

# GKA

Golden Key Academy



## **THE GKA GUIDE: SURVIVING YOUR UNIVERSITY YEARS**

**#LearnWithGKA**







## WELCOME

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So you've started college or university, and you are on the path of obtaining great achievement. Congratulations! This guide is for you, to expand on your knowledge on how to do well in college and keep pushing you higher.

This e-book is separated into sections, detailing some useful tips to begin early in your college career, in the middle, and then closer to the end of your college career. It gives 30 tips for a better college experience; we just ask that you take these suggestions seriously.

Real American Military University (AMU) and American Public University (APU) officers compiled the tips and combed through it to help you learn from our mistakes or miscalculations.

This guide is, by no means, here to insult your intelligence. You may very well know most of these tips already. But we hope you might find some ideas here that will help you and guide you in your educational journey, making it a positive experience for you.

The tips in this book have been contributed by:

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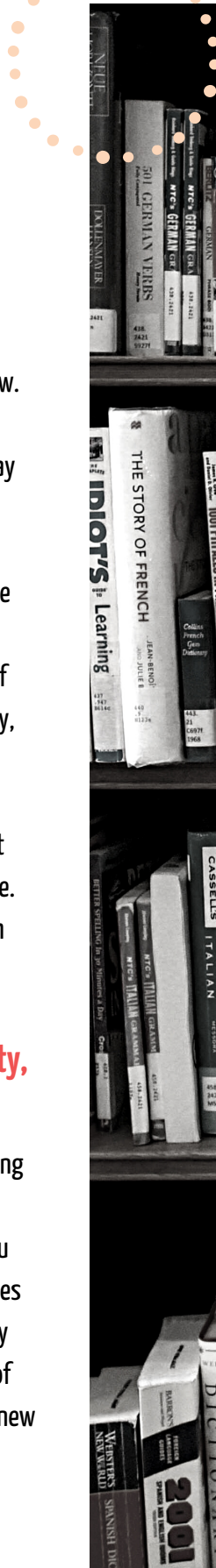
Carla Springer, Public Relations Director, AMU & APU Chapters of Golden Key 2018-2019



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A black and white photograph of a library shelf. The top shelf holds several books and a white paper bag. The bottom shelf holds more books. The books on the top shelf have labels with numbers and names. The books on the bottom shelf have labels with names like 'MICA' and 'CASTELL'.

A close-up photograph of several cables with labels. The labels are white with black text. One label clearly shows '458-1', another '458-2', and a third '458-3'. The cables are bundled together.





### 3. Start looking at scholarships now!

The biggest recommendation is to start building a scholarship package now with elements of all four documents and use that as your template moving forward in your college career. Begin building a digital or physical binder to keep all your documents together. After you find your scholarship make sure to carefully read the nomination guidelines to ensure you write to the package criteria. Additionally, when you plan your letter of recommendation, write a rough draft for the signatory to review. Your letter of recommendation should be in the voice of the person who is signing the letter; it is important to capture this in order to make the process easier.



#### 4. Plan, even if your plan is to wait to plan.


College is not something to take lightly. With the high rate of tuition, you want to be sure you are physically, mentally, and financially ready. Do not be embarrassed or upset; be honest with yourself, and you will have an enjoyable experience in college. You need to plan out what college will be like for you. Are you going to take one class or two classes at a time? Are you sure the degree plan you chose is what you want to do? You need to organize your agenda for daily and long term tasks and commit

to those goals. If you are not ready to commit to your goals, sometimes you need to make the hard decision and wait to attend college.

#### 5. Start a tradition.

This tradition can be something small but make it something genuine to you. If you are a people person, go have some fun with friends or new people. If you are not a people person, find something for just you to do. One

example from a student is to play disc golf once every two weeks. A group of friends would meet every second Saturday to play a round of the sport. Not only does planning a reoccurrence like this get you to interact with others, but you can also have a light exercise as well. Traditions do not have to be religiously followed but adhering to the activity as much as possible grants you opportunities for prioritizing leisure time, creating memories, and having a fun experience to look forward to. Commitments are equally important, commit to do three things daily. Maybe one commitment is to wake up early to



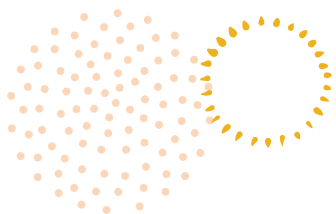
**"Traditions do not have to be religiously followed but adhering to the activity as much as possible will allow you a much-needed break, create memories, and give you something to look forward to."**



enjoy your morning once or twice a week. You can potentially make a commitment to take time at the end of the night to be mindful and gracious to the events of the day.

