

Life *After* High School

September 2008

Greetings! Welcome to the first issue of *Life After High School*, an e-Newsletter for high school students filled with personal stories written by young adults from Prince George's County between the ages of 18 and 24 about life after high school.

What you think you know and the reality about what life may be like after high school may surprise you. We hope that you read all of the stories and that at least one if not all of them will help you think differently about your future.

If you like what you read, please pass along to your friends. If you received this from someone else, please sign up for your own copy on [In Reach's](#) website.

Inside Life After High School



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My Top 10: We all know that education is important; however, not everyone knows how to survive in college.



Perseverance: I credit all of my accomplishments to one truly important skill.



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My College Prep

Tanaya, 20, college junior

Opening the envelope and finding out that I had been accepted to Lincoln University was a thrill! It validated the surrealism of “college life”. Orientation, summer of 2006, was the first time I had actually been to the campus. I remember being a bit taken back by its immediate physical appearance. I envisioned acres of freshly cut green grass, paramount buildings that reeked of higher learning, and hubs of on campus hang-out spots to pass the time. My expectations were instantly discarded. The grass was, for the most part, dead. A number of the buildings screamed for reconstruction and I found the campus itself to be relatively small and bunched together. All the same, I still appreciated Lincoln for being my home away from home and decided that I would embrace it rather than reject it. I later learned that this was simply the way the campus looked at the time, due to the brink of a major renovation and construction plan. Later, when I returned for the beginning of the school year, the appearance had drastically changed.

Unlike the typical experience that high school students are often urged to take advantage of, I had never attended an open house of any of the three schools I applied to. For most college-bound students this would be a key element in determining a final school, but for me it did not sway my opinion. Since I did not have the opportunity to visit my school before hand, I made up for it largely by research. This was how I found out some of the most important facts about the University and how I eventually made my final decision.

When it first became concrete that I would actually go away to school, I was so excited that my mind factored out most of the realistic things like tuition, funds, and extra money for miscellaneous things. I encountered my first financial hardship before the first semester of my freshman year had even begun. Through federal funding I had received a good amount of my tuition but not all of it. The remainder of my balance for the upcoming semester was so large that I doubted whether or not I would actually be able to attend. But after making special arrangements with both the financial aid and bursar’s office I was allowed to move in. This, however, was not the last time I would experience a financial aid crisis. Even now, entering my junior year, I am constantly inconvenienced with the stresses of funds and fees. Looking back on it now, I would have taken more advantage of scholarship opportunities and federal aid.

There were also other things about my school that made my experiences quite different from most of my friends. For one, my school is primarily small with a student body of about 2000. Secondly, Lincoln University happens to be the first HBCU (historically black college or university) in the country. My closest friends would often tell me about their tales of culture shock stemming from the predominantly white colleges and universities they attended. These experiences were ones that I never had to undergo. In the same respect my stories were quite different from theirs. When I would speak about our campus parties, organizations, or Greek life it would be quite different from what they were used to on

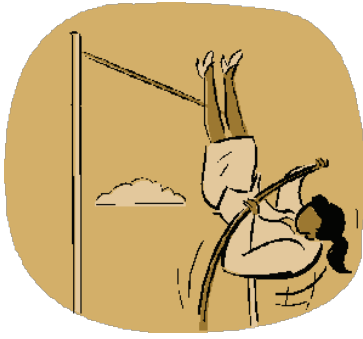
My College Prep continued

their campuses. This in ways was bittersweet. I was grateful to be around people with whom I identified and understood, but in ways I felt my friends were the beneficiaries. They were exposed to several different types of people which I believe helps you to become more of a well-rounded person.

Growing up primarily in a city, one could say that there were a few things I had to get used to at Lincoln. Being that this township is somewhat industrial, many of the properties that surround our campus are farms. The Amish community was also a dimension of life that came along with attendance at Lincoln. Though I have never personally had an encounter with an Amish person or Mennonite, I was informed that they resided in areas not at all far from our campus. Racism soon came into the picture as well. Although Lincoln is a HBCU, it's placed smack dab in the middle of Oxford County, a primarily white town that consists mostly of senior citizens. Not all, but a great deal of these people seemed to find it an inconvenience that so many African American students were nearby.

