

How To Make Friends In College Or University

The college environment really is one of the easiest places to meet people and make friends. You're surrounded by thousands of other like-minded people from your age group, most of whom are open to meeting others. You'll often hear people saying things like this. Of course, those types of statements can seem like a slap in the face if you're currently struggling in this area while you're at university. It can make you feel like there's something extra wrong with you for having trouble creating a social circle in such a supposedly easy situation.

The same basic structure for making friends applies

1. Put yourself in places where potential friends are, and then meet and talk to them
2. Take the initiative to hang out with the people you seem to click with
3. Keep making plans and hanging out with these people you get along with and see where the budding friendship goes. Things can't work out with everyone, but some people will end up becoming friends of yours.

In university the 'finding potential friends' part is a lot easier because there are so many places to meet people. Some students stumble on the 'taking initiative' step though. In the past they may never have had many friends, or in high school they fell into their social circle by accident. Maybe they'd been hanging out with the same people since middle school, or they just somehow ended up becoming friends with their high school track team without realizing how. Now that they're in a new environment they may not consciously know how to form a social circle and think it's something that will just passively happen to them.

Making friends during your first few weeks of college

Further down I'll share some thoughts on how people can make friends during day-to-day university life. In this section I'll talk about meeting people during those first few weeks.

Pretty much everyone feels at least a little nervous, awkward, and overwhelmed

Yeah, there are a handful of people who glide into the college experience effortlessly and confidently and seem to know half the campus by the end of their third day there. Don't worry about them. They're the minority. Most people feel awkward and uncertain when they first go to university. It is a major life transition after all. The thing is most people put on a brave face and act like they have it all together because they believe everyone else feels that way. Nervousness also doesn't show as much as you'd think. So you have a situation where pretty much everyone feels a bit uncomfortable, but they look around and see that all the other people appear confident. So they decide they better act self-assured too. Then some other unsure person looks at them and the cycles continues.

It's possible you'll find everything easier than you thought it would be

Most people are understandably worried about whether they'll be able to make friends in college or not. If they're currently shy or awkward, they have even more reasons to fret about it. Sometimes people are anxious beforehand, but once they arrive for that first week of school, they find everything just seems to work out. They still feel shy and out of their element, but at the same time, they meet people and form a social circle much more easily than they would have expected.

What I think happens in these situations is that even though that person may see themselves as inhibited or clumsy around people, they had more social skills and positive traits under the surface than they realized or gave themselves credit for. Once they were put

in the new, easy-to-meet-people university environment those hidden strengths were able to show themselves.

This point isn't to falsely get anyone's hopes up. I also realize that many people come to college and continue to struggle socially, and need additional help. However, I just wanted to mention the possibility that you may worry about college a lot beforehand, but find things aren't so hard once you get there.

See if you can get to know some people before the school year actually starts

Lots of people do just fine going into a new school not knowing a single other person. Many of the other students are in the exact same boat, so the situation isn't too stacked against them. It can take the edge off though if there are some familiar faces waiting for you when you begin college.

One way this often happens automatically is if you already know someone who's going to the same school as you. Even if they're just a high school acquaintance, it can still help to have someone to hang around with at first. Though if you know someone who's going to the same university as you, and you really don't like each other that much, don't feel you have to force yourself to hang out with them. It may be easier to just start from scratch and go it alone.

Some colleges will hold orientation or information events in the weeks and months prior to school actually starting in September. If you can make it to these you may get the chance to meet and get to know a few people from your program ahead of time.

Depending on your program there may also be a Facebook page set up for it, "University of Whatever - Political Science class of 2012" or something like that. You can scope out some of your classmates who have also joined the page, or there may be threads started about people meeting up. If you see them later you can go, "Hey, are you Melissa? I think I recognize you from our faculty's Facebook page."

Try to visit and get familiar with the campus and surrounding area ahead of time too

This won't be feasible for everyone, but it can take away a chunk of your anxiety if you've already visited the school and know your way around a little, and are familiar with the area. It's one less thing you have to worry about on top of everything else. Also, it can give you a bit of a leg up if you're the person who can show people where things are, or if you can say, "Oh, how about we all go to Place X tonight? I know it. It's good."

If you really want to get some practice with the university experience ahead of time, go backpacking beforehand

Go to as many Frosh Week/Freshers' Week/O-Week events as you can

The name is different depending on what country you're in, but the idea is the same. It's that first orientation/initiation/partying week for the incoming freshmen before classes start. There are lots of other students from your faculty to meet here so go to as many events as you can. Over the week you'll also start to see the same people at different activities, giving you more of a chance to get to know them.

The events are mostly run and organized by older students. Not all of these guides will be helpful, but some of them will go out of their way to make sure everyone feels comfortable and included. If you're at these events and feel a bit awkward about talking to the other students there, you may find it a bit easier to chat to the guides. You can do that to get yourself in a more talkative mood, then try talking to your peers.

The week can seem a bit overwhelming and crazy and partying focused. This is one situation where I'd advise people to go anyways, push their comfort zones, and try to make the best of it. It's an experience you'll only get to do once, and there are a lot of benefits to going. Not all of the activities are pub crawls either. Universities realize not every student drinks, or is legally allowed to drink, and will try to accommodate them too with non-partying activities.

If you live in residence try to get to know the people on your floor

A lot of this will happen automatically as you can't help but run into people as you move your stuff in or walk down the halls. Take it a step further though and try to talk to as many of your floormates as you can. Go around and knock on doors and introduce yourself to people. Nah, that doesn't mean you're being lame and desperate, just friendly. Hang out in the common room and chat to whoever else comes in. Drop in on the floors above and below you and see what's going on there.