### 6. Remember that college is not a race.

I had a friend that, I believe, did everything wrong when it came to college and his pursuit of higher education. This friend would never take breaks when life got too busy, or he felt burnt out. They would purposely not turn in an assignment and shrug it off. Their viewpoint was nobody would care about his GPA as long as he had his degree. I remember he graduated with an average, which is fine for some, but he was a brilliant person who could have done so much better. The homework was not hard for my friend, and I remember instructors would try to work with him, but in the end, he treated college as a race. Do not set yourself up for failure; take as many classes as you can handle. If life throws a curveball, take a break. If courses are becoming too difficult, take a break. While having a degree is good, having a degree with a good GPA is even better.



### 7. Start saving money now.

How many Hollywood movies can you count that create a romanticized version of the broke, tired college student? That image is fictitious, try as hard as you can to not let it happen

to you. Do the best you can to create a savings habit so you can exit college with a nice savings fund. Despite what Hollywood will show you, a broke graduate is still just as fictitious in the world today.



### 8. Buy nice tools.

Just as the mechanic or the artist will buy nice tools, so should the college student. A nice journal and pen set will make you feel like your college notes and assignments are worthy of something. When you finish a journal keep it. The assignments you do should help you become more

qualified for the job you want. Now you have a professional way of showing your work and exhibiting that you have experience in your field.

### 9. Make sure college is right for you.

Research your potential college, if it doesn't work for you, make the hard

call. What this means, in a nutshell, is that if the college you want to enroll into does not work for you, keep looking. If you find out college is not right for you, then find another avenue. College is too expensive and time consuming to waste your resources doing something that will make you miserable. Life is too short.





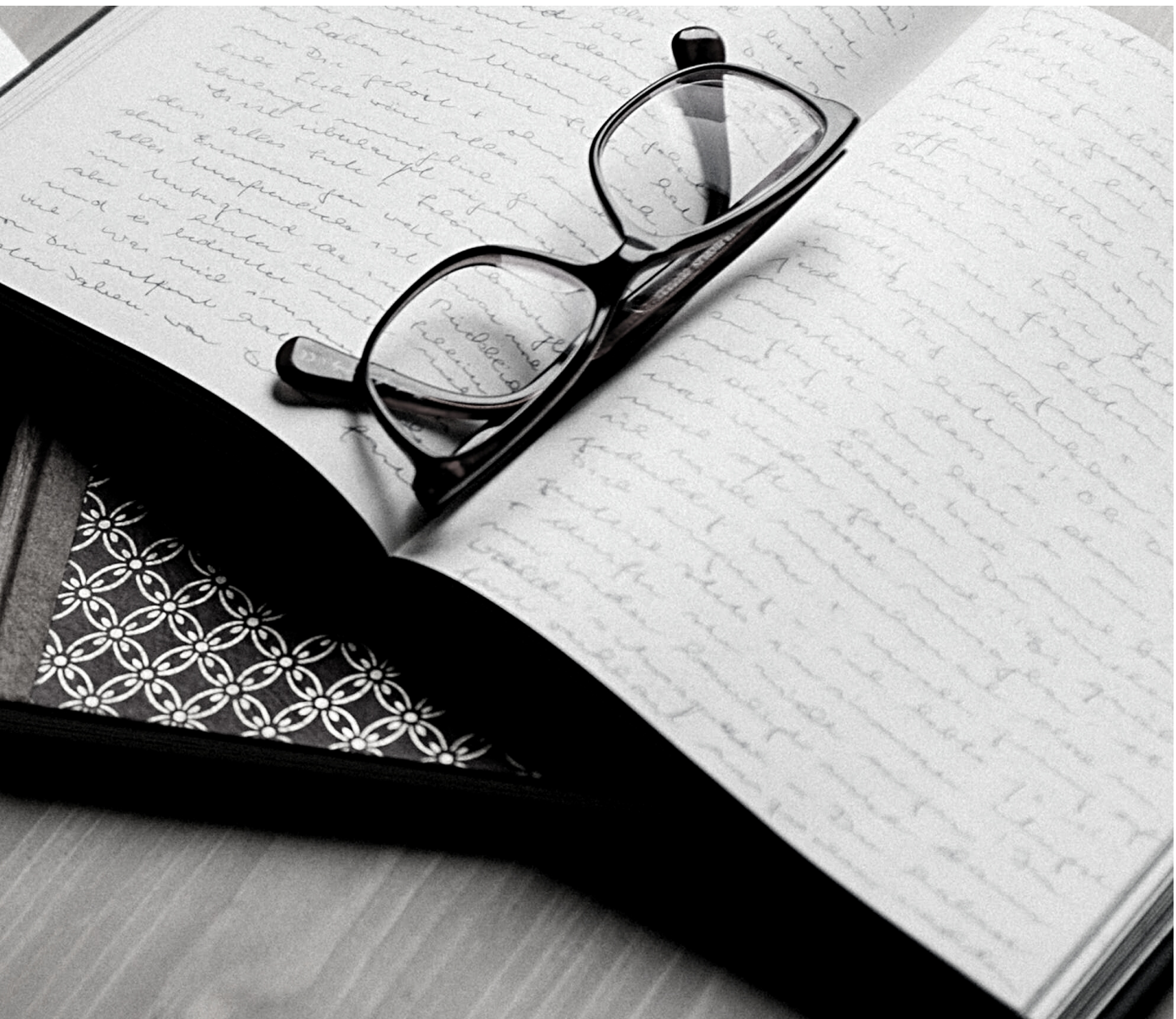
## THE GKA GUIDE: SURVIVING YOUR UNIVERSITY YEARS

