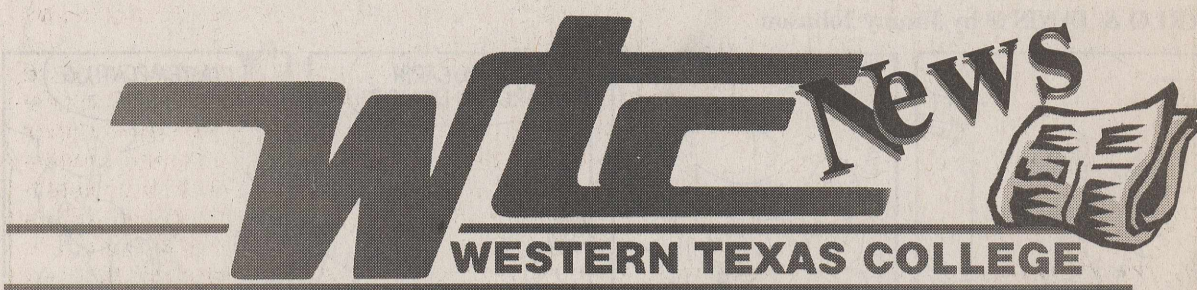


Fall 2002 Registration Thursday, August 22

8:30am-4:30pm
6:30pm - 8:30pm

See our complete fall schedule and calendar, inserted in today's edition



August 19 Fall In-Service Begins	August 26 Fall Semester Classes Begin
August 21 Dorms Open	August 28 Welcome Dance
August 22 Registration for Fall Semester	August 26 Last Day to Register/Add/Change
August 24 WTC Fun Day	Now-August 22 "Ready to Roll" Exhibit Scurry County Museum



Weekend, August 17-18, 2002

Western Texas College, 6200 College Ave. Snyder, TX 75649

Ten Things I Wish I'd Known Before College

By Joyce May



Editor's Note: The following is the first in a series of articles written by current and former WTC students highlighting areas of growth and change during their time at the college. Joyce May is a 2000 graduate of WTC who is currently working on her BA in Mass Communications at the University of Texas at Austin.

I am 24-years-old and in my junior year at the University of Texas at Austin. The math should tell you that it hasn't exactly been a straight shot from my high school graduation (Snyder High Class of '95) to where I am today. While the majority of my fellow classmates are already enjoying wedded bliss and babies and careers and all that wonderful adult stuff, I on the other hand, have been taking the scenic route through college.

Had you asked me seven years ago where I would be today, my answer would not have been "still trekking my way toward my bachelor's degree." No, I had higher aspirations when I left Snyder in June of 1995, two weeks after graduation and almost a month after my 18th birth-

day. I was going to climb that mountain of success, soar like the eagle, conquer the world. I crashed and burned. What should have been an easy ride on scholarships ended with me living out of my car before humbling myself enough to crawl home to Granny.

It was one of the darkest periods of my life, but one I am grateful for today because I learned more in those six months than six years at any college could teach me. (Important things like you can wash your clothes in a bathtub with Dawn dishwashing detergent and hang them to dry when you don't have a quarter for a phone call much less laundry money.) I know what you're thinking, but you do what you have to survive.

I consider myself to have earned a degree in the school of hard knocks. That's why I am taking my time now to share with you a few things I wish I had known before I started out on this journey called college life. There is a lot more to my story than my one semester at Blinn Junior College in Brenham and my eventual return to Snyder and attendance at Western Texas College, but that would fill more space than I am allowed. I hope you will simply take my word for it and take these things to heart.

1.) You're not the top dog anymore

For the person who was Mr. or Miss Everything in high school, this is one of the hardest things to adjust to. In high school you might have been captain of the football team or head cheerleader or, in my case, editor-in-chief of the school newspaper. Maybe you were named class favorite every year and all your teachers thought you were the next Einstein. Prepare for the jolt when you get to college. Chances are you will be just another face in the crowd, back at the bottom to claw your way up the mountain again. It's not as difficult at a friendly ju-co like WTC to make a name for yourself amongst students, faculty and staff, but at the larger colleges and universities, unless you have a cushy sign-on to a sport's team or really are the next Einstein, it's you among the masses. Don't let it get you down. Recognize that you are an intelligent and worthwhile being — you've come this far — and continue to put forth your very best effort. If you want to make a difference, get involved in an organization on campus. You may or may not get recognized for your brilliance. Regardless, you'll hopefully realize that being Mr. Popularity is not what it's all about anyway.

