

Academic Survival Guide for Transfer Students

What is Transfer Shock?

As a transfer student, you might think you know all about college-level courses. However, it is not uncommon for students transferring from one kind of educational experience to another to find the transition to be more difficult than they thought it would be. Students who transfer may discover that classes are larger, that scholarly expectations differ from one school to another, and that academic policies differ widely from one institution to another. While many transfer students adapt quickly, others may feel lonely, unsure, under-prepared and overwhelmed. If you are feeling this way, you are not alone. You are suffering from what is commonly referred to as “transfer shock,” and because of it, many transfer students do not do as well academically in their first or second semesters at a new institution as they did at their previous schools.

TIPS for beating Transfer Shock:

1) Let your academic advisor help you select courses and review your requirements.

If you have declared a major in English, you will be assigned to the Advising Coordinator for your first year at USM. You should plan to meet with an advisor once classes have started so that you can review your overall program and make plans toward the completion of your degree.

2) Balance your course load. If you lost a few credits when transferring, do not try to make up for them by over-enrolling your first semester. Wait until you know what USM courses are like. Your first semester, you may want to take introductory courses toward your core curriculum, or balance upper-level courses in your intended major with lower-level, introductory and core courses. A fulltime course load is 12 credits. Some students take 15. However, if you register for 15 or 16 credits your first semester and begin to feel overwhelmed, you can drop a course mid-semester while remaining a fulltime student. If possible, see your advisor before you drop a course. You will also need to pay attention to deadlines. Note that there is a deadline for dropping a course without a “W” (end of the first week) and a deadline for withdrawing WITH a “W” (mid-semester). The “W” does not affect your GPA or overall academic record.

A word about working: Students with financial burdens should keep in mind that registering for a full time course load while working much more than 20 hours a week at a job may prove excessively counter-productive. Failing courses and repeating them is ultimately VERY costly because you may need to re-take the course(s)—and you may end up on academic probation or on the dismissal list. Just because you were able to work full time and go to school successfully in the past does not mean you can do so at USM. Contact Financial Aid for information about student loans.

3) Utilize ALL of your academic skills:

Attend every class; leave extra time for class and exam preparation and for researching, writing and REVISING your papers before you submit them. Faculty expect students to be independent and self-motivated, to follow the syllabus without reminders, to review handouts and course notes independently, and to complete every homework and reading assignment on time, even if the specific material is not under discussion. USM professors also expect students to think critically about the material on their own: that means thinking of questions as you read or prepare for class, breaking down the material into smaller units of analysis, and grasping the concepts related to assignments. Your instructors will expect you to contribute actively to discussions, and participation may factor in the grade. Therefore, you need to prepare thoroughly before each class and review notes from previous classes. The extra review time before and/or after each class will render exam preparation far more productive and rewarding. In addition, if you need to meet with the instructor during the semester, you will be thankful for the extra hours of preparation—especially if you need to address concerns about an assignment or request accommodation of some sort (e.g., missing a class due to illness or family event). Instructors are much more sympathetic to students who are well-prepared and knowledgeable about the course material than to students who have missed classes or appear to be behind with the assignments.

4) Develop and utilize good time management skills. Use an academic planner. Review the syllabus for each class CAREFULLY for information about grading policies and due dates. Mark down all due dates in your planner and expect to spend approx. 2-3 hours per credit PER WEEK in studying (that means on average 20-30 hours/week—or as long as it takes to complete your work and prepare for class!).

5) Seek out assistance. Visit the Learning Center for assistance if you are at all doubtful about your study skills or if you are feeling overwhelmed. Bring assignment directions or drafts of essays, and writing tutors will help you at any point in the writing process, from brainstorming to final editing. You do the work. The tutor's role is to help you become a better student. If you want a qualified student to look at your work and talk it over, tutors are very helpful sounding board. The Portland Learning Center hours are Monday to Friday, 8 A.M. - 4:30 P.M. Appointments are encouraged. Please call 780-4288. For other forms of support, contact your academic advisor.

6) Interact with faculty when possible. USM faculty members are interested in their students and willing to help. However, you must take the initiative in seeking contact with faculty. You should also follow a few simple rules. 1) Respect office hours as stated on the syllabus. 2) Behave respectfully both in class and out. 3) If and when emailing your instructor, use good email etiquette: do not write breezy, chatty, very lengthy, or poorly punctuated emails. Do not WRITE ALL IN CAPS or in funny colors. Ask for an appointment if you have a lot of questions since it is difficult to respond in writing to very detailed concerns. Finally, sign your full name to every email and remind the instructor which class you are in if it isn't obvious from the email. 4) Go prepared to class AND office hours. If the instructor recognizes you from class because you sit toward the

front and raise your hand and participate, he/she may be far more kindly disposed toward you than toward a student who sits in the back, looks sleepy, and never contributes. Likewise, if you meet with a professor, you should at least be knowledgeable about course material that has been covered in the class thus far.

Why meet with faculty? Obviously you do not need to meet with all of your teachers, but it is wise to develop relationships with 2-3 faculty members in your area of interest, either in your major or a related field. You may need to get information about research or internship opportunities. You may also want information about graduate programs, and eventually, you may need to ask for a letter of recommendation. (On the other hand, you may simply want to clarify something a teacher has said in class, ask about an assignment, or review an exam or paper.) Students who avoid contact with teachers and advisors may complain of feeling “anonymous.” One can alleviate that feeling by maintaining regular contact with a few teachers and advisors—but again, such contact requires some initiative.

7) Get involved in at least one student group, campus or department organization.

Students who get involved in one way or another have a richer experience, learn more about themselves and others, meet people, feel more connected to the college, and may even do better academically. Getting involved on campus is a great way to gain leadership experience and strengthen your résumé. A list of student organizations at USM is available on the web at <http://student-groups.usm.maine.edu/bsc>.

8) Learn about the library. You may perform a good deal of research over the internet, but you may actually need to visit the library as well (!), and there are computer terminals within the library with access to the library collection—URSUS--and other databases and indexes. The library system appears vast at first but once you begin using it, it will become more and more familiar. Make it yours!

9) Learn about USM’s policies. Familiarize yourself with the Academic Policies section of the Undergraduate Course Catalog. You should be given a catalog during orientation. There is also an online link to the catalog at <http://www.usm.maine.edu/catalogs/index.html>.

10) Get Help. Seek out University Counseling services at 207-780-4050, if you feel overwhelmed, homesick, or stressed.