

## The Freshman 15

**September means back to school and many off to college, but this list is really for us all.**

*By Sarah Micula*

September makes me think about starting college. The month of back-to-school beginnings is always known and unknown simultaneously. But going to college is like going to the first day of kindergarten. It's everyone's first day.



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, so I did an informal survey and compiled a list for those in our corps about to depart. And even if you're not shopping the dorm section at Target, it's a list for us all.

**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. 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). As 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 IntersVarsity. Or why not start your own?

**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, such as 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, which taught 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 up of 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.

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.

Talk to someone that looks and dresses different than you. Sit with different people in the cafeteria, or 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. 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 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 was the top response to my survey question: "In college I wish I would have...". I've seen fellow classmates choose not to study abroad because they were in a relationship, or because they were afraid of what they'd miss at their campus. Believe me (seriously, you should—I studied abroad in London), the things you'll do, see and experience will greatly surpass any gatherings or all-nighters you might otherwise experience that semester. Those moments on campus are special, but living in another country for one semester out of eight (or 10 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 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. How did that happen? Then the next thing you know the balance is \$1,500, 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. Take a look at [betterworldshopper.com](http://betterworldshopper.com).

**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 (i.e. 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, a false sense of belonging to a community, and a false sense of adulthood. Physically it will leave you dehydrated and tired. But it also puts your safety at risk. Don't compromise your values to fit in.

**10 – Wait.** The amount of cuties you meet at college might give you endless butterflies. College may be 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. You won't regret it.

**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. That's 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 might 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 five 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. But there will be a lot 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).

**14 – Finish.** College may be one of the harder things you do in life. The workload 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. 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 stop. Develop some self-awareness and recognize if and when you use your friends. 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.