When I first arrived at Lincoln, I was inquisitive and overwhelmed. I had no idea what the classes would be like. How it would be living with a stranger or whether I would like going to such a small secluded school. Many of the stories you hear about college are quite true. You will more than likely enjoy the freedom and independence. For me, leaving for school was a springboard to getting to know myself. So much was going on in my life during my last year of high school that, for me, college was like an escape.

So much has happened already in the two years that I've been in college. I've learned so much about people, life and most importantly myself. When you're on your own you begin to learn so many things about yourself that you may not have noticed before. I often times find myself, trying to understand the complexities of me. How deep my imagination is, how powerful my mind can be, and how much I've grown already since my freshman year. Who am I really? Who do I want to be? I often times find myself scanning the decisions I've made in the past and trying to avoid those mistakes again. I have become my own biggest critic. Patrolling myself everyday and constantly battling with my own conscience to ensure that I do the right thing. Despite all of this, I am positive that my transition into the woman that I will be after college is far from over. But for now, I am quite happy with myself and Lincoln's affect on me.



STRONGER, BETTER, WISER

Kendra, 19, working college student

For me, life after high school has been an eye-opening journey. I did not go straight to college; instead I waited 2 years and am starting online courses this fall. During these 2 years off I have been working and trying to live life the best I can. People say once you take a break you won't want to go back, well no one really wants to give all their time and money to schools for the next 4-6 years (and with loans can stretch out to about 30), but you'll do it if you want to reach your goals. And I am determined not to live check to check for the rest of my life in a dead end job.

I love the freedom of being out of high school. I was only 17 but as soon as I graduated I moved out of my parents' house. I lived with my boyfriend for a while which may not have been the best choice at such a young age but of course I thought I knew it all. I was out of high school for about a year and a half trying to get into college but always running into trouble and then giving up. It was even more difficult because I wanted to go out-of-state. I had never really been out of Maryland and I knew this was my chance. I finally got through the process and got into a school in Virginia. It's not that far from home but it was about four hours away and that was good enough for me. I was home free. So I thought. Before the semester started, I had been working on getting a loan with no co-signer and for whatever reason I thought I would get it and have no problems. I couldn't have been more wrong. I was denied and needed a co-signer and there lies the issue.

By the time they denied me, I was already at school so there was no turning back. No one in my family willing to co-sign was credit worthy enough. I tried everyone and got turned down time after time. All the applications took weeks and weeks and time got away from me. All the money for out-of-state students, which was already limited, had run low. They were able to award me an additional Stafford loan of about \$1,500 but that was not enough for the high out-of-state fees. I looked for scholarships; I tried to contact radio personalities hoping they were having some type of contest or anything that could help. I even wrote a letter to Oprah, of course with no response. It was hopeless. I didn't know how I would come up with about \$9,000 in less than a month.

At that point, I was just waiting for them to evict me. I was home sick anyway and I knew that's what it would come to. I asked the people of authority if my balance would be prorated if I was evicted and they told me no. I said that wasn't fair and they said to me, "what's not fair is you agreed to pay for something that you didn't pay for and now we get the short end of the stick." I felt like the person I was speaking with didn't have a heart at all. It's not like I was deliberately not paying them, not like I had the money. I felt defeated. Most days while I was still there, I didn't get out of bed until late afternoon; I was just so depressed and felt like crawling into a whole. Just wondering when are they going to send me that notice that says I need to vacate. But other days I would still try to go to class because my state of mind was I can still try to keep learning, that way when I try again next semester, I'll be ahead of the curve. I knew that I wouldn't give up.

Stronger, Better, Wiser continued

And I haven't. I'm excited to finally start the next chapter of my life. I'll be starting school again this semester. What's so great is I won't even need a loan this time. With the help of a grant, a payment plan and tons of support from my family and friends, I'll be paying out-of-pocket the whole time. So when I'm older and am paying the mortgage and the rest of the bills, school loans won't be one of them. This experience has indeed made me a better person.