### 10. Take the time to learn, study smart, and get some sleep.

As eluded to earlier, this degree should help you become more qualified for the job or career you want. Obtaining a degree is great, but having the subject matter expertise to back up your degree is essential.

Find what learning style or platforms fit you personally such as lectures, Youtube or podcasts. There are four key learning styles: visual learners, auditory learners, reading/writing learners, and kinesthetic learners. When you unlock which learning style you are, you can use this information and finally learn to study smart. The second tip to studying smart is to

start with your mindset. Studying in an efficient manner will require resilience, discipline, and motivation. To make sure you are obtaining the knowledge that you are researching, get some sleep! Sleep is essential to your health, but remember sometimes you won't be able to get the recommended amount.





## THE MIDDLE YEARS

You are now past the  $\frac{1}{4}$  point and heading into the  $\frac{1}{2}$  way point. You have passed your first hurdle of college and are on the way to your sophomore or junior year. Look back at how much you have learned at this point. At this time you potentially have a rhythm on how to balance life, work, and school. You potentially have a network to lean on and have started the foundation to a successful college

experience. Don't stop now; you have to keep moving forward confidently. Here are ten more tips to accomplish your next portion of your college experience.

### 1. Teamwork makes the dream work.

In the beginning you had introductory classes that prepared you for your field of study, but as you progress the classes will increase in difficulty.

Do not fret about the new challenges, use the network you built in the beginning to help you. Additionally, you may have other teammates in your life that demand your attention. Family and friends will want things from you during your college career, don't forget to be a good team player and help out where you can. College is temporary, friends and family are for your entire life.





## 2. Don't forget about your family and friends.


Far too often we say that we are too busy with college to spend time with friends and family. This is, by far, the biggest thing I regret about my college journey. At times, I caught myself wrapped too tightly during the journey. If I took the time to refresh with my friends and family, then college may have been more enjoyable to me. This balance is essential.

## 3. Remember to take time for you.

You are the biggest advocate for yourself. Make sure you do what you need for your physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. I am one of the biggest extroverts, but even at times, I need to take a walk by myself or be away from people. This balance is essential to me; just like your balance will be essential to you.

## 4. Keep the reason you are doing this in the forefront of your mind.

When times are tough, it is too easy to put things in the back of your mind and forget that the "pain" is worth the potential outcome. College is about being resilient; you will have times of hardship and struggle. The bad times, in the end, are worth it.



**"You are the biggest advocate for yourself. Make sure you do what you need for your physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing."**

## 5. Don't be afraid to alter the plan if you have to.

Too commonly, people are stuck on a plan. If you are planning on attending nine classes every semester to finish your degree as fast as possible, that is fine until a roadblock occurs. Then what? You were on track for nine classes every semester to finish your degree as fast as possible? What if, to have a fuller college experience and balance all your life priorities, you only took six classes? What if you just took three? People are hesitant to deviate from the original plan, which is not a successful mindset to have. Life happens; plans change, you must adapt and overcome.

