

# GOING TO COLLEGE



TEN STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS ON CAMPUS

A row of ten book spines is shown, each with a different color and embossed design. From left to right, the colors are red, orange, yellow, and white. The designs include geometric patterns, floral motifs, and symbols like a cross and a sun.

BY CURT HARLOW

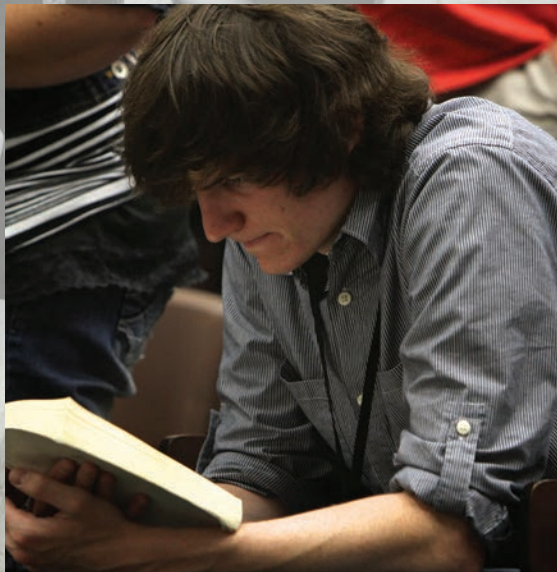


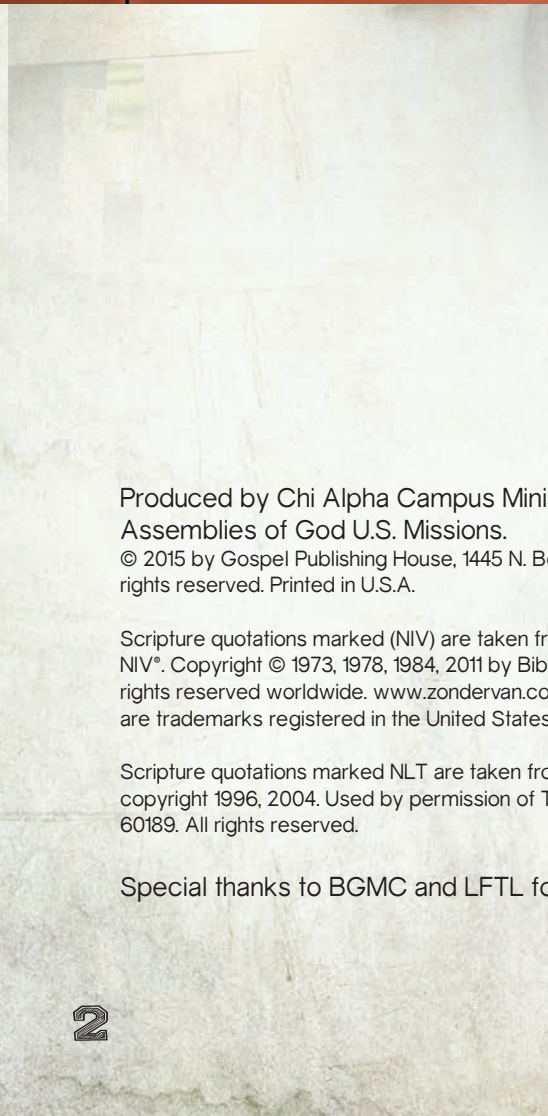


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BY CURT HARLOW





Produced by Chi Alpha Campus Ministries, U.S.A., a ministry of Assemblies of God U.S. Missions.

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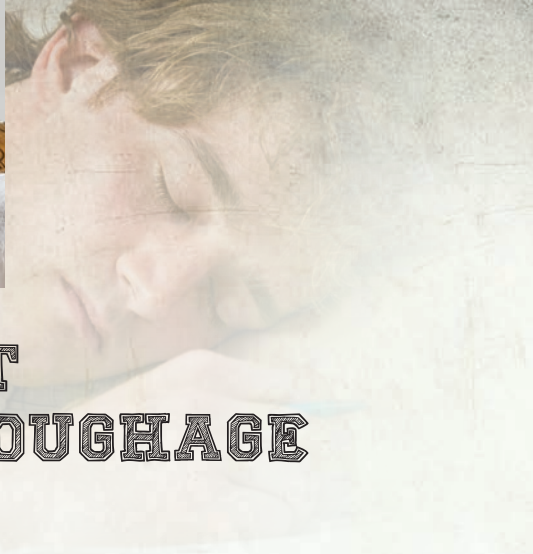
Special thanks to BGMC and LFTL for funding this project.