I have a full-time job and have my own apartment. I am also in the beginning phases of starting my own company and am doing very well for myself. I've learned things about life early. Not really anything that can be pinpointed but things that are silently realized in the back of my head. Most people don't realize these things until years later when they are truly on their own. In college your parents and teachers are still there to be your safety net just in case. But after that, you're the only safety net, and that's when you really get to understand that what doesn't kill you, will make you stronger and most things WON'T kill you.



My Top 10

Maqita, 19, college sophomore

So you've finished the SAT's, gained acceptance to the right school, and finally walked across the stage to receive your diploma. Now what? We all know that education is important. However not everyone knows how to survive in college. There are many different steps a person can take to become an excellent college student. Here are 10 tips that helped me survive the all-important first year of college.

1. **Know when it is necessary to attend class.** Although class is the most important part of the college experience, each class meeting is not informative and is often repetitive. Occasionally, I have decided not to attend scheduled classes that ended up being cancelled due to the teacher's absence. However, when you do miss classes that were actually informative, be sure to e-mail the teacher and get any notes or assignments from a classmate. You do not want to be clueless during the next class session.

2. **Know your professors.** Whether you are just trying to get an "A" in the class or you want to build your contact list, it is vital to establish a relationship with your professors. I regret not knowing many of my instructors during my freshman year because there were numerous occasions where I needed a teacher recommendation for something. You never know who your professor may know or what kind of opportunities they can expose you to, so it is best that they are familiar with you in a positive way.

3. **Buy your books online.** During my first semester as a freshman in college, I spent about \$250 on four books, two of them I rarely used. When I went to sell the books back, I was told their total value was only \$50. I learned from my rookie mistake and during the spring semester I looked up my required books on the bookstores' website and then purchased them elsewhere for 50% cheaper. Some websites I recommend: half.com, cheapbooks.com, amazon.com, or even ebay.com. Use the campus bookstore as a last resort because the books are not worth their priced value.

4. **Don't room with a friend.** Many people think that living with their best friend is a dream come true...WRONG! That dream can quickly become a nightmare once you get to college. I chose to have my roommate selected for me by the school and we have become great friends, unlike many of the people I know who came to school as friends, roomed together, and now don't speak at all. It is better to meet someone new, have your own separate space, and thus maintain your sacred friendship.

5. **Make your schedule fit you.** A major difference between high school and college is the flexibility of your classes. In high school all my classes were back to back, which made the day seem to slowly drag on, so when I got to college I made sure to set my schedule according to my personal preferences. I would not suggest taking any classes before 9 a.m. or any classes after 2 p.m. unless it is absolutely necessary. Also, try to give yourself a class free day or a day where you have only one class.

My Top 10 continued

6. **Know what classes your friends are in.** Just because you do not have a class at the same time or day with someone does not mean they cannot help you with your work for a specific class. I have often received help from friends who have taken or were in the process of taking the same class as me. Even if they took it the previous semester, they may still be of some assistance because the material changes very little.

7. **Do your own work.** No matter how tempting it may be to use someone else's work, it is always best to do your own. My freshman year, I was caught using another student's homework because I was too lazy to do my own. I could have been reported to the school's Honor Council and possibly kicked out of school. Luckily for me, I was let off with just a warning from the teacher, but that simple mistake could have ended my entire scholastic career. This was a very valuable lesson that I learned and it has shaped my work ethic for the rest of my life.

8. **Leave high school at home.** Whether at a local school or out-of-state, for some people it is hard to transition from being an immature adolescent to a mature young adult. I have noticed that many students feel the need to bring their disagreements from home or start new ones once they reach a college campus. It is important to realize that college is a different level of responsibility and the consequences for your actions are much more severe. There are no suspensions, you will be arrested, tried as an adult, and possibly asked to leave school. At the end of the day, it is not worth ruining your college experience over.