## 6. There are four pillars to wellness, remember all four.

At the time of this publication, the United States Air Force is actively sharing the idea of four pillars with their Airmen that are the foundation of wellness. The four pillars are physical, mental & emotional, spiritual, and social & family.

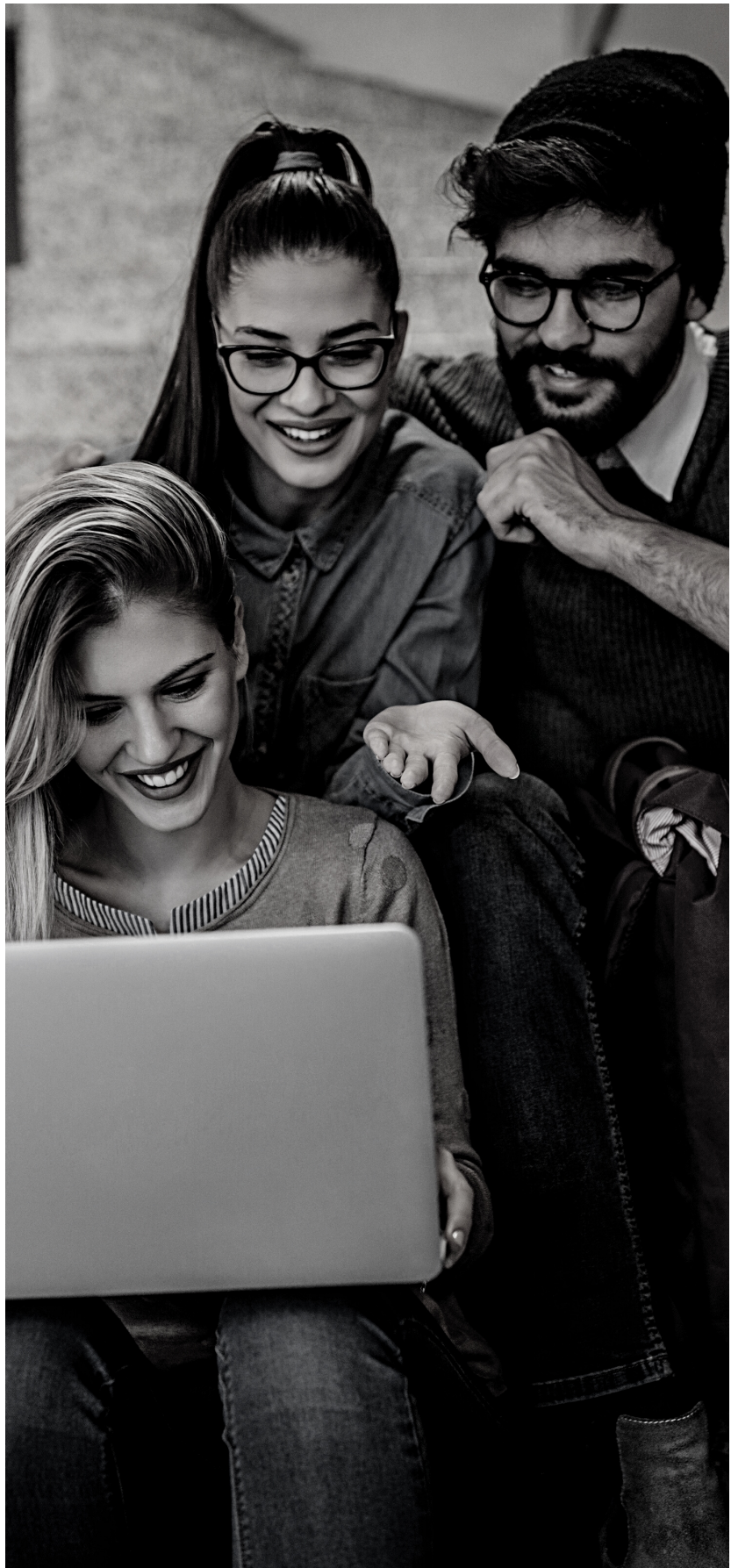
If you think of a house that has four corners, each corner being a pillar of wellness, what happens when one pillar gets weak? The house loses its integrity, but it still may stand. What if two pillars get weak? Would you live in a house that has two weak walls? You would not, and it is not safe! Make sure you are tending to all four pillars



in your life. Sometimes you will feel like you are losing it, do not lose it. Take a break, the work will be there when you come back.

