

# Off to College Guidebook

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Advice from Mitchell Alumni,  
Scholars, and Staff





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*Cover Photo: 2013 Mitchell Scholar Abby Roy (Bowdoin 2017) as a rising sophomore.*



# Six Ways the Mitchell Institute Can Help ...*Beyond the Scholarship Check*

## 1 Events

Whether it's the **Welcome Celebration**, a **MILE** (a fancy acronym that stands for Mitchell Institute Leadership Experience—any event that offers leadership development insights), or an **on-campus reception**, there are so many year-round events hosted by the Mitchell Institute that make it easy to meet other Mitchell Scholars and Alumni. These are ways to connect with peers who are going through similar experiences as you, Alumni who have been there before, and staff who are continual resources for you—not to mention experiences full of good food, good team-bonding, and all around good times.

## 2 No-Agenda Chats

This is the Mitchell Institute term for an **open conversation** with a Mitchell staff member. Want to talk about possible summer internships, an issue with a roommate, how to pick a major, or your goals for the future? If you have a question and you're not sure who to ask, this is the solution for you! **We're here to listen** to whatever it is, direct you to resources, and connect you with others who are going through something similar. Bookmark [this page](#), and sign up whenever you're needing a friendly ear.

## 3 Fellowship Awards

The **Mitchell Institute Fellowships** are additional stipends of up to \$1,500 that you can apply for (both as a current student and after you've graduated!). These can be used to help fund professional or personal development opportunities that may be just out of reach: internships that are underpaid, graduate school prep materials (like studying for medical and law school exams), study abroad opportunities, or conferences and certification exams. Application cycles are in March and October each year, and Scholars and Alumni are welcome to apply more than once. Keep your eyes on your email for when the application opens.

Casey Near, Scholarship Director,  
Mitchell Institute

# Six Ways the Mitchell Institute Can Help *...Beyond the Scholarship Check*

## 4 Supplemental Funds

We know that many Mitchell Scholars do not have a financial safety net, and a flat tire or a sudden increase in fuel costs can become a hurdle that prevents them from continuing their educations. That's why we offer two resources that can help you make ends meet. The **SOS Fund** helps with emergencies like a fender bender or a crashed laptop, and the **SPARC Fund** helps with basic necessities like utilities, fuel, or especially expensive school supplies. We also try to connect Scholars with resources that exist within their colleges or regions. Contact a member of the Scholarship Team if you're struggling, and we'll get back to you swiftly.

## 5 Professional Development Resources

Unsure how to write a cover letter, or what questions to ask in your first interview? Every year, we host **MILE II**, an event that focuses specifically on professional development, and we're joined by major companies and hiring managers from across the state. It's run by our **Mitchell Institute Alumni Council** (more on them [here](#)), a wonderful group of engaged Alumni who are here to help you and connect you to individuals in a wide range of regions and career paths. And outside of MILE II, you can always reach out to the Mitchell Scholarship team for feedback on a job or graduate school application before you press submit.

## 6 Networking

As a Mitchell Scholar, you've now entered the amazing **Mitchell community**—a vast, supportive group of current students and college grads who've been in your position before. They know what it's like to transition to and through college, often being the first in their family to graduate. They know what it's like to navigate the unknowns, to be nervous, to be excited, and to be motivated. Even if you can't make it to an event to meet other Scholars and Alumni in person, our staff is always here to connect you with someone who has similar experiences or future goals. And, make sure to join our [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) groups, just for Scholars and Alumni. **We're in this together.**





# What's That?

## A Glossary of (Often Confusing) College Terms

### ★ Academic/major/faculty advisors

Academic advisors are campus professionals who aid you in planning your courses and major selection as you transition to college. They are an excellent resource for helping you know what classes to take and can connect you with the right people on campus when you are not sure where to go. Often once students declare a major they may be assigned a faculty advisor who is usually a professor in the field you are majoring in.

### ★ Bursar

One of the more confusing college terms, but an important person to know! This is the person responsible for billing for tuition and disbursing student aid (like scholarships). Think of them like the college bank, who will issue your bill. The bills usually arrive at the start of each academic term. If you have any questions about your bill, you can go to the Bursar's Office on campus (sometimes also called Business Services, Campus Billing, or Student Financial Services). Though the Bursar's Office may work with the Financial Aid Office, they may be entirely separate offices.