If you live at home or off-campus try to hang around campus as much as you can

People who live at home, or who live in an apartment far away from everything often have a harder time meeting people at school, simply because they're not around everyone as much. There are so many more social opportunities living in Residence. Especially during the first few weeks, don't head home as soon as you no longer have to be on campus. Hang around and see if there are any chances to meet people.

Chat to whoever you want to, since it's okay to do so

Sometimes people have the attitude that they can't just chat to people they don't know because it's bothering the other person, or that it's just a weird, inappropriate thing to do. That's not really true in general, but it's especially not true when university is first starting. It's a free for all in terms of meeting new people and trying to get to know them. Start conversations with whoever you want to. If you're in the auditorium to hear some presentation about Campus Safety, say hello to the people sitting beside you. Chat to the people walking with you when you're at a Frosh Week event. Talk to other students in the elevator in your residence.

It's okay to tag along with groups of people or to go to events alone

Say you're at an Orientation Week event and you've been talking to a group of people. They all announce they're going to check out a certain place once the event is over. They seem friendly enough to you, but they didn't specifically invite you along. In cases like this just go along as well or ask if it's cool if you can come too. It's not like this is some long-established social circle that you're intruding on. Nothing has formed yet. It's cool to just tag along with these proto groups and see where things go.

You may also find yourself in a situation where you know there are certain freshmen events going on later that day, but for whatever reason you find yourself alone in your room with no one to go with. That first week is chaotic and things like this can easily happen. Just go to the event by yourself and then try to meet or run into people once you're there. Again, everything is up in the air so this is fine. Even the students who came in groups will be meeting lots of new people there, so it's fine if you're doing the exact same thing, but just happened to show up by yourself.

Play the numbers game

You're not going to make friends with, or even hit it off with, every person you meet and talk to when you first come to school. This doesn't mean you're an unlikable failure. It just means

some people aren't the best match for you. You don't need to get every last person on the campus to like you. You just have to find a handful of people you get along with well.

Don't feel that your social life is a lost cause if you haven't made a group of friends after the first few weeks

Something I've heard fairly often is that it can feel like once the first few weeks of school have passed that everyone's social circles become more solidified and that it gets harder to make friends since most people have some already. I'd say it's true that the atmosphere where everyone is open to making friends with everyone else dies down after the first few weeks. However that doesn't mean that every social circle that has formed is now completely locked. A social group is usually open to a new member if they're likable and they bring something to the table.

The other thing is that the social circles that people form in the first few weeks of university sometimes don't last that long. They can form because everyone is eager to have a group to hang out with and not be lonely and will link up with the first batch of people they come across. In the months that follow these circles can break up as everyone realizes they actually aren't that well matched for each other. Naturally you may find this happening with any friends you made at first too. It's okay though. There are lots of ways to make other friends in school.

Making friends during day-to-day college life

Above I covered some approaches to making friends during the first weeks of university. School goes on for years though, and people often want to know how to make friends during the rest of their time there. Below are my thoughts on how to do that.

There really are tons of ways to meet people in university

The general advice in the articles above will tell you most of the general principles you need to know. One thing that makes university stand out is that there are so many opportunities to meet people. As I mentioned at the start of the article, some people have trouble forming a social life because no one ever really spelled out the process of making friends to them. They may think it's something that just happens. If someone doesn't have a lot of friends they may hole up in their room, try to hide their loneliness from the world, and feel sorry for themselves wondering why a social life hasn't 'happened' for them.

Once they learn that making friends is a more active process that they have to take charge of, there are a lot of options for a college student where they can get started:

- The people on your floor in residence. Or if you live with roommates, people you can meet through them... or you could just start hanging out with your roommates more if you don't already.
- People in your classes. You may automatically meet some people by getting assigned to do group work with them, but you can meet others just by chatting to them before or after class, or during breaks. This isn't a weird thing to do at all.
- Clubs, student associations, and hobby groups. Most campuses have dozens and dozens of these. You can always try getting into a new hobby too. You don't lose anything by testing some of these out either. If you don't meet anyone there, just stop going.
- Classes that are held off-campus, but nearby, and which mainly cater to students (e.g., dance lessons)

- Joining a fraternity or sorority. This is a great way to meet people, though it's obviously a bigger decision and not for everyone. Fraternities and sororities are more of a factor in the U.S. than other countries. They get somewhat of a bad rap for being a place where people 'buy their friends', and for being full of obnoxious Bros or catty, dramatic princesses. However, there are different types of fraternities or sororities, and not all of them are full of douche party animal stereotypes.
- Sports teams
- Volunteering at the student newspaper, radio station, or for a student association. Any skills you have that could be put to use? Are you a decent artist that could draw posters for an association's events? Could you design a club's web page?
- Typical student part-time jobs are another good way to meet people your age.
- Through placements and internships.

Basically, there are lots of ways someone could have trouble making friends in school, but having a lack of places to meet people isn't one of them.

Don't use your school work as an excuse to not have a life

Some majors really do pile on the readings and labs and assignments. Some fields also promote the idea that the only way to succeed is to be a robot that does nothing but study. I think some people recognize that they have social problems but decide to throw their hat in with the idea that they're making a noble sacrifice by doing school work all the time. Of course I don't think this is the way to go. If you manage your time and priorities well you should have some time left over for socializing even in the most intense majors. Not to mention that spending time with friends can be a great way to recharge and refresh yourself.

Other barriers to socializing that come up in university

This article gave some advice about what to do to make friends in college. It kind of assumed that anyone reading the points could apply them though. That's not always the case. Sometimes other issues, like shyness or not being able to relate to drinking culture, get in the way.