### **7. Student organizations are here for a reason.**

While you are in college, you should try to get involved with your student organizations. Essentially, there are four types of student organizations: academic, niche, lifestyle/philanthropic, and career groups. Academic is just as it sounds, if you reach a certain GPA or academic achievement then you will be accepted into the group. A niche student organization is also just how it sounds, and this is a group of people who enjoy the same pastimes or hobbies. The third type of student organizations are lifestyle/philanthropic. These groups can be a group of like-minded people who want to make a change in their local communities or promote a lifestyle such as the LGBTQ+ group or similar groups. Career groups are for like-minded people pursuing the same type of careers, an example being welders, information technology, or other groups. The relationships that you have and create in these organizations can prepare you for future success.





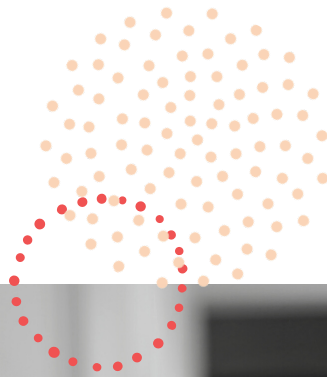
### 8. Monitor burn out.

Burn out is when you have put so much on your plate that you become emotionally and physically exhausted. Burn out makes everything you do ten times harder because you do not have the energy to do it. Remember steps 3 (remember to take time for you,) 5 (don't be afraid to alter the plan if you have to) and 6 (there are four pillars to wellness, remember all four.)

You have to make time for yourself to make your pillars of wellness strong, so do not be afraid to alter the plan if you need to.

### 9. Be honest.

There will be many instances during your college career where you will have to take a hard, honest look at issues. Honesty is truly the best policy. The truth about a situation may not be the easiest to handle, but you have to find the courage to remain true and holistic to your values.



### 10. Track your experience and accolades.

If you have not already, at some point, you will need to create a resume. To help support your resume, you should create an “I love me” binder. This binder has all the documentation on awards, accolades, and proof that you have a certain knowledge set.

Employers do like to see how you were while in college to set yourself apart from others. Having an “I love me” binder also helps with writing letters of recommendation and scholarship award essays.



## THE FINAL STRETCH



You are close to the finish line, but you still have a ways to go. At this point, you may be focused on the future, but you should also look at the past. Look at how far you have come, look at the memories you have made, and look at how much you learned. These final ten tips are geared to helping you finish strong and posturing you for success in your future education and career goals.

### **1. Fall in love with something.**

When you are coming toward the end, it is nice to look back and think about what made the best memories during your time. As discussed in the beginning chapter, page 6, item 5, in line with creating a tradition, fall in love with some activity or item and take it with you when you leave.

### **2. Look at all your outside opportunities.**

Of course, we want you to be happy and stay at your chosen college for all your education needs, but there are thousands of other schools that provide similar services. It would be a disservice to you to **NOT** examine your options. Think about it, if you take the chance to look at your opportunities and still stay at a particular college then you will feel even better about the journey you had and the next chapter. This point ties into the next point perfectly.

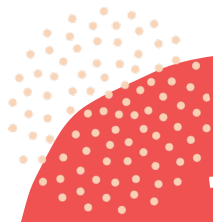


### 3. Move forward.

You have been, more than likely, so focused on your studies and the grind of life that you will feel stuck when it all comes to an end. You must move forward on to the next project; college is not the end of your learning. What is the best way for you to move forward? Should you go for that next level of education? Should you take a break and start something else? Is it time to apply for jobs and let your merits speak for themselves? Whatever it is that you decide, make sure you are moving forward to your goals and dreams.

### 4. Leave your mark, teach others.

This is the best way to pay it forward. Regardless if the person you are working with is a fellow student or not, do not turn down an opportunity to get someone started on their education journey. You are the lucky one who has heeded these tips as a guide and have your own experiences, now try to help someone start on the right path. You have spent a few years in college, now is the time to pay it forward. Find ways to turn that knowledge into something useful for someone else. If there is not a forum to pass information, make one! Connect with your student organizations or student affairs team and brainstorm some new initiatives to create. The next class depends on people like us to teach them the ropes.



**"Try to thank everyone that you had a chance to work with or interact with. A more grateful life will make a more grateful world."**

### 5. Thank those who got you here.

The key here is to take some time to reflect and acknowledge those who helped you. Do not leave anyone out when you do this; two words can make someone's day that much better. Try to thank everyone that you had a chance to work with or interact with. A more grateful life will make a more grateful world.