## INTRODUCTION

Late night noise, cafeteria chaos, organic chemistry stress, parking that is 1,000 miles from your class, and the English 101 lecture hall filled with 600 other students. That's college life. Transitioning from high school into this world of majors, minors, and tuition money can be tricky. The decisions you make here have an impact on the rest of your life. You will choose your vocation, possibly find a spouse, and make important decisions about your ideals. This is big—very big.

But don't worry. Whether you want to graduate summa cum laude or just "Thank you, Lordy," succeeding on campus is not as difficult as it may seem at first. After 20 years of observing college students from all over the world, I've noticed successful students employ a few basic strategies that are not hard to master. If you use these simple tactics, you will do great.



## 1. REST AND ROUGHAGE

Let's be clear about the physical needs of the human body. It simply cannot live indefinitely on pizza and energy drinks. If you combine a steady intake of grease and caffeine with a serious lack of REM sleep, you have a formula for brain damage. After a couple months of empty calories and too much late-night laughter, even the best students become easily discouraged, unable to focus, and "puffy." While it's true that everyone on campus pulls the occasional all-nighter, a lifestyle of poor nutrition and sleep-depriving slumber patterns is counterproductive.

From week one, write down an eating, sleeping, and exercising plan that is both realistic and healthy. Be sure to include lots of green stuff. Along with healthy eats, it is very important to just get up and move. Most college students don't realize how much of collegiate life is sitting, listening, and sitting some more. Not only is exercise one of the best stress relievers known to man, it is key to avoiding the "Freshmen 15." Find a workout partner for fun and accountability, or take a one-credit P.E. class. Once you are in the habit of eating healthy and exercising, go ahead and include some of the fun food. A giant deep-dish combo now and then is great for the soul.

**Bottom line: Successful students make a plan about when they will sleep, what they will eat, and how they will exercise.**



## 2. DREAM BIG

In the movies, college life is all nerds versus frats, crazy parties, and amazing romances. You never see movie stars studying. There is no doubt that you will have a lot of fun, but the truth is that the non-Hollywood version of college life is full of less-than-riveting lectures and laboratories. The endurance needed to get your degree can be too much for individuals who are easily bored.

No worries though. There is a remedy for those of us with a touch of Attention Deficit Disorder. Simply fuel your learning with big dreams. If you know why you're doing something and your "why" is a big one, even the most tedious tasks become exercises in passion.

College is the ideal time to discover what you were born to do with your life. Experiment with your different roles. Ask a trusted mentor to help you evaluate your gifts. Ask God to give you a new and creative idea that will help you serve your campus, your friends, and this world. For instance, start a study group for struggling students or sponsor a late-night poetry and philosophical roundtable to challenge students. Join a Christian group and set up the campus fellowship's sound system each week. Become a small group leader in that fellowship. Innovate. Be something great. If you do, you will never regret your time on campus.

**Bottom line: Successful students are passionate about a vision that is bigger than themselves and serves both God and other people.**



### 3. SAME TIME, SAME PLACE

I knew a student so serious about his classes that he had the library hours tattooed on his forearms. Another guy I knew was so cavalier about his studies that he lived in the dorm for six years before he realized he was at the wrong school. Okay, maybe I am exaggerating, but not by much. The point, of course, is that both extremes should be avoided. Finding a regular schedule that balances study and fun is a key strategy for success.

Go to class everyday, starting with your first day. It is amazing how many students don't understand that their poor grades are related to their poor attendance. Establish very firm study times and a regular study area. Hint: your dorm or apartment is not likely to work well. Once you have a habit of studying at the same time and in the same place, give yourself a reward after your study session by making a firm commitment to fun. The truth is, we are not that much different from Pavlov's dog. Treat us and we'll do the trick every time.

No cheating here. If you play before you work, the play is never as fun. Do first things first and establish a pattern of work and reward over the long run. Not only will you rock your GPA, but your vocational and personal life will benefit from this practice long after you have left school.

