Some Advice from Seasoned Freshmen

As an international student, adjusting to a different way of teaching was a definite challenge when I came on campus in August 2017. There was a different way to register for courses and to look for courses that we had a little idea about before registering in May. The summer online registration really helped me find classes for the upcoming year. I asked question about each class, each course,
about the workload that each class entailed and even about the possible courses that I can take in the following years with my academic advisor. I believe, being open to your advisor, interacting and asking questions about even a possible query that you might have, should be clarified there and then. This not only benefited me to choose my classes wisely, it also gave me a prior indication about the work I'll have to put in every week and what should I expect in terms of academic load for the upcoming semesters.

On campus, I was really impressed by the way professors and faculty here conduct and organize classes. All my technical classes in my major tend to focus on the practical applications of what we learned during lecture. This gave me hands-on-experience with all the Electrical and Mechanical parts that I learned about during class as I started implementing my own personal projects with this knowledge that I gathered. It’s true that the curriculum is challenging, however it surely prepares you to excel and have a mastery of every subject. On a personal note, I would also like to add, however committed you are, don’t take 8 AM classes. They sound good on your schedule as you might be over for the day a lot earlier, but on a long run, they really aren’t.

Moreover, as a freshman, I understand that it becomes really tempting when you must start scheduling for classes for the upcoming semester. You are not a 100% sure about your chosen field of specialization for the future and hence don’t really know the classes that interest you. However, each Department on campus has their own major-related advisors who have vast knowledge about all the courses and specialization that Illinois has to offer and always help to lead you in that direction.

-Daksh Varshney (EFC EIB Committee Member)
Dorms

Living in the dorms is one of the biggest changes from high school to college life. All of a sudden you are living in a small compact room that functions as a bedroom, study space, and kitchen all in one with someone who might be a complete stranger to you. This may sound intimidating but don’t worry, dorm life is eventful and worthwhile if you make the most out of it.

At U of I, there are so many university housing dorms that choosing one can be difficult. If you are a STEM major and prefer to live with other STEM majors close to the quads, ISR is a perfect fit for you. ISR is known to not be very social, however since many of your classes will be similar, more tight-knit groups are bound to form. Choose Busey-Evans if you want an all girl dorm just across the
quad. The Ikenberry Commons is considered the most social dorm, because of the amount of students in one area as well as many fraternity and sorority houses being located within streets of the IKE. Their dining hall is in its own building and you do have to walk outside to get to it. If you have an artsy or creative personality, Allen Hall has many features dedicated to the arts. LAR is connected to Allen and provides a quiet and friendly environment not too far from the quad with vegetarian and vegan lunches. Lastly is FAR and PAR which are known to be very far from the quad. However, I lived in PAR and really enjoyed it. It might seem far, but you can walk to most anywhere on campus within 15 minutes and there are also many bus routes that go by. PAR & FAR are pretty diverse and social, and PAR has late night dