this can be the deal-breaker. It builds good learning patterns and puts you on the ‘inside track’ — much information won’t be posted on a virtual learning environment.
8. Commit to the programme. Have trust in your student; 
9. Love your librarian; more important than ever in this digital age.

Parents, may we have a word in your ear?

Congratulations! Your son or daughter is entering higher education. All that effort they put in, as well as all those years of encouraging and nurturing and guiding that you put in as a parent or guardian have paid off.

For most parents, the pride and joy that are experienced when their son or daughter heads off to college are often coupled with twinges of worry. Every family is unique as is each individual within it, with their own particular challenges, joys, expectations, and concerns.

It’s an emotional journey for both parents and students. When students go to higher education for the first time, their maturity and independence evolve at a rapid pace. They develop support systems outside the family unit and start to fine-tune their own interests and problem-solving abilities.

By the time they graduate, their parents will be more mature, which means you may need to renegotiate house rules and expectations. Be flexible and find a compromise where you will both be happy.

Mary O’Rawe pictured at DIT, Cathal Brugha Street. PHOTO: COLIN O’DIERGAN

Parents may want to consider the following tips:

1. Attend, engage, submit: Top tips to succeed in first year at college

   a. Attend your orientation and any follow-up support meetings.
   b. Get to know your tutor — they can help you with problems settling in, or point you in the right direction.
   c. Submit everything. It might be only 5 or 10% of the module, but can mean the difference between progressing to second year and repeating.
   d. Engage — with your programme, other students and your lecturing team.
   e. Commit to the programme.

2. Transition for parents

   a. Attend, engage, submit: Top tips to succeed in first year at college
   b. Engage — with your programme, other students and your lecturing team.
   c. Commit to the programme.

3. Transition for students

   a. Attend, engage, submit: Top tips to succeed in first year at college
   b. Engage — with your programme, other students and your lecturing team.
   c. Commit to the programme.

4. Transition for parents

   a. Attend, engage, submit: Top tips to succeed in first year at college
   b. Engage — with your programme, other students and your lecturing team.
   c. Commit to the programme.

5. Transition for students

   a. Attend, engage, submit: Top tips to succeed in first year at college
   b. Engage — with your programme, other students and your lecturing team.
   c. Commit to the programme.

6. Transition for parents

   a. Attend, engage, submit: Top tips to succeed in first year at college
   b. Engage — with your programme, other students and your lecturing team.
   c. Commit to the programme.

7. Transition for students

   a. Attend, engage, submit: Top tips to succeed in first year at college
   b. Engage — with your programme, other students and your lecturing team.
   c. Commit to the programme.

8. Transition for parents

   a. Attend, engage, submit: Top tips to succeed in first year at college
   b. Engage — with your programme, other students and your lecturing team.
   c. Commit to the programme.

9. Transition for students

   a. Attend, engage, submit: Top tips to succeed in first year at college
   b. Engage — with your programme, other students and your lecturing team.
   c. Commit to the programme.

10. Transition for parents

    a. Attend, engage, submit: Top tips to succeed in first year at college
    b. Engage — with your programme, other students and your lecturing team.
    c. Commit to the programme.

Mary O’Rawe lectures in Management and Innovation Management at the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism, DIT, and manages the school’s orientation and first-year transition initiative ‘Get Smart!’