

President Clark's Speech to Incoming Freshmen

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Welcome, incoming freshmen, to BYU—Idaho! We're thrilled to see you all here and looking so well. Today is another great day at BYU—Idaho, especially because you are with us now. Truly the most exciting part of my duty as president is welcoming new freshmen. We take great interest in your well being and success. We believe in you. You will do great things at this school.

BYU—Idaho is unlike any other university. Our professors are top-tier and care deeply about your success. Our classes are much smaller than the nationwide average, allowing you to receive intimate interaction with faculty. The school is also a Church institution; students progress spiritually as they participate in their wards, religion courses, devotionals, firesides, and other uplifting activities.

Many of you are coming here from high school. Others have recently returned from missions. And some of you are returning to school after years in the workforce. But regardless of your previous experience, college is a time of transition. We offer many resources to help you make this transition smoothly. But today I'd like to offer a few thoughts about surviving your first year of college. You could say this is my "What I Wish I Knew When I Was A Freshman" list.

Of course, the reason you are here is to gain an education. The attainment of a degree should be your ultimate goal. In high school, you may have had teachers who told you that in college, going to class would be optional and your professors would never know your name. Homework would be optional and your whole grade would be based on test scores. This is not

the case at BYU-Idaho. Here, we have the advantage of small class sizes and teachers who are personally invested in their students' academic performances. Class attendance and homework completion is mandatory because we believe that students should be held accountable for their education. It won't be easy but it will be worth it. Gaining an education is an important part of your earthly progression. We have been told to "get as much education as possible."

You will find that college work is much different from what you experienced in high school. You will only go to each class an average of 2-3 times per week so much of your learning will occur on your own time. A statistic that has been proven to work is for every credit hour, plan on spending two hours studying outside of class. So for a three-credit English class, you could expect to spend six hours on homework for that class weekly. It's usually a good idea to think of school as an 8-5 job. You won't actually be in class that entire time, but you should set aside those hours to work on homework and class projects.

This much time devoted to schoolwork every day may make the idea of balance seem impossible. But if you can discipline yourself and dedicate this time to your classes and homework, you will find that your more of your evenings will be free and your general stress level will be lowered. If you neglect your homework, your grades suffer and you will find your college experience to be a less enjoyable one. Don't let schoolwork become an unbearable burden that darkens your days with worry and panic. Think of college as an opportunity to stretch yourself and to better prepare for your future. Perhaps every moment of every day won't be filled with entertainment and fun, but you will have continual chances to challenge yourself and grow. And ten years from now, the time you spent at the movies or hanging out with your friends won't matter; what will matter is what you learned and what you do with that knowledge.

Occasionally it may seem that your professors are out to get you. You'll happen to have several tests, papers, and projects due all at once. Many students experience a great deal of stress. But stress is part of life. It is a big part of student life. Often it is said with a groan, slump of the shoulders, downcast eyes, and dragging feet. However, stress can be a good thing. Stress, very much like trials, pushes us to stretch and reach far beyond our normal capacity. It forces us to change ourselves to deal with circumstances. But it can also be negative if we allow it to break us or indulge into detrimental habits. Here are a couple things that will help make stress a positive experience:

First, recognize what is causing the stress. Whether it is a big assignment, the overall workload in one of your classes, an accumulation of work, trouble back at home, drama in the apartment, recognize where your stress is stemming from and identify it.

Second, recognize your resources and utilize them. Each of us has several different resources to our disposal, though we may not recognize them immediately. They typically fall under two categories: Christ-like attributes and social networks.

Christ-like attributes are personal qualities that help us do well. They are what keep us going when times get rough. A quality such as dedication means that a big homework assignment will not be left half-done. Diligence allows us to look ahead and work consistently on projects. Hope in the future helps make the current stressful moments bearable because they will have an end. Patience reminds us that this time is just but a moment, and will come to a conclusion. Charity allows us to leave our difficulties and help others through theirs through active service. Cultivating Christ-like attributes as you face trials will strengthen your ability to face them both in school and life.

Do not underestimate the resources you have in your social networks. These include roommates, classmates, friends, and your ward and family. Ask for help. When you are emotionally having a difficult time, ask for help. When you are struggling physically, ask for help. These people love and care for you and want to help you. These support systems have been put into place for a reason.

