The Tip
Don’t create too many expectations. You might think that you know what will happen in college, but really, you don’t.

The Story
I left for college expecting my high school boyfriend and I to stay together forever. Well, we ended up breaking up in December of my freshman year. I had always gotten As in high school classes. It was easy for me. I left for college expecting to do the same amount of work in college as I did in high school (not all that much) and to get the same grades. In reality, I’ve never had to work harder and no longer always get the A. I thought my friendships in college would be the same as they were in high school. But I soon learned that it takes time to develop those same kinds of friendships. Once I stopped expecting so much and started expecting the unexpected, college got so much better.

—freshman, Northwestern University

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I know, you didn’t expect this to be the first tip.

Welcome to your college experience. Right now, you’re on that upward climb, preparing for what is guaranteed to be a wild ride. It’s like a roller coaster moments away from running at top speed down the tracks, and unless you’re able to handle the unexpected twists and turns ahead of you, you risk running off the tracks or just getting sick to your stomach. Not good.

While it’s unnatural to leave for college with NO expectations, try leaving with flexible expectations. If you do, you will find that the ride ahead will take you to places you never imagined. (I ended up as an intern at The Tonight Show, and then as a syndicated advice columnist—nothing I had ever imagined.)

If you and I were close enough that I could reach out and grab you by your shoulders (without you thinking I was making a move) and talk to you, I’d tell you exactly what I wish I could have told myself before heading to college.

Just relax.

Have fun.

Enjoy it all.

Your job is simple:

Be your personal best,

Meet lots of people,

Make new friends,

Make smart decisions,

Possibly find a career,

Possibly find love,

And take risk after risk after risk so that you can figure out what you love and what you don’t love. Expect that all the risks you take will not always go as planned. Some will, but not all. When it doesn’t go as expected, don’t go on the attack, don’t give up and hide—instead, look inward, look outward, and then move forward. If you do this, you’ll love college with more than a degree. You’ll leave knowing what it takes for you to be happy. Really, what more could you want.

Bottom Line
When you expect the unexpected you’re better prepared when the unexpected arrives. Should it throw you, lean on the professionals on campus who have seen it all (or at least most of it) before.