*Loren Bowley Dow, 2000 Mitchell Scholar, Bonny Eagle High School  
University of Maine 2004, University of Massachusetts Lowell 2010, University of Vermont 2020*



# What's That? A Glossary of (Often Confusing) College Terms



## Career Center/Services

Most colleges have a center or office to support student career and professional development. Don't wait to meet with a career advisor until you are looking for a job your senior year. They offer support finding internships, research opportunities, and resume building starting in your first year. They also may host recruiting events and career fairs to begin building your network.



## Dean of Students vs. Dean of Faculty

Deans are college administrators similar to a principal or vice principal in high schools who oversee various aspects of campus. The Dean of Students is for student life; Dean of Faculty is for professors and academic affairs.



## General Education (Gen Ed) and Prerequisite Requirements

Most American colleges have a set of courses you have to take to graduate (a writing course, some form of science, some form of math, etc.). They tend to be broad categories, and you just have to take a class that fulfills that bucket in order to graduate. The intent is that it will introduce you to a wide range of courses, sometimes changing your mind about your eventual major. Your academic advisor will often help you make sure you're picking courses that will satisfy general education requirements, so you can then spend your final years focusing on your major. Be open to exploring new topics while meeting your Gen Ed requirements. Prerequisite requirements are classes you must take and pass before taking other often more advanced classes. For example, some universities require taking advanced math before chemistry.



# What's That? A Glossary of (Often Confusing) College Terms



## Identity Centers

Many colleges will have centers on campus dedicated to supporting students who identify with a specific cultural background, gender, race or socioeconomic status. Examples include centers for students of color, women, first-generation college students, and LGBTQIA+ students. These are excellent places to seek mentorship and meet students who hold similar identities. Many colleges also have interfaith centers for students of different religious backgrounds.



## Majors/Minors

Typically by the end of your second year, you will declare a major, which is your desired field of study. Most students spend the first two years of college exploring their interests through general education requirements. A minor means you do slightly less coursework in a specific topic. Some colleges will allow you to double major or minor, meaning you will be studying multiple subjects at once; a double major means you're doing two majors at once (a lot of work). All you need to graduate is one major!



## Office Hours

This is a time outside of class to allow for you to ask questions or follow up about an assignment with your professor, typically hosted in their office (thus, "office hours"! ). There isn't often time in class to get significant 1:1 time, so office hours tend to be a good window to seek out additional support. They will usually announce their weekly office hour schedule during the first week of class.



## Professors

This is the college word for teachers and members of the faculty. Typically, when addressing a teacher for the first time, you will write/say "Professor [last name]" unless they note you can call them by a different name. Not all of your teachers may be professors, especially in earlier courses—you may even have graduate students who are leading courses while they work toward their own graduate degrees.

# What's That? A Glossary of (Often Confusing) College Terms



## Registrar

This is the office/person responsible for maintaining your academic record, certifying your degree, and course registration. Students often need to contact the registrar's office for enrollment verifications, copies of transcripts, transferring credits, etc. Many colleges have a Registrar's website or portal to help you request the documents you may need. Tip: View your college's academic calendar on the registrar's website at the start of the semester so you know when important dates are like final exams, college breaks, or the course registration period. (Many classes are first-come, first-serve, so you want to know those dates!)



## Thesis

This is basically a really long paper, most often associated with graduating "with honors." It's an option at many colleges to pursue a research project in your final year, under the mentorship of a professor, and write a thesis that you present before graduating. Every major has different requirements for what a "thesis" and graduating with honors might look like. (An English major is going to have different requirements than a Biology one!)



## Writing Center/Tutoring Center

Most colleges will have a center on campus dedicated to help students with their writing. It's often staffed with professors or peer tutors who can help you outline, write, and edit papers. If you are nervous about your writing, this is a great resource on campus!