Third, keep a positive perspective. The moment you allow your circumstances to cloud your vision with discouragement and cynicism, you will find it difficult to stay afloat amid the stress. However, if you keep a positive vision then you will be better able to face and conquer your stress. You will come out on top, even better than you were before. And even better, when similar difficulties arise in your future, you will have learned the necessary qualities that will help you to succeed.

Another great tool for coping with your new life is exercise. “Exercise is the single best thing you can do for your brain in terms of mood, memory, and learning,” says Harvard Medical School psychiatrist John Ratey. “Even ten minutes of activity changes your brain.” Exercise boosts the level of brain chemicals called growth factors. These chemicals help create new brain cells and also aid in the creation of new connections between brain cells, which helps us learn. Exercise also boosts the levels of the neurotransmitter serotonin, which is responsible for transmitting messages from one brain cell to another. Studies have shown that complicated activities, such as playing basketball or taking a dance class, provide the largest boost in these chemicals. Complicated activities improve our learning capacity by strengthening our attention and concentration skills. German researchers found that students scored better on high-attention tasks after ten minutes of complicated exercise than they did after ten minutes of normal activity, and those who hadn’t done anything scored the worst. John Ratey says, “You’re challenging

your brain even more when you have to think about coordination. Like muscles, you have to stress your brain cells to get them to grow.”

Exercise can also help reduce the symptoms of moderate depression. Depression is associated with a low level of the brain chemical called endorphins. When you exercise, your brain releases endorphins, which are responsible for feelings of happiness and peace. According to an article in the U.S. News & World Report titled “5 Mind-Blowing Benefits of Exercise,” exercising can reduce symptoms of depression almost as effectively as antidepressants, without the potential negative side effects. A recent National Health and Nutrition survey found that physically active people were half as likely to be depressed. In addition, “exercise has been found to stimulate the growth of neurons in certain brain regions damaged during depression.”

The third benefit of exercise is that it just feels good. The “runner’s high” is not just a myth. Experts recommend “sprint bursts through interval training.” Translated into layman’s terms, they recommend working out as hard as you can for 30 to 40 seconds, shifting to a gentler pace for five minutes, and then switching into high gear again. Repeat this process four times for a total of five “sprints,” and you’ll feel great for the rest of the day. Exercise can also give a real sense of accomplishment. Beating an old time in a sprint, or adding another repetition, or finally mastering a move or maneuver can create feelings of pride at having achieved a set goal.

Although you are here to get an education, it is important to take time to have fun! Some of you may be natural-born hard workers, and that is an excellent quality to have. But life is about balance. It is balancing our time in a healthy way that is the tricky part. It is important to remember that although we must work hard, we should also be able to take a break and play.

Every once in a while, we deserve a break, guilt-free and without thoughts of the homework that we should be doing instead. Simply cramming information into your brain for

hours on end is not an effective way to study. We are more likely to remember what we have just learned if give the brain time to process the information by breaking up study time periodically with a little reward. For example, it is perfectly healthy to say to yourself, “After I finish this paper, I will have a homework-free hour at Kiwi Loco with my roommate, and then get back to work!”

College is a stressful time. You are on your own for the first time. You may have bills to pay or you may be juggling a part-time job. You might think there is absolutely no way you have time in your schedule for play. However, it is important that you make a little time to relieve that stress. Stress affects you negatively both physically and mentally. If you are stressed, it will show in your studies. You are also much more likely to get sick. Relieving that stress is both cathartic and healthy.

It isn't just about balance between work and play. Your social life needs balance, too. It is easy to just get to know your new roommates and not make an effort to meet other people as well. You were accepted into this school because you have something to offer. Remember that the other students have something to offer as well. Take a little time out of your day to get to know someone new. The school has plenty of social activities to attend that can help you meet new people. Remember to also keep your relationships with others healthy, whether it be a roommate, friend, or significant other. If you have a toxic relationship with someone, ask yourself what you can do to fix the problem.

Remember that college is an exciting time. You are in the prime of your life, and completely independent. Study hard, but don't forget to enjoy yourself. Do something creative, be spontaneous, smile, laugh until you cry, and enjoy yourself. We know that each of you has

such high potential. You are children of God. You're also adults now. The world is yours.

Achieve your dreams.

BYU—Idaho is a wonderful institution. I know that if you research the various academic opportunities, you'll be impressed. You'll also find that this is a wonderful place to gain a testimony and discover who you truly want to become. So, my new friends, good luck. We will do all we can to assist you. But, in the end, you determine your own success. How high will you soar?