

# First year experience courses in university and its benefits

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Once you get to university you will discover a different culture from the one that you are used to. You are expected to change and to learn how to cope with the challenges that will occur once you have crossed that great bridge into adulthood. To help first year students deal with the multiple changes both personal and academically, some universities have created a course designed to help them. This course is called First Year Experience. However, before the development of this course, students were left to adjust to the changes of college life without help. All first year college students experience homesickness, they feel less sophisticated than the students that have been around longer, values are tested in ways that they never thought possible and academically they feel inept as they struggle to grasp college teaching styles. The First Year Experience course, otherwise known as FYE, covers the basics that a first year student should know and prepare them for the changes that will occur. According to the course text "Right from the Start" by Holkeboer and Walker students go through five different stages of change. The first one is that values are tested. Meeting people from different backgrounds and cultures will change the way a student will think about the values that he or she have been taught by their families. They will eventually come to create their own values that work for them and not depend on others to teach them the values that they need. The second change mentioned in the course text is that students will become more sophisticated. Once they leave high school and join college, their take and opinions on political and social events will become more knowledgeable and they will be able to hold and participate in conversations with people from different countries and backgrounds. Another change that students will

undergo is their intellect will be challenged. Holkeboer and Walker state that they, the students, will grow more confident in their ability to think for themselves by examining evidence and drawing reasonable conclusions. They also say that the students will see the connection between ideas, concepts and subjects. 1 The fourth change is that students will become more self confident. This is explained in the course text as students trusting their own beliefs since their religious beliefs and their value systems will be challenged. Most college students stray from the religious as they come to understand the world and see more of it. This is self confidence in the sense that they can think for themselves and make their own decisions that will impact their lives, thus giving them control over what they do. The last change that students go through according to Holkeboer and Walker mention is the fact that a student's life gets richer and fuller. The experiences in college that a student will go through, from having different friends to the lifestyle that they lead will enrich their lives in ways never thought of before. However, as much as there are positive changes within a college student's life, this is the time in life when parents and other adults close to the student, now regard him or her as an adult. Their responsibilities become harder and teach a student how to handle the rollercoaster of life and its ups and downs. For instance, a student who moves out of their parents home and lives by themselves will have to deal with paying rent on time, managing their finances and their time efficiently in order to have a life but have time to study and read for their courses. FYE helps students realize that life is not one big party when they are in college. According to Holkeboer and Walker, students procrastinate with time wasters. Time wasters are things or events

that cause you to spend a lot of time on them when they are unnecessary or do not produce any benefit. 2 Another reason why students procrastinate is that they have not clearly defined their goals and they do not prioritize. Prioritizing means putting important things first. Holkeboer and Walker suggest that before a student sleeps or when they wake up, they should write down a list of all the things they need to do and number them according to importance. Once students have mastered this form of organization, they will find that they have time to do what they want without rushing through assignments that need their time and concentration. This will also give them the chance to plan out their weekly schedule and put time aside for their friends and family. Money management is another area of a student's life that FYE looks at. Most students come to college and find that their fellow peers are well off and can spend a lot of money. Students are told to live within their means by Holkeboer and Walker. This means that they must budget and find a way to still have fun within the money they are given either weekly or monthly. Holkeboer and Walker suggest several ways of budgeting such as coming up with ideas that a student could use to save money, accounting for how and where they spend their money and keeping all receipts. As a student, managing your money and time are some of the responsibilities parents expect you to do. You are expected to take your life into your hands and carve out the path that you want to live in the long term. Generally our adult life starts in college and what we do here and now will determine what we will end up doing. Our parents expect us to handle crisis situations at an adult level, not calling them all the time. Our responsibilities also become harder once we leave high school and join

college. We are left to choose our courses and lectures, pay our school fees, rent and any other bills that we incur without running back to our parents. Holkeboer and Walker say that it may take a while to find the proper balance between freedom and responsibility. While they offer solutions such as looking at your role models and successful people, they stress the fact that it comes down to an individual and whether they want to graduate or not. A major issue that all students struggle with is peer pressure. This is a social issue where students have a particular group of friends who test their value systems on things such as sex, alcohol and drugs. Holkeboer and Walker together with the FYE course encourage students to develop strong value systems that cannot be broken down. Bill Cosby, an actor and comedian, once said that " I do not know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody. " With that in mind, students are told to learn how to say " no" when they are challenged to do things they are not comfortable with. FYE also teaches students to take care of themselves, their overall and sexual health. Counselors and doctors are called to give talks on the evils of drinking, smoking and protection against AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. VCT centers are made available for students so that they can walk in at any time to check their status. However, it all boils down to a student's individual choice in life and how they want to live. Students are also encouraged to choose the right type of friends, and surround themselves with positive people, who will help them now and later on in life, as friendships made in college tend to last longer than the ones made in primary or in high school. Surrounding yourself with these types of people will make you realize that you are in college to graduate and start a life of

your own. Students who surround themselves with the wrong crowd tend to not graduate and make the wrong choices in life, whereby other students that they were having fun with might later on realize that they have only so little time and change their lives at the crucial moment. FYE as a course is a stepping stone in helping students acclimate to the different culture that they will live in for three to four years and find outside of a college setting. Together with Holkeboer and Walker's course text, students can either take the advantage and learn and set their goals according to or sit back and ruin their lives knowing that that they will not get a second chance. College is a place where we experience new things and environments, make new and lasting friendships or lose focus of our lives. It's a change and experience most students should look forward to as it only comes once in a lifetime. Making the right choices here and now determines where a student will end up after the four years in college.

Bibliography

1. Robert Hoelkeboer and Laurie Walker (2004) *Right From The Start: Taking Charge of Your College Experience* (4th ED) Wadsworth, Thomson Learning Inc.
2. Collins Cobuild *Advanced Dictionary of English*, (2009) HarperCollins Publishers.