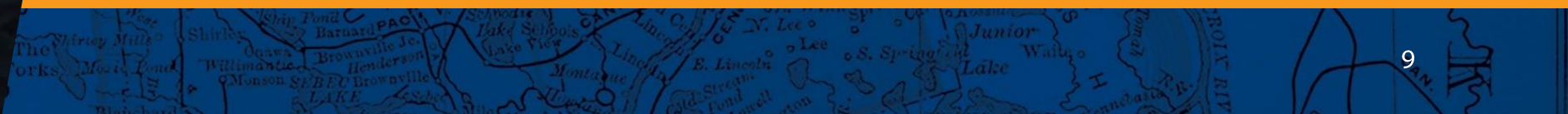
# How to Step Outside Your Comfort Zone

What's the quickest way to step out of your comfort zone? Meet new people. That's it. Did you hear about a student event happening in the dorms at 4:00 pm? Go. Want to join a study group for your difficult chemistry class? Do it. Got an invitation to a club you didn't even know existed? Say yes.

College is going to be a shock. Thousands of people from different backgrounds and walks of life will surround you. As a freshman, you will be very awkward; trust me, I was there. But you know what? Everybody else will be just as awkward as you, so you will have nothing to lose. **Take risks, go to events, meet new people, laugh often, and enjoy the ride.** Your four years will pass in a flash; you won't even believe it.

At the end of it all, you won't look back at the assignments, homework, or exams that you completed, regardless of how well you did them. Rather, you will think about all the funny jokes, late-nighters with classmates, the lunch convos, and the amazing friendships you made along the way.

*Jean-Daniel Liwanga, 2020 Mitchell Scholar, Baxter Academy for Technology and Science  
University of Southern Maine 2024, The Roux Institute 2026*





# 5 Reasons to Visit Your Campus Library

During my freshman year of college, I got a work study job at the campus library. What started as a place to make some money quickly became one of my most used resources. I had no idea how much libraries have to offer. Libraries are more than just a quiet place to study—they are a **building full of free resources just for you!** Here are 5 things to look out for at your local campus library:

## 1 Textbooks

Your library often has textbooks for your classes available to check out for a short period of time. You may even find older versions of the textbook available in the stacks, as well as other books that might be required reading. Even if they do not have the book, you may want to ask a librarian for help getting it from another library. All campus libraries are part of a network that spans across the country, and they may just be able to send you a book from California to Maine for free!

*Brittney Nickerson, 2014 Mitchell Scholar, John Bapst Memorial High School  
University of Maine 2017*





# 5 Reasons to Visit Your Campus Library

## 2 More than books

Books are not the only things that are available for you at your campus library! Many libraries have an assortment of other resources that you can check out, such as cameras, CDs, DVDs, anatomy models, and more. Some libraries will have things you might not expect, like a sewing machine or 3D printer. Campus libraries will also have computers and printers present should you not have one available to you at home or in your dorm. Make sure you see what yours has to offer.

## 3 Research resources

Your librarians do more than check out books. Have you ever heard of JSTOR, keyword searching, boolean operators, or wildcards? Your librarian has! They are skilled experts at finding the exact information you need to complete a paper or project. You can schedule one-on-one time with a librarian to walk you through the best way to access credible sources and teach you research skills that you can use for the rest of your life.

## 4 A study zone for everyone

Campus libraries typically have areas designated to different noise levels. Need a spot to study with a friend? They have a table where you can chat freely. Need a quiet box of solitude and silence to cram for an exam? They have that too! Libraries often have rooms you can reserve as well, in case you are interested in hosting a study group or need a space to have a virtual interview.

## 5 All of it is free!

The absolute best part about your library is that it is all free. The textbooks, the camera access, the book that is being flown across the country... every bit of it is no cost to you. College is already a huge expense, and it can be hard to feel good about buying every little thing off your class requirements list, especially if you know you will only use it once and never again. Check out your library, and when you leave campus, check out your local library too. You might be surprised what you can find there.

# How to Build Community in College

Entering college in a new environment around new people can be quite nerve-wracking. The good news is the rest of your incoming class is probably just as nervous. Each college has different offerings, and I am confident each Mitchell Scholar is capable of understanding how to join or build a club, etc.

Instead, I want to focus this article to address misconceptions that hold students back from being fully involved in their communities. One sentiment I heard at the beginning of my first year is that most students are like ducks; although they appear just to be floating calmly on top of the surface, underneath they are paddling their feet furiously. **Here are some tips for more effective paddling when it comes to finding or building communities on campus.**

*Hunter Steele, 2019 Mitchell Scholar, Lewiston High School  
Bowdoin College 2023*



## Commit.

Whatever you care about or is important to you, there are most likely other students on your campus who have a similar, if not the same, interest. So if there is an activity you care about, join the club—or start the club if it doesn't exist. You may be surprised how many others enjoy that activity, too.