**Bottom line: Successful students determine a schedule that balances work and play, and they stick to it.**

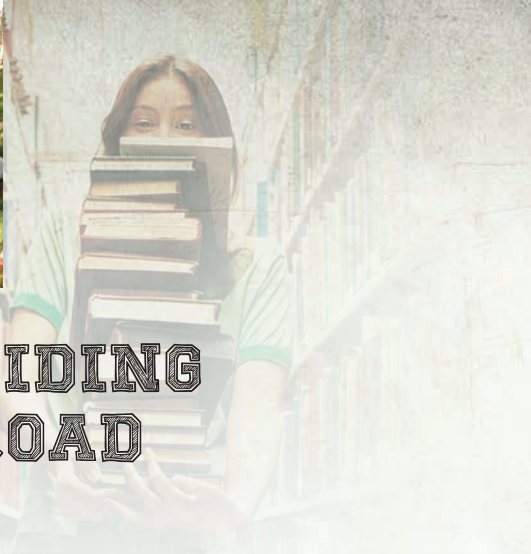




## 4. HANG OUT WITH BABIES

There is something important about being around someone other than just college students all of the time. Babies, families, seniors, and the occasional Sunday potluck at your local church can be huge for your mental health. The campus has a “boy (or girl) in the bubble” effect. If you are not careful, you can get caught in this bubble and lose track of reality. Get part of your life to occur off campus by attending a local church, getting to know some folks who are not in their twenties, and serving the community. In fact, it is not hard to pick up a free meal after the service at your local church. If you stand by the front door and look really hungry (something most twenty-somethings do naturally), chances are some nice family might even take you home with them. Think of it— washing machines that don't require quarters and food that is not served on a bright orange tray. Wow!

**Bottom line: Successful students keep their head in the real world by going to church every Sunday and connecting with the wider community.**



## 5. AVOIDING OVERLOAD

Do you have “bite off more than you can chew disease”? Many collegians catch this killer. In the rush to get a degree and keep costs down, they take too many (or the wrong) credits, take six jobs and join five clubs. This overloading has caused many a good student to choose the wrong major, waste major time and money, or worse yet, flunk out. In the long run, overloaded schedules do not save time or money; they cause students to work harder and get less.

Every student needs to spend a significant amount of time planning what credits he or she will take. If your academic advisor doesn't work hard for you, find one who does. Try your best to take only one very challenging class per semester. Do not waste credits by declaring your major before you are 100 percent sure it is for you. Do not be afraid to consult non-traditional advisors. Peers, pastors, and the dean's administrative assistant (who usually knows more than the dean) are the people who can give you some of the most practical advice available.

And don't forget about leaving time in your schedule for rest (see Strategy One). There is an ancient and effective biblical idea that one day out of seven ought to be just for relationship, prayer, worship, and thinking deep thoughts. If you are too busy to do this, chances are you are in danger of making some poor choices.

**Bottom line: Successful students get the facts, pace themselves academically, and plan their schedule very carefully.**



## 6. GO GLOBAL

Disney was right; it is a small world. The fact is, you will not make it in the global market without thinking globally. The good news is, being on campus makes this so easy. By befriending an international student and getting involved in a campus group or church that serves people overseas, you can develop global chops almost overnight. Once you have a few international friends, plan for a summer or semester missions trip. Spending time in overseas service will expand your brain, teach you about servant leadership (the only kind of leadership that really works), and help you form deep, lifelong friendships. For your money, this sort of adventure is the most educational thing you can do as a student.

**Bottom line: Successful students find international friends and have a “give, go, and pray” policy for the world.**



## 7. DORM DWELLERS AND APARTMENT PEOPLE

A strange disease hits millions of students, usually sophomores, every spring. The main symptom is delusional thoughts about how renting an off-campus apartment will be better than living in the dorms. The disease is not fatal. In fact, it usually goes away after one semester off campus, and these people are back in the dining hall, mooching off their friends.

Shopping for all the staples, preparing your own meals, cleaning your own kitchen, cleaning after your roommate's meals, sorting out the bills among roommates, and handling all of the other details of running a household take up lots of precious time. "But it will be so much cheaper off campus," you say. Sure, until you get busy and start ordering out pizza and buying fast-food burgers every night, or your roommate drops out of school halfway through the semester, and you're stuck with the other half of the rent.

Dorm living is a once-in-a-lifetime privilege. Dorms are an incredible place for sharing your faith, making great friends, and avoiding the distractions that come with renting. Stay in the dorm as long as you can.

"But Curt, I go to a commuter campus and live with my folks." God bless them for keeping you around after high school. There is nothing wrong with saving some bucks by living with the folks for one or two years. Keep in mind, however, that the "40-year-old playing video games in Mom's basement" portion of our population is growing rapidly these days. The basement is sometimes a time-warping trap. Your second year out of high school is usually the best time to bite the financial bullet and strike out on your own.