### 6. Reward yourself.

All this time you have spent working on your degree has finally morphed into a diploma. Now is the time to do something for you. Be genuine in what you do, if you want a night out, then do it. You don't even have to spend a lot of money to celebrate, take a road trip to another town and see something new. You deserve to do something for you, make certain others respect that time as well. The earlier you plan, the more excited you will be when the day comes.







### 7. Talk about graduation early!

For a while you have been counting down the classes remaining, and that is okay. Take it from us, three classes left is a lot harder to stomach than ten left. You are tired, and you want it to be over, you want to walk across that stage. When you talk about graduation early, you are getting encouragement from others to stay strong and cross the finish line. A second point to highlight is the earlier you start discussing graduation, the more prepared you will be. Nothing is

worse than trying to plan your big day at the last minute. Before you graduate, there is so much you have to do, like plan your final courses, apply for graduation, complete application items (which cost money), coordinate plans for others to attend, purchase your cap and gown, photoshoot, graduation party planning, awards, and still have enough energy to finish your courses. This is a lot and it takes a lot of time. Do not wait, start early, start asking questions, make sure you complete everything on time.

### 8. Think about your legacy.

This may seem like an unnecessary tip, but this is the foundation of you. School is meant to enrich you and arm you as an intelligent and mentally flexible person. For those who are younger, after college, you are building what people see you as. For those who are more senior, your legacy is even more important as you mold the future generation behind you. Your legacy continues in the lessons you give to others.



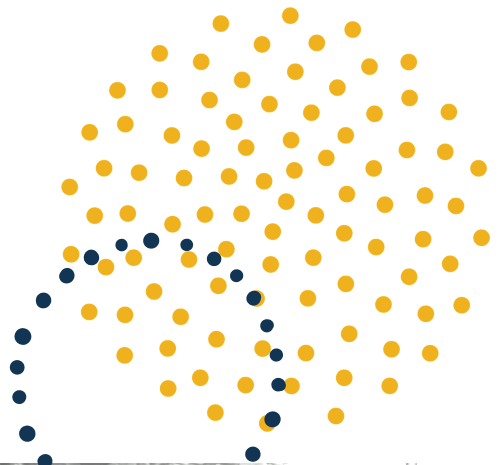
### 9. Look at graduation awards now.

If your record supports it, there are many graduation awards that you can apply for. The importance of these awards is that they will set you apart from others when you are writing your resume (remember to track your awards and accolades!). Being a successful college student is important, but if you become a recipient for an award or even a finalist, that will set you even farther apart from your peers. Talk to your student affairs office to see what opportunities exist, talk to your private organizations and see if there are opportunities. If there are no opportunities, maybe present the idea to your student affairs office to see if you could create an award. Not only winning an award is a great feeling but creating something for the benefit of others is an even better feeling (remember, page 16, item 8, what will be your legacy?).

### 10. Solidify your network before you go and start expanding.

This guide has discussed many organizations, people, and opportunities to solidify your network. Before you expand your network, solidify your current network. Do not be the person who

takes and takes from other people for personal gain, that is not a network mentality. A network is where someone hears something that needs a certain skill set, and you catch yourself saying “John would be perfect for this!” If it works out for John, he may help you out later with the same scenario.





## FINAL THOUGHTS

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You have now read the guide on 30 tips to be an effective college student, during the beginning, middle, and end of your college career. The AMU & APU Chapter of Golden Key's officers' intent in writing this guide was to give you a platform to help you be successful during your college journey and after. We hope that you heed the tips in this guide.

Do you believe there is a tip that is missing? Continue the conversation by messaging the AMU and APU Golden Key Chapter Facebook. Your suggestions may make a future edition of this guide. Thank you for reading, now go do great things...





The men and women of the 2019 American Military University and American Public University System Golden Key Chapters wish you luck on your college journey. Some special acknowledgements from the authors are made below for those who have impacted their lives in their academic pursuits.

President Ian Bush – This guide is dedicated to all my family and friends and, more specifically, my daughter and former wife. Samantha, thank you for all the nights you took Winnie, and encouraged me to keep going at the time. Thank you for understanding how important this all was to our family and me. Thank you for being the voice of reason when I needed to do something or take a break. To Winifred, your parents built the foundation of your life. In time, I need you to close the deal and make your life beautiful however you see fit. Mom and Dad are so proud of you already, even if we are not together anymore, and we cannot wait to see what you do. No matter what, your Mom and Dad will always love and care for you. The road is before you, pick a path and run like Hell.





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