The Freshman View

The website Cogito.org offers perspectives from young scientists on a range of topics. In the series “The Inside Scoop from College Freshmen,” first-year college students share insights about the college application process and their adjustment to college life. This interview originally appeared in that column and has been adapted here with permission.

What recommendations do you have for students who are applying to college?

I would recommend that students complete the common application as soon as possible because many schools have rolling admissions. If a school doesn’t accept the common app, students should not be discouraged from applying just because it takes a little extra effort to do so. That may be the school you end up going to, as was the case with me. If possible, I highly recommend visiting all the schools you are applying to so you can experience the intangible aspects of the school, such as atmosphere, campus setup, and student life. I would also recommend doing an interview at the schools you apply to. An interview allows the school to see you as an individual and can help you stand out in a large pool of applicants.

If you could go back to high school, what would you do differently?

I would try to participate in more extracurricular activities. Although I was involved in many clubs, sports, and organizations, I still felt that there was more I could engage in. Additionally, I would have attended more school events, such as sports games, plays, and fundraisers. It wasn’t until my junior year that I began participating in these events and I wish I had started earlier.

What helped you the most during the college application process?

I think the most helpful thing during the college application process wasn’t a thing, but a person. My guidance counselor was instrumental in the process because she helped me narrow down my list of schools, met with me regularly to answer any questions I had, proofread my essays, and, most importantly, wrote me a letter of recommendation. It is critical to develop a personal relationship with your guidance counselor, who can become an invaluable resource in the college application process.

How did you choose which college to apply to and attend?

I divided the colleges I wanted to apply to into three categories. The first category included my dream schools, which were mostly Ivy League universities and other top-tier institutions. The next group included the schools I believed I could get into, but were still very competitive. The last group included my safety schools. These were colleges I knew I could get into and would be happy attending if all else failed.

In addition to categorizing the colleges, I also looked for schools that weren’t too far from home, weren’t out of my family’s budget, and had good athletic programs because I am really into sports. It is also good to choose schools that are recognized in the field you want to study, although in my case I was undecided.

I ended up attending the University of Maryland. The campus blew me away, and I was really enamored with the atmosphere. Once I visited, I knew that Maryland was the school for me.

What is the biggest difference between high school and college?

There are many differences between high school and college, the most obvious being living away from home and having to assume responsibility for your everyday life, like keeping your room clean, doing laundry, and staying on top of things.

But the biggest difference is the teaching styles of professors in college. In high school, teachers always remind you of what is due when and basically lead you through the class. In college, you have to take responsibility and make time to finish assignments, study, and keep up with readings. It is easy to fall behind when no one is there to guide you, but staying on task is not hard if you remain focused. Also, classroom sizes in college are much larger. In high school, the largest class I had ever been in had 35 students, but in college I have a few classes with over 100 students. Those would probably be the biggest differences from an educational standpoint.

Mirish Shah is a freshman at the University of Maryland, where he is majoring in government and politics and looking to add another major soon, possibly economics. Mirish enjoys hanging out with friends and playing and watching sports in his free time.

Read more articles in this series at https://cogito.cty.jhu.edu/the-inside-scoop-from-college-freshmen.