9. **Do not get a job.** College is about enjoying your youth while getting your education. During the first year, there are many things to get acclimated to and you do not need the pressure of balancing a job. Although you may need the money, it is better to focus on your grades. I noticed that after working at Starbucks on campus only three days a week for a month, my grade in Public Speaking began to drop. This was because I was lacking sleep at night due to work, so while in class I often gave sub par speeches/presentations. I would suggest waiting until you are comfortable with your schedule and workload before you take on a job, and if it becomes too much for you, don't be afraid to quit. Your grades are worth more than \$8.00 an hour.

10. **Frequent the library.** During freshman orientation I toured the campus and saw all of the wonderful things my campus had to offer. I told myself then that I would make sure to visit every building and get all the help I can with my education. Well that did not happen, I did not step foot in the library my entire freshman year. I visited the website often and found that very helpful; however, I probably did not get as much information as I would have from an actual book. Many people see the library as a sanctuary from all the parties and chaos that are associated with college, but I personally thought of it as self-torture. Although the library was not my favorite place to visit on campus, I did realize that it was the best place to go for all my academic needs.

These are some easy steps to becoming a successful college student and while they may seem difficult to follow at times and may take some work to get used to, in the end it is worth it. A great education is one of the most important things in life. If you have the power to achieve it, don't let anything hold you back!



PERSEVERANCE

Harold, 20, Apprentice

Perseverance- the determination to continue with something, usually despite difficulties or setbacks. This is a concept and expression that I had to learn single-handedly in order to be in the position I am in today. I consider this word to also be a skill for someone to have. It is not easy to stay determined and focused when you encounter obstacles and barriers both internally and externally.

After high school, I attended Morgan State University. The excitement of going on to college was overwhelming and once I arrived that excitement multiplied tenfold. From actively participating in the university marching band to all of the new friendships forming, I really felt as though this was going to be the best four years of my life. There was never an idle moment at my time at Morgan State. However, this excitement slowly started to fade away and reality hit me. I was lost, with no clear path on which to follow. As a result of this, my grades started to suffer because I neglected to attend class. My mind was clouded with uncertainty and I no longer saw my purpose in college.

Furthermore, I could not see where I was going or where I wanted to go. This was my biggest worry because I always wanted to be successful in life but at this stage I didn't know how I was going to achieve that. So towards the end of my fall semester during my sophomore year, I decided that I was going to take a semester break from college to clear my head. While on this break, that cloud of uncertainty steadily followed me growing larger and larger. So I then decided that I was going to enlist in the U.S. Army as an Infantryman. I was really dedicated to this decision. Running miles a day, doing 100+ push-ups a night, and building my confidence to cut my hair were all the preparatory actions I was taking in order to go into the Army. My parents reminded me of all of the risks but they ultimately said that "At the end of the day it is your decision and no one else's." So a couple of months went by and I was still committed to joining the Army. That's when my aunt introduced me to a year long college program called Year-Up. Year-Up gives students the opportunity to become IT (information technology) Support employees. I just nodded when she told me about the program because I was still stuck on going into the Army. She noticed this and just told me to do some more research because it may be a great alternative for me.

During my research, I discovered that this free program actually pays 72 students a \$360 bi-weekly stipend, offers 18 college credits in various IT courses, Business Communication courses, and a six month apprenticeship with major corporations such as AOL, Freddie Mac, Lockheed Martin, The Carlyle Group and a long list of others. In reading this, I felt it was too good to be true, not because of the program, but the fact that in my time of struggle where nothing seemed to be going right, such a great opportunity could just fall out of the sky right in front of me. I felt like I was in a scene out of an inspiring movie. Currently, I am one of the top students in the program. I also earned the Leadership Award which is given to a student who exemplifies great leadership throughout the program. Soon I will be transitioning into my apprenticeship with Lockheed Martin and plan to take full advantage of this opportunity. Hoping to get hired, I will also re-enroll in a college while working. I credit all of my accomplishments to one truly important skill—perseverance.