## Sign-Up.

It would be easy to say “step outside your comfort zone,” but it is even easier to discover reasons that the step outside should be pushed to tomorrow. Instead, take the first step to commit yourself to the decision by signing up at the first club fair or putting your name down on that first Google Form. By signing up, you are publicly declaring your intentions and you are more likely to follow through with this public commitment to prove your consistency. In one book that challenged me to step outside my comfort zone (*Influence* by Robert Cialdini) the author states, “Once we have made a choice or taken a stand, we will encounter personal and interpersonal pressures to behave consistently with that commitment.”

## Be Yourself.

So many students are worried about how they are perceived by their peers, and it holds them back from participating openly in what they enjoy. The secret is most students are more worried about how others will perceive them to actually care about judging you. Enjoy what you enjoy and don't hold yourself back because of the small possibility of others judging you.

## Say No.

A trap most scholars will fall into is overcommitting themselves or sticking around in a community they no longer enjoy. There is no reason to continually feel drained from the activities you are participating in; the activities you choose should be filling you up. You are not letting anyone down by establishing or shifting boundaries, and it is not your responsibility to continuously participate in a club for others' happiness. It will often be better for you to participate fully in activities you enjoy and that build you up, and for others if they are getting a member who is excited to be there and participating to the fullest extent. I have stepped away from clubs and teams to focus on other endeavors and have personally become happier and watched the team I left achieve the same, if not a greater, level of success.

## Ask.

Many students are also nervous and stressed about finding their community. Do not be afraid to invite others to a meal, to join a group, or to an event your community is hosting. Many will likely say yes. By helping others find their community, you also continue to build your own.

# 5 Things I Wish I Knew Before Starting College (Part 1)

## 1 Time management

Transitioning to being a college student presents many challenges that are exciting, yet often intimidating. For many students, there are dozens of responsibilities to juggle, many of which may be new, including attending classes, completing assignments, working either on or off campus, studying, meal prepping, doing laundry, etc. It's highly normal to feel overwhelmed with the added responsibilities of college. While it may seem like a precise balancing act, try to plan out your schedule one week at a time by identifying deadlines, tasks, goals, and responsibilities for each day of the week. By spreading tasks out over the week, learning to minimize distractions such as social media, and taking things one day at a time, you can tackle your to-do-list in an organized fashion without becoming overwhelmed. Don't forget to set aside time for self-care and things that recharge your battery!

*Caleb Cullen, 2015 Mitchell Scholar, Katahdin Middle/High School  
Northern Maine Community College 2017, University of Maine at Fort Kent 2020*

## 2 How to study efficiently

The style of teaching in college can be very different from what you may be used to from high school, and it can also vary based on your field of study. College professors expect you to have done your due diligence in reviewing assigned material, and lectures often only hit the highlights and key points. While it may be impossible to read every single assigned page, learn how to effectively skim and identify key points within your textbook (chapter summaries are great review tools), take notes effectively while reading and during lectures, and write down and bring any questions you may have to class. If you're finding yourself struggling with a particular class, visit the tutoring center on campus for one-on-one help, find a study group within your class, or reach out to your professor for help during their established office hours.

## 3 Learn to embrace getting outside your comfort zone

College is a huge, often overwhelming transition in life. It's a big step in independence, and it brings forth many exciting challenges. My biggest tip is not to be shy and take advantage of opportunities to step outside of your comfort zone and grow personally and professionally. Whether it may be attending an activity on campus, going to your first MILE I (Mitchell Institute Leadership Experience), or networking with classmates or people in your dorm, take that opportunity. I was very hesitant my first year of college, and I later regretted that when I realized that my biggest periods of growth came from stepping outside of my comfort zone.

## 4 Learn when to say "no"

Being a college student is a full-time job in itself, and it's difficult to find time to fit everything in your schedule. While it's important to find time for social events, self-care, and hobbies, just remember that it's perfectly okay and healthy to say "no" if you don't have the time or energy to commit to something. It's very easy to become overbooked and overwhelmed if you find yourself committing to every request from a boss, friend, or family member.

