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### **Residence halls not quite Rome, but one must still do as the residents do**

Living in the residence halls on campus can be compared to moving to a new country, learning the ways of the land and striving to make it seem like you belong. There's a new language to learn, new roads to navigate and new faces to become familiar with.

And while moving into them and becoming accustomed to the operations within isn't that difficult, learning how to maintain a neighborly and amicable atmosphere around you could take some pointers and practice. Taking these small tips for survival into consideration could prove to pacify those anxious thoughts and soothe those nervous jitters to the point where it will feel as though you're only moving to the other side of town.

Be sure to move your furniture around to make your part of the room your own. There's no better way to feel at home than to make your living quarters look like it. Personalization is the key to being comfortable with staying in the residence halls. Your room is where you'll spend 45 percent of your time, whether you're studying, hanging out, sleeping or running in and out. If you don't like what you see when you open the door then it will only get more displeasing and unfulfilling as time goes on. Colorful rugs and wall decorations do wonders for those white cinderblock rooms.

Don't be afraid to meet new people and make new friends in this unknown land called college. Almost everyone is doing it. The first few social hallway gatherings will be awkward, but it will become more natural as the days go on and you accept that these are the people you'll be spending the school year with. You will come in contact with many types of people you may never have before. Meeting and befriending these people can welcome many opportunities to grow as a person and become that much more rounded in understanding ways of life. Do your very best to maintain the same kindness with them that you would with your RA or any other person that walks the residence hall.

Do everything you can to maintain at least a cordial relationship with your roommate. There have been real instances where sheets have been hung to separate living quarters and belongings between two residents in a room, and that makes for a miserable school year filled with feelings of isolation and resentment. Neither of those two emotions should be welcome in residence hall life.

Some of the best people you will come to know in college will be your neighbors and suitemates in the residence halls. These people will become the family in your home away from home. You will spend hours upon hours in their rooms just hanging out and talking about the day you spent together and telling jokes you may have heard along the way. They will be the group you walk to and from class with and the same people you wouldn't dare to be seen at the dining halls without.

You'll go to parties with them. You'll take funny pictures with them, and you'll hang those pictures up both in your dorm and in your room at home. You won't realize it when it's happening, but these people that you will see practically every day will turn into the same people you couldn't imagine going a day without. They say the best friends in your life are the ones you make in high school, but the truth is the people who you meet and call friend in college will likely be just as close many years, marriages and children later. Love and cherish them. They're wonderful people.

There are two doors that lead to the one bathroom your suite will share. If your suitemate posts a bathroom-cleaning schedule on your bathroom door instead of their own then tear it down, throw it away and clean the bathroom whenever you feel like it. There is a certain level of cleanliness and sanitation that should be upheld with four people using one bathroom, though. Just make sure those lines don't get crossed or the schedule might need to stay.

The resident assistants are not your parents. They will not tell you what time to come home at night, and they won't tell you when it's mealtime. They won't come around collecting laundry and they won't pick up the messes in your room either. You live in college — on your own. One of the biggest transitions from home to college is coming to realize just how much more responsibility one obtains by moving away from home and starting an independent life elsewhere.

At the same time, though, your RAs are not your friends either. Your RAs absolutely have the authority to write you up for disciplinary action, and they will definitely do so if they see fit. Rules get broken and pranks get pulled, and even the most straight edged RA can appreciate when it's done cleverly. Defacing the bulletin boards and drawing obscenities on the dry erase boards can often times be funny, but there's a time and place for everything. It's up to you to define that line and be sure not to cross it.

The dining hall food is not mom's cooking, nor will it ever be, no matter how tight you close your eyes and wish for it to be. You will miss home cooking on more than one occasion, and you will find a new appreciation for Thanksgiving and Christmas breaks. Ramen noodle soup and Doritos will become your new go-to for snacks if they are not already, and you'll miss the dining hall's operating hours about 30 percent of the time. The snack shops that are open during late hours will become your new best friend, and you will probably go there so much that you will learn exactly where everything is placed and exactly what shelf to grab your favorite bag of chips to from. Just be sure to bring your SIUC water bottle along for the trip for free soda refills!

You will stay up all night talking, laughing and playing games with your floor mates. It's almost inevitable when you live in a residence hall of more than 80 students. More often than not, this will infringe on homework that is due the next day, a paper that needs written or a test that needs studied for. That is why it is extremely important to keep focused on your studies and maintain the motivation to get it done. The fun times that are to be had in the residence halls wear very convincing masks as reasons to forget you had homework or a paper in the first place.

But it is just as easy to fall behind in a class as it is to miss a day of lecture, or two, or three or four. Textbooks will rarely be used in your classes, and much of the material you will be tested on will be from lecture classes. It is imperative to attend those, even if you feel like you can't take another 50 minutes of someone talking about math you'll never use for your major.

You are not the only one who will have class in the middle of the day. You are not the only one who will have to leave a few minutes early to find your class in a building you've never even heard of before. It's okay to leave your new friends for a few short hours because they're going to have to leave you too. And they're going to feel like they're missing out on fun times too.

The reality is that there are many fun and memorable times to be had in the residence halls, but studies must come first. Proper priorities must be set in place and they must be unshakable, otherwise your grades could easily get compromised and sight of why you're in college in the first place could easily get lost. There will be many stories to pass on to those who come after, but you have to make sure you can stick around to be a part of them.