**Bottom line: Most successful students stay in the dorms a little longer to simplify their lives, and the successful students who strike out on their own grow up faster.**

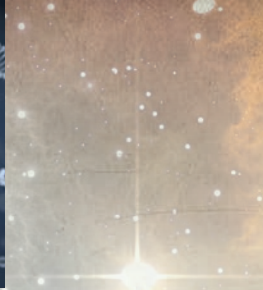


## 8. LEARN TO LEARN

One of the best things you can do is take a class on taking classes. Getting expert advice on how to read textbooks effectively, write papers that get A's, and taking great notes that can be deciphered later is huge. Even more important is learning how to work with each professor. Being a student of teaching style is huge.

Most universities offer non-credit classes on how to do college-level research and writing. If yours does not, there are several excellent books on this subject available at most campus bookstores. Some students are naturals at this. They work less and get better grades because they know how to approach a class. Find one of these people and become their friend. You might also try meeting with the teacher and just asking, "How do I get a great grade from you?"

**Bottom line: Successful students work hard at learning how to learn.**



## 9. ASK THE BIG QUESTIONS

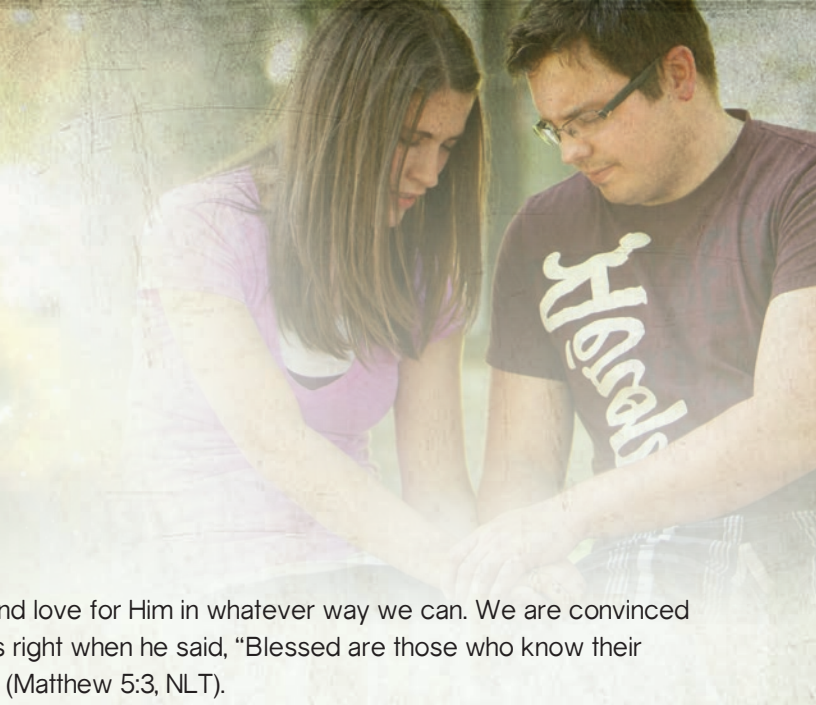
Here's the great thing about college: it is not just about memorizing. It is about forming personal opinions and learning how to think about our world. Don't just accept what you're told, and don't be afraid to ask questions. Big questions. Don't just record information, but actually press yourself to understand it.

This is especially true when it comes to the big questions in life. Why are we here? Is God real? Where do we go when we die? Why are there mosquitoes?

In fact, local Chi Alpha Christian Fellowship groups exist on campuses solely to help students ask these big questions. At Chi Alpha, you are accepted no matter who you are, what your background is, or what you've been through. We refuse to buy into the idea that any one person is better than the next. If you exist, you are important and deserve to be treated as such. We want to join with you to make your campus experience truly great.

So what is Chi Alpha? Sometimes there aren't enough words to describe it. At other times, those words won't stick because the face of Chi Alpha is a reflection of those involved, constantly changing and maturing. The question is not so much what is Chi Alpha, but who is Chi Alpha.

We come from many different backgrounds, and that diversity makes Chi Alpha unique. Most of us have just one thing in common. We're excited about God. He has been so good to us it makes us want to express our



appreciation and love for Him in whatever way we can. We are convinced that Jesus was right when he said, “Blessed are those who know their need for God” (Matthew 5:3, NLT).

Our encounter with God began with a simple confession. We are not perfect. In fact, we are far from it. The Bible says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23, NIV). Once you can admit you need forgiveness, encountering Jesus is just a matter of trust. Belief in God means trusting He is good enough to die in your place on the cross. It also means believing He is alive today and wants to be the chief leader of our lives.