## 5 How to save money

College is notoriously expensive and comes with many expenses, both direct and indirect. While the expenses can pile up, there are many ways that you can pinch pennies. Textbooks, for example, often can be rented for a much lower price, purchased used, or often an older edition can be used with professor approval. Many campuses have social media groups where older students list textbooks for sale, which I always found helpful for both purchasing and selling textbooks. Also, become familiar with what is included for amenities on campus and take advantage of any opportunity to save money, such as gym membership, free coffee, tutoring, test-prep, etc. Many retail stores, such as Target, also offer apps with coupons and deals to help save on expenses for dorm/apartment purchases, snacks, etc.



A portrait of Sarah Tatlock, a woman with dark hair and red-rimmed glasses, wearing a red top. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a library or study area with bookshelves.

# Mental Health 101

Going to college may be the first time that you're solely responsible for your own medical and mental health care. It can be overwhelming at first, but remember that there are many people on campus (and off campus) to help you.

## Overview

- Self-care is essential for overall well-being, including mental health
- Recognizing when professional help is needed is crucial for maintaining emotional wellness
- Seeking support and practicing healthy habits can enhance your college experience and academic performance

*Sarah Tatlock, LCSW, 2007 Mitchell Scholar, Boothbay Region High School  
Sacred Heart University 2011, Columbia University 2012*

## Support on Campus

- You will most likely be given a lot of info about **student services**, including health and mental health care, during orientation. Keep that info handy in case you need to be seen, whether you have a cold, sprained ankle, or are homesick.
- Students are required to carry some form of **health insurance**. This may be on your parent's plan, a student plan, or another plan. Make sure you know what your plan is and what it covers.

## Off-Campus Support

- You are **not limited to on campus services**. Check out this [guide from NAMI](#) if you are looking for community resources. This [guide from JED foundation](#) also has important information about asking for help when you need it.
- And, know you can always reach out to the Mitchell Institute if you're unsure who to contact or what support system is right for you.

It's important to remember that mental health conditions are a normal part of life, and there's no reason to feel ashamed if you or someone you care about is dealing with one. By educating yourself about [different types of mental health disorders](#) and recognizing the [signs and symptoms](#), you can not only know when to seek help or support, but also gain a deeper understanding of and provide support to those around you who may be living with these conditions.

## Additional Resources

- How to have conversations about tough stuff with a friend who you are worried about: [Seize The Awkward](#).
- **SAMHSA's National Helpline:** Call 1-800-662-HELP (4357) for a referral for mental health treatment
- **Trans Lifeline:** Call 1-877-565-8860
- **The Trevor Project (LGBTQ) Helpline:** Call 1-866-4UTREVOR (1-866-4UTREVOR (1-866-488-7386), text START to 678-678, or chat online
- **Veterans Crisis Line:** Call 1-800-273-8255, chat online, or text 83825
- **National Domestic Violence Hotline:** Call 1-800-799-SAFE (7233), chat online, or text START to 88788
- **National Runaway Safeline:** Call 1-800-RUNAWAY (1-800-786-2929) or chat online
- **Rape Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN):** Call 1-800-656-HOPE (4673) or chat online

## Immediate Danger

- If you, or someone you know, is in immediate danger:
  - Call **988**
  - Text **START** to **741-741**
- Call the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** at 1-800-275-8233 (TALK)



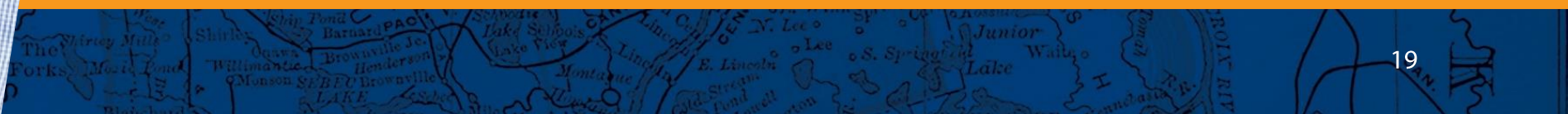


## Major Myths: Embracing Exploration and Developing a Diverse Skill Set During Your College Journey

Declaring a major is a fact of life for all college students – and choosing a field of study can be daunting for those who are not yet sure what direction they want to go in with their careers after graduation. **But fear not – your major isn't the end all, be all!** In fact, for many American college students, their declared major ends up being quite distinct from the jobs they go on to pursue or obtain - and that's okay! One of the most fulfilling parts of college is figuring out what you love to study and what you want to do for work after you graduate. Sometimes those align, and sometimes they don't.