2. Don't let opportunity pass you by

I mentioned getting involved because I think it is a very rewarding part of the college experience. Both WTC and the college or university you may transfer to later will offer a wide variety of organizations for you to participate in. Be cautioned not to get involved in *so many* things that you neglect the primary purpose for being in school: your classes and grades. My first semester in college was so full of trying to work and survive and adjust that I didn't take full advantage of the opportunity. By the time I was stable enough to return, I had to work full-time to make ends meet. My last year at WTC, I worked full-time at *Snyder Daily News*, went to school full-time and managed a 16-unit apartment complex. I had a lot more irons in the fire, but I'll spare you the details. Just know that it is a little difficult to focus on one iron when you have 15 others to keep an eye on. Silly analogy, I know, but try to stay with me here. This is the proverbial once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. If you are in the fortunate position that your parents or guardians or a full scholarship are paying your way, do not take that for granted. Speaking from someone who's been down the road, (I had scholarships) once squandered, the opportunity is tough to get back.

3. Resist the urge to procrastinate

Oh, am I an expert on this. If hard knocks is my major, procrastination is my minor. Procrastination, in fact, will lead you right down hard knock row. I would start a semester pumped that this would be the one where I do all my assignments and readings ahead of time and avoid that knot of pain and anxiety in my stomach that occurs when I'm sitting in class without my homework and the professor has just called on me to read answer number 1. And who hasn't heard of the student who stayed up all night, swigging café latte and burning up the keyboard to get an essay out in time for that dreaded 8 a.m. course. The lesson: procrastination is painful. It is so much easier to take Nike's advice and "just do it."

4. You may not have to go to class, but you should

It was my first semester in college when I, in all my innocence, asked a friend at Blinn what I had to do if I needed to miss a class. I was accustomed to the "note from a parent or guardian" days of high school. That's when he told me the words I wish that I had never heard. "You just don't go." It seemed too simple. "You mean I don't have to show up if I don't want to?" I questioned, amazed. It was all downhill from there. When you work and go to school, there are lots of days when you don't feel like going. College presents many new freedoms, and this is one that you do not want to abuse. While some professors don't bother with calling the role, it is still important to be there. Like my current roommate says, "I feel like if I skip, I'm just burning \$40 bucks." Also, some professors do take role and you are only allotted so many absences before points start to be deducted from your grade. Whether or not it is you, someone is paying for you to be in school; don't squander the opportunity. It's tempting to skip all the lectures and just show up for the tests, but you're more likely to get a good grade and actually *learn* something if you attend class.

5.) There is power in numbers

I wish I had taken the cue from other students I saw at the beginning of my college career and made a point to connect with other students in a study group. Many of you may already know the wonders and benefits of the study-buddy system, but I'm adding this on my top ten for those of you who may think going solo is the only way. The power of a study group was best evidenced for me in my Media Law and Ethics course last semester here at UT. The very first test I took, I am ashamed to admit, I made a 36. That's not a typo. Thirty-six is correct. I was devastated. I thought I was too stupid to be at the University and should save

myself the worry and quit. Fortunately, I hung in there and immediately connected with an older lady in the class who I had noticed always paid attention, asked questions and attended regularly. She had already been discussing the material with another guy in the class, also a dedicated student. Thus our little study group was formed. We took turns meeting at one another's house or on campus to discuss the material and make sure we had a good grasp on the various law cases and lecture points. The next test (they were essay exam's by the way), I made a 94, and on the next, a 97. I wasn't too stupid to be at UT after all. I just needed a new approach. I came out of that class with an A, which would not have been possible if I had not grouped with other students. In addition to having another mind to bounce ideas off, there is also a degree of accountability. When someone else is depending on you to read the material and show up, it increases your motivation. I start looking around the first day of class to see if I can connect with someone. This doesn't mean that you have to spend all your study time with the group; some things you do need personal time for, but just meeting a couple of days a week for an hour helps tremendously.

6.) Beware of credit cards

There is something that credit card companies know very well: college is expensive and all those fresh young faces would love to have more "spending power." The companies are more than eager to give out the plastic. While some of you, I am sure, are wonderful managers of your finances or, at least, your parents are, I offer a word of caution before signing up for a credit card. In my case, like everything else, I learned this the hard way. It was early fall, and there he was set up at a table in the student center at Blinn. Beckoning me over with promises of building my credit and the built-in calling card, the representative of a major credit card company encouraged me to apply. In early November I received that pretty piece of plastic, and I thought I was something special. I called to tell a friend of mine from back home about it, and she proceeded to offer me words of caution to only use it in emergencies, never charge more than you can pay off at the end of the month and always pay more than the minimum payment. "Yes, okay, right," I replied. A month later the card was maxed out. I, seven years later, am still paying on the original debt. Many of you may already have one or more cards. I'm not preaching against them — just be smart. I have nothing to show for my credit card debt except a bad mark on my credit report. In a time of feast, it's easy to spend, spend, spend, but when the famine comes, the money may not be there to pay the fiddler.