College is hard, but in Jesus we find direction that is both full of joy and wisdom. Jesus’ best friend John summed it up this way, “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NIV).

Trust? Believe? How does this work exactly? It starts by praying a simple prayer. Tell Him where you have fallen short and ask him to help you leave these sins behind. John promises that “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, NIV). Then find a Bible and begin to read. Finally, don’t forget to visit Chi Alpha on campus.\*

**Bottom line: Successful students understand that a degree is good and friends are great, but real success can only be found in God.**



## 10. AVOID THE DESERT


"I need to buy books, decorate my room, get to know my dorm mates, meet with my advisor, go to the financial aid office, set up my checking account, learn my way around the campus, pledge a frat, exfoliate my skin, and write home to my cat." There will always be a never-ending list of urgent things to do on campus. For many freshmen, finding quality Christian friendship gets pushed to the back burner. If you don't make it a priority to find a Christian fellowship, your soul will be as dry as a desert before you know it. It is funny. We create this dry state, then wonder where God went. Even if you are not a Christian, a Christian group is a great place to find sincere and loving friends. Life is hard even with close Christian friends supporting you. It is almost impossible without them.

Ask these questions about the groups on your campus:

1. Are they committed to true biblical ideals, and are the leaders affiliated with a reputable, evangelical denomination or parachurch organization? Beware, there are a lot of strange groups out there.
2. Have they set up healthy small groups?
3. Do students own the ministry and have a big say in the events of the ministry? Groups that rely on non-student leadership are a bit shaky.
4. Do they reach out to all races, sizes, and shapes of people? The best groups are those that look like heaven—people from every tribe, language, and nation.
5. Do they use creative means to teach and defend the gospel on campus?

**Bottom line: Successful students get involved in a Christian fellowship without putting it off.**

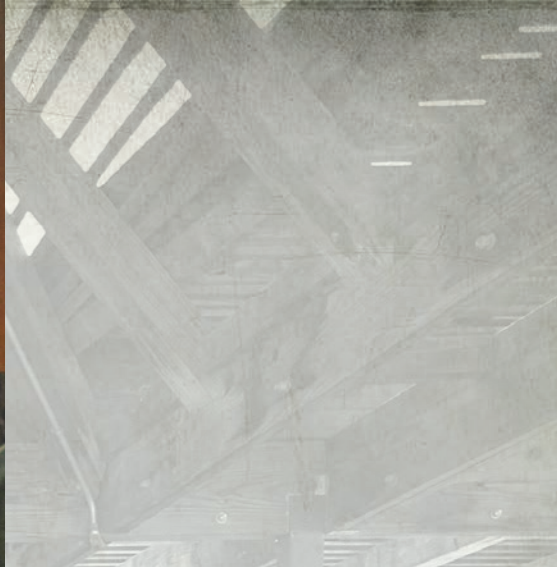




Chi Alpha Campus Ministries, U.S.A. is a movement of college students earnestly following Jesus Christ. Students meet on campuses in all sorts of settings and sizes. These gatherings are informal, charged with music, given to humor, and deal with everything from relationships to the nature of truth. The goals of these gatherings are to meet with God, meet among friends, and meet real needs.

Chi Alpha is organized on more than 300 campuses in the United States with more than 30,000 students involved. Sister ministries are organized in 40 nations of the world. For more information, contact [chialpha@ag.org](mailto:chialpha@ag.org) or visit [www.chialpha.com](http://www.chialpha.com).





# GOING TO COLLEGE

The transition from high school to college doesn't have to be stressful. From choosing a major to navigating dorm life, it is easy to discover what top students do to succeed on campus.

Gleaned from more than 20 years on college campuses throughout the U.S., Curt Harlow summarizes the principles that mark the lives of successful students. This practical and straightforward advice will help you find great friends, make solid academic decisions, and discover your true talents in life.

During the next four years, you will choose your vocation, most likely find your spouse, and make big decisions about your worldview. Reading *Going to College - Ten Strategies for Success on Campus* will help you succeed during this crucial time.



Curt Harlow is a dynamic speaker and writer who uses stories and humor to bring home serious truth and real biblical content. He graduated from Central Washington University and served

as a Chi Alpha campus missionary for 26 years. Curt directed two Chi Alpha campus ministries at California State-Stanislaus and the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California. He co-authored a booklet, *Connecting, A Practical Help for Launching College Ministry*, and served as the training and resource director for national Chi Alpha from 2001 to 2005. Curt currently pastors at Bayside Church and lives in Sacramento, California with his wife, Kelly, and their three children: Jesse, Maddy and Emma.



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