Here are a few reflections as you embark on your college journey and start to more deeply contemplate a particular field of study.

*Andy Estrada, 2008 Mitchell Scholar, Hall-Dale High School  
Colby College 2012*



# Major Myths: Embracing Exploration and Developing a Diverse Skill Set During Your College Journey



## Explore New Interests.

College offers you a unique opportunity to step outside your comfort zone and explore new areas, activities, and experiences. Whether it's enrolling in courses on subjects that are novel to you, participating in student clubs that delve into new interests, or attending guest lectures that expose you to diverse viewpoints, your college years are a time to broaden your horizons and discover new passions.

*I entered Colby College as a freshman bent on pursuing a dual major in Government and Economics. But, after enrolling in a class focused on analyzing modern interpretations of the New Testament, I found an undiscovered passion for learning about—and applying a critical lens to—religions practiced around the world. The flexibility to explore new interests led me to forgo the planned Economics major in favor of one in Religious Studies.*



## Develop a Diverse Set of Skills.

While mastering a specific subject can be important, what really sets you up for success in any career are the broader skills you'll develop in an array of settings during your time in college. Regardless of the field of study you choose to pursue, you should seek out opportunities to develop an array of skills including critical thinking, problem solving, and effective communication. These abilities are applicable across various fields and will enable you to navigate a dynamic world with confidence and resilience—and also prepare you to pursue lifelong learning and growth!

*I studied Government at Colby College and went on to spend my early career working in politics and for the federal government. But, a little later on in my career, I was able to leverage those broader critical thinking and communications skills I harnessed in college—including analyzing texts, writing essays and research papers, interacting and working with a diverse community of professors and peers, and delivering a succinct oral presentation—to pivot to my current role as a media relations specialist for a philanthropic organization.*

# Major Myths: Embracing Exploration and Developing a Diverse Skill Set During Your College Journey



## Network, Network, Network.

Sure, many potential employers will be interested in seeing a record of academic success and perhaps even experience with a specific field of study when considering your resume for a specific position. But, perhaps even more important is building a network of colleagues, teachers, friends, and mentors who can serve as sounding boards, advisors, and champions for you during and after your time in college. In addition to serving as a support system, a strong, wide, and diverse network can help you in other surprising ways—for instance, you could find yourself connecting with a mentor or employer about something outside your major like a shared hobby or interest that you studied. Some of the best networking happens that way!

*You're off to a great start by becoming a Mitchell Scholar! The Institute offered me an array of networking opportunities that helped pave the way to subsequent career opportunities in political campaigns, public service, and the philanthropic sector. I highly encourage you to take advantage of the opportunities they offer.*

As you embark on your college journey, remember that your major is just the beginning! Embrace the opportunities for exploration, cultivate diverse skills, and seize every chance to learn and grow. Your time in college isn't just about preparing for a job—it's about preparing for a fulfilling and impactful life.

Congratulations again on being selected as a Mitchell Scholar! Wishing you luck as you embark on what I am sure will be a fruitful postsecondary experience!





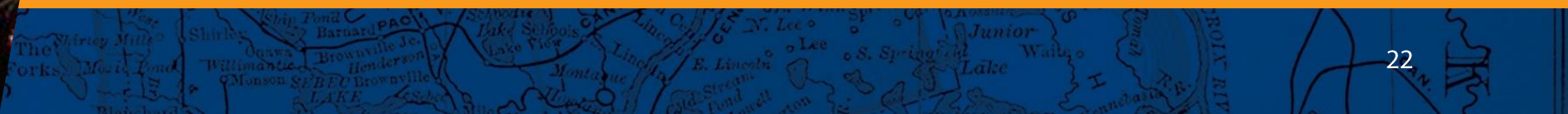
# Key Support Systems and Resources

The transition from high school to college can often be a big adjustment, both academically and personally. Thankfully many colleges have free resources for students, but it's sometimes hard to know what those are and how to access them. This outline serves as a guide for identifying what resources may be available to you:

## 1 Academic Support

- a. *Tutoring* – Many colleges have free weekly tutoring hours led by other students who have taken the class or major in that subject. The services are often open to anyone on a walk-in basis. There may be an opportunity for individual one-on-one tutoring as well (with permission) - also free!
- b. *Professors* – Most professors offer office hours each week for anyone in the class to attend on a walk-in basis. This is often a great way of getting small group or even individual help, and it gives your professor more visibility into your level of effort in the class.
- c. *Advisors* – Once a student declares a major (typically during or after sophomore year), they are usually assigned a college advisor in their area of study. This person is a helpful resource for questions around major requirements, overall academic trajectory, and potentially career advice.
- d. *College librarians* – This is more research-specific, but librarians are a great resource for identifying sources for papers, as well as getting help properly citing those sources.

*Molly Foley, 2015 Mitchell Scholar, Greenville High School  
Bowdoin College 2019*



# Key Support Systems and Resources

## 2 Career Counseling

The Career Center will typically have several different advisors depending on area of interest. They give students resume and cover letter feedback and can also provide networking advice and opportunities. At times they can also give job-specific help if there is a recruiting opportunity directly through an employer.

- a. This will be the resource that many colleges use to invite employers to campus and host career fairs or information sessions.
- b. Don't wait until senior year to use this service! This office is usually the main resource for getting summer jobs and internships, and oftentimes for graduate school / prep as well. The earlier you start going, the better the relationship you will develop with the advisor!

## 3 Mental/Physical Health Resources

- a. Counseling center – Many colleges have free counseling services with a licensed provider who you can see on a regular basis.
- b. Health services – Free student health visits / services, often conducted by an on-campus nurse practitioner. It's a good idea to check what services are available to you and at what frequency.

## Other

- 4 a. Peer Health or equivalent – Student/peer led mental and substance abuse help and services
- b. Resident assistants/proctors/dorm leaders – Students assigned to and typically living in first year dorms. They act as a guide to general campus life, whether for academic or personal advice. Don't be shy about going to these people, this is the exact reason why they are placed in dorms!
- c. Various student life centers – many campuses have a variety of different student-led organizations for different demographics, for example different races and cultures, LGBTQIA+ groups, religion, political affiliation, and other groups.



# Talk to Your Professors!

Faculty are among the most valuable resources of any college, and they are also often the people who have the greatest impact on your academic experience. Get to know your faculty! The sooner you see and use your professors as resources, the more you will gain from your time in college. Here's why:

- 1 Adjusting to college-level work is hard. Good teachers know this and want to help.**  
Professors specialize in presenting difficult material to students new to their subjects. If you are struggling, it is likely that others are, too, and that your professor has worked with many students who have struggled in the same way.
- 2 Getting to know your professors can lead to great conversations and great opportunities.**  
Most professors love their subjects and love talking about them. Out-of-class conversations about course material can help you process what you're learning more deeply, develop a passion for a subject, and see connections between your course material and your life. Professors can also be great resources for opportunities: they can help you find research positions, internships, fellowships, etc. A professor who knows you can write you a better recommendation letter for a summer or post-college job or opportunity.
- 3 Finding a mentor can change your life.**  
One of the best reasons to get to know your professors is that one of them might become a mentor. A mentor is someone who you learn from over time, who takes a personal interest in helping you grow, and who is a role model as well as a teacher. Finding a great mentor is one of the keys to college and post-college success. Good mentors often help students long after graduation and can be important allies and supports in the early years of your career.

A portrait of Kristen Case, a woman with long brown hair, smiling. She is wearing a dark top and a light-colored cardigan. The background is blurred.

*Kristen Case, Scholar Research & Grants Manager, Mitchell Institute*



# Making the Most of Office Hours

**Q** How do I get to know my professors?

**A** *By going to office hours.*

Office hours are designated time that faculty set aside to meet with students. This means that you are not bothering or interrupting a faculty member when you show up during office hours: you are using the time as it is meant to be used. Office hours are a great way to connect with a faculty member, to get additional guidance on an assignment, to ask about out-of-class opportunities, or just to talk through thoughts you have about the course you are taking.