7.) Don't take a loan just because you can get it

Loan companies are also more than eager to pass out the dough to young people. Fast cash loans are tempting. If it's a local company, be aware of the finance rate you are paying. You don't want to pay twice the amount of the original borrowed amount. Some people qualify for government loans through financial aid. I am in

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the situation now that I have to have the loans, but that wasn't the case my first semester. I had more than enough scholarship money, but Blinn happened to be changing over its computer system that year, and one of my scholarships was lost. They cut me a check for the difference, but by that point I was so financially strapped that it was too late to help me. In the meantime, I accepted the government loan that was offered to me and blew that money too. With a little planning ahead of time, I wouldn't have needed the loan and wouldn't now have it hanging over my head. To make a long story short, realize that borrowed money must be paid back at some point, so do not take out more than you need. Read all the fine print whether you are borrowing from the government or a local loan company. My pastor literally worked his way through Nazarene Bible School in Colorado Springs and came out with no debt! He had to sacrifice a lot, but he came out free, so it can be done.

8.) Save, save, save

This message is mainly to those who alone are footing the bill for all or most of their higher education. They will know what I mean when I say that the words "poor" and "college student" fit well together. I was discussing the topic the other day with a customer at Target, where I work. We were talking about how expensive textbooks and materials are: "It's wild that we spend all this money to go to school," I told her, "so we can make more money to spend putting our kids through school. Are we caught in a rut or what?" I know it's worth it — expanding my mind, my horizons, my employment opportunities, but sometimes the way is all uphill. Something that would have helped me — on the transition from Snyder to Brenham and Snyder to Austin — would have been to save more money. I knew I would need money; I guess I just thought the dollar fairy would come bestow untold riches upon me. Saving money is a discipline, something you must commit to early on and regularly. It also takes sacrificing some things along the way for the greater pay off later. Prioritizing is the key. Committing to setting back a set amount from each paycheck — even if it is only five bucks — will add up. Also, extending work hours during holidays and summer vacation won't be as fun as sunning in Ft. Lauderdale, but, again, the payoff later is what is important.

9.) There are people in the world who don't think, believe or act as you do

Culture shock is a mild term for what I felt after leaving Snyder, Texas, population 10,000 for Austin, Texas, population half a million. In Snyder, it was more of a protected environment. I was not so bombarded with hundreds of different worldviews, belief systems and lack of belief systems. As a Christian living in Snyder, I didn't feel threatened in my beliefs or attacked as intellectually inferior. Austin is a whole new scene. My very first class on Monday mornings last semester was Human Nature, a philosophy course. It could have just as well been Atheism 101. The professor told us, "It is more likely that little green dogs rule the universe and that when they pee it is raining than it probable that a divine source created the universe." I share this with you not to initiate an argument about the origins of the universe. I have my beliefs; you have yours. The point I wish to make is that not everybody thinks, beliefs or acts the same. I have encountered so many different people since being here. Before this course, I had never encountered such a blatantly atheistic person. But the differences go beyond religious opinions. Perhaps I just lived too sheltered a life in the small city, but everything

here seems so different. Don't get me wrong, it's not all bad. I have two Korean American roommates, and it has been great getting to know more about their customs and traditions. One of the guys from my study group last semester is from Bangladesh, and it has also been fascinating talking to him about his homeland. I have learned most importantly, though, that while I may be challenged, I don't have to abandon my beliefs. It's actually been good for me in that I have to search myself, scan my life and discover what I believe, and why. Having an open mind does not necessarily require weakening your convictions.

10.) Don't ever give up

If I've learned anything, it's to keep on keeping on regardless of the odds against you. The day I called TEX, the electronic phone system for UT, and heard those words, "You have been accepted into the University of Texas at Austin," I cried. It was just a few weeks short of the sixth anniversary of my graduation from high school. Most of the people I had gone to school with were already through college. I guarantee you though that I wouldn't change a year, a month or a day of what it took to finally get here. I learned a lot along the way, and I can hopefully help at least one person avoid the same mistakes. The awesome thing for me is that the adventure has just begun. Whatever your age, whatever your income level, whatever your grade point, don't ever, ever, ever give up. As a good friend once said, "Don't quit five minutes before the miracle happens."

"Like my current roommate says, 'I feel like if I skip, I'm just burning \$40 bucks.' Whether or not it is you, someone is paying for you to be in school; don't squander the opportunity."