

February 4, 2019

Dear [REDACTED]

Thanks for your letter! The paper you wrote it on was so cool with all the cells and the microscope on it! That's exciting that you are learning about cells in science class. Did you have to build a model of a cell? I remember when I was in 7th grade, I had a project to build a model of a cell and I used candy to represent the different elements like the nucleus, ribosomes, and mitochondria. What other projects are you doing this semester?

It is true that in college you have a different teacher for every class you take and you do get a lot of homework. College classes are not scheduled in a big block from 8 AM to 3 PM every day. Most college classes have lectures only 2 or 3 times a week, so every day you might have a different schedule and every class is in a different building on campus. Then you have to add in discussion sections, labs, and maybe even part-time work. I had a few different part-time jobs on campus during college. I had a paid position for 10 hours a week in a research lab. I also worked at a campus magazine and at the volunteer center at other times. I really appreciated those opportunities because I got to earn some money during the school year while also getting some useful work experience. But with so many different things going on in a week, it was really important to stay on top of my schedule and plan things out so that I could get all my homework and studying done on time. Here's a photo of the USC campus so you can see where I was walking to get to all my classes:



I actually did have a hard time adjusting to college my first year. I had a great group of friends in high school that scattered all across the country for college and I missed them a lot. I had a hard time making new friends on campus. I was doing okay with my school work, but I felt really lonely. I remember eating a lot of meals in the cafeteria by myself at that time. In my second year, I decided to dig in and get involved on campus with the experiences I wanted to have. I joined the jazz choir and I signed up for an alternative spring break trip to spend the week of spring break volunteering in Mexico. I also started spending more time with the other students in my chemical engineering classes and become much closer friends with them. That ending up

helping me also do better in those classes, because we formed a study group and helped each other with homework and projects.

Here's a picture of me with my alternative spring break group on Isla Contoy, off the coast of Cancun in Mexico. Isla Contoy is a national park and we stayed there helping the park rangers by picking up trash off the beautiful beaches, clearing the trails, and doing other maintenance work. This ended up being one of my favorite experiences in college. I'm glad I joined even though I didn't know anyone else in the group at the beginning!



I think the lesson for me was that it's important to make an effort to get to know people and try new activities, even if it feels hard. Because I learned this lesson in college, when I moved to Berkeley for graduate school and when I moved to San Diego for my job, I had a much easier time making friends and making the new city feel like home. That also helped me be a better scientist, because when I am fulfilled and happy outside of work, I can focus better on my research when I am at work.

Keeping working hard on getting those good grades! I hope you do end up getting those turtles and fish for your fish tank!

Sincerely,