**Q** Is there anything I *shouldn't* do in office hours? **A** *Yes. Don't ask "What did I miss?"*

Office hours are a time to extend the learning you do in class, not to make up material you missed because you were absent. In general, if you miss class, try to get notes from another student rather than asking the professor to re-teach the material from the class you missed.

**Q** Is it okay to go to office hours if I'm totally lost? **A** *Yes! This is one of the best reasons to go.*

It's a great idea to go to office hours when you are struggling in a course. It is very likely that your professor can help and that talking to them will make you feel better. Push yourself to be specific about what is confusing to you rather than saying, "I just don't get it." This will show your professor that you're serious about wanting to learn, and it will help them help you get past the specific challenges you're facing.

# Making the Most of Office Hours

**Q** Besides office hours, how do I find a mentor? **A** *Ask around!*

In your first semester of college, ask every student you meet who their favorite professor is. Keep a list. When a name comes up more than once, consider taking a class with that faculty member, regardless of their subject, the following semester. Students are great at identifying who the most energetic, caring, exciting teachers are. Make use of this valuable knowledge!

**Q** What if I'm too scared to talk to my professor? **A** *You got this.*

Remember that you are in college to learn, and your professor's job is to help you do that. Learning something means that you don't already know it, so not-knowing is the pre-requisite of being a good student, not a sign that you're a bad one. You belong in college, and it's okay to ask for help.

# 5 Things I Wish I Knew Before Starting College (Part 2)

## 1 Take classes completely unrelated to your major.

It can be tempting to only take classes that you can relate to your major. But this is college: you'll probably never get the chance to be in an environment that encourages studying for its own sake. Plus, you'll have access to professors, who are experts in their field. Take advantage! I took a Chinese class in college because it fulfilled my University's General Education requirement for a language class. Will I ever use it? Who knows. Was it fun? Absolutely! If you see an interesting class, go ahead and take it: you might end up loving it!

## 2 Try to avoid 8AM classes if you can help it.

Did you do it in high school? Yup. Should you do it in college? Probably not. And I say this as a morning person! If it's a class you absolutely love (or have to take) then go for it, but at least for the first year, I'd advise against it. You'll find yourself staying up later than you ever did in high school, and until you find your rhythm, aim for some mid-morning or later classes. A bonus piece of advice on this point: when you schedule your classes (whether for the fall or spring), try to give yourself one day in the week off. Trust me—it'll be worth it!

*Michelle Henaire, 2013 Mitchell Scholar, Thornton Academy  
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# 5 Things I Wish I Knew Before Starting College (Part 2)

## 3 Beware of open-ended deadlines.

“The project isn’t due until the end of the semester—I’ve got time!” Those are the famous last words of me, before I spent the end of my semester in a library trying to panic-finish a project I put off. My advice now: give yourself a personal deadline. Even better, break down your assignments into small chunks and set deadlines along the way. Yes, it can be a lot of work in the beginning, but it pays off in the long run.

## 4 Your major isn’t locked in once you select it.

You can change your major at any time—even multiple times! It’s completely okay—and normal—to find the major you selected at 18 isn’t what you’re interested in at 20 or even 21. Maybe one of those fun classes you took (see tip #1) inspired you to pursue something new. That’s okay. Don’t think just because you spent a bunch of time on one major that you can’t switch. A lot of things will transfer over. Graduate with the degree you want—not the one you think you should have.

## 5 It goes by *fast*.

I know, I know. You’ve probably already heard this at your high school graduation. But it’s true! One day you’re moving into your dorm, and the next you’re ordering your cap and gown for graduation. College is such a unique and fun time—so do what you can! Go to that karaoke night, take that funky class you’ll never use, join a club—or found your own! Embrace the fun and wonderful world of college because it truly does fly by.

# Parting Thoughts

As you embark on your college journey, it's important to remember **you're not alone**. You have a community—and a legacy—of Mitchell Scholars and Alumni supporting you.

On the next page, you'll find the contact information for our Mitchell Institute staff. We'll be in touch throughout the year, but please reach out with questions, concerns, updates, or anything that pops up throughout the year.

And, remember to bookmark our [no-agenda chats](#) page to sign up for a check-in, at any time in the year.

**We're so proud of you – you've got this!**

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