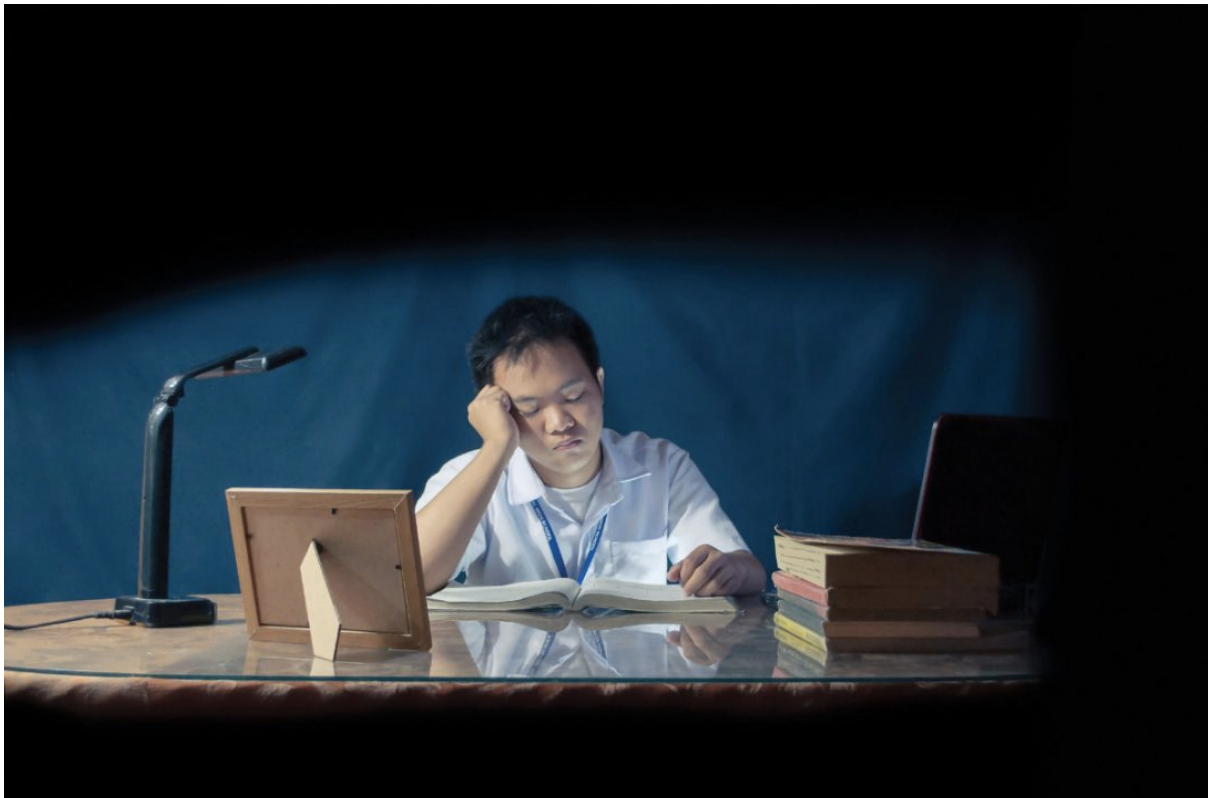


Seven skills your teen needs to learn before entering college or university

By Shannon Reed
Washington Post

Young people may be academically prepared but often, they are woefully lacking in real-life skills and knowledge.



There are fun films about college life, but none actually shows a student sitting in the library, reading and writing until 2 a.m. (DREAMSTIME)

In my job teaching college English and creative writing, I hold individual conferences with my freshmen every semester, and this year's were a doozy: One young woman wanted me to help her with a criminal complaint; one young man sought advice on finding a neurologist; and another student asked me how debit cards are different from credit cards.

I tried my best to help, but wondered, not for the first time, why young adults were coming to college with so little knowledge about how being a grown-up works? In my experience, even students who go to outstanding high schools are often at a loss for how to function in the mature world they've joined. They may be

academically prepared but often, they are woefully lacking in real-life skills and knowledge.

After thinking through the questions that come up most often with my students, I've compiled a list of things that parents of older teenagers can discuss with their kids to help them get ready for higher education, and life in general.

How to navigate differences.

My freshmen often don't know how to work with a professor who's differently abled, from another country, or lacking the friendly demeanour of many high-school teachers. Their classmates may include people who are different from what they're used to as well, whether in nationality, gender identity, sexual identity, religion or race. This is a good thing, of course, since most of us want our children to learn to respect, befriend and work well with people who are not just like them. But too often, freshmen are flummoxed by these differences, instead of intrigued by them. Talking with them about what modern colleges and universities will be like can help, as can helping them learn about current events. Your child will meet people from all over the world in college, and they should have some idea of what the rest of the world is like.

How money works.

For every student I've met who has a job, there are three more who don't really understand how much money they've borrowed to attend college, and how long it will take to pay it back. They should understand this, as well as how credit works, how much money they have to spend per semester, and why having a budget is a good idea.

How to deal with illnesses.

I'm always amazed by how quickly students get sick in college (all those germs, and too little sleep, is my guess) and how often their first response is to turn to the nearest "real" adult for help. But while I and many of my colleagues will do our best, we're not really on campus to evaluate fevers or suggest over-the-counter medicines. Students need to learn how to care for themselves when they are ill, and where to get help from a medical professional when they need it.

How to manage homesickness.

So many parents send their children off to college with their hearts in their throats, hoping that they'll be happy in their new school. But the truth is, many students are not happy, at least not at first. Few make good friends on the first day, or even in the first month, and managing the stress that comes with college/adult life is hard. Instead of wishing that your kids will be happy, teach them that they will face sad and lonely times, far away from home and the familiar, and that they have the

inner resources to cope with their homesickness. Too many of my students think that “everyone else” loves college and that they alone are having a hard time. It’s just not true.

How to deal with sexual assault on campus.

All kids need to be equipped with information about what to do if they see it happening, or if it happens to them. It is a horrific and terrible part of being at college, but if you tell yourself that your kid knows what to do and won’t do that even though you’ve never discussed it, you’re fooling yourself. Teenagers usually know what the right thing is, but they need help to think through how to do it.

How to use their manners.

I’m not talking about elaborate Edwardian Era silverware rules, but make sure they know the basics: How to send a polite email to a professor. To hold the door to the library open for the person behind them. To say “thank you” to the cafeteria workers. Most campuses are villages, and word gets around pretty quickly about who’s pleasant and who’s not.

How college life is depicted on television and film, and how that compares with real life, including parents’ experiences.

My students are actually quite interested in old folks’ college stories. And it’s been shocking to realize how often students expect college to be like the movies they’ve seen. Pitch Perfect is a fun film, but it never actually shows a student sitting in the library, reading and writing until 2 a.m. I like Legally Blonde, too, but again, it’s not what college is really like.

Of course, the point is not to overload them, but to help them get ready for the next complicated, exciting and challenging stage in their education. By the way, I also teach upperclassmen, and they all tell me that while they wished they had known more about college before leaving home, the support and love of their families has given them the strength to figure things out as they go along. That’s ultimately what’s most important.

Source: <https://www.thestar.com/life/advice/2018/02/15/seven-skills-your-teen-needs-to-learn-before-entering-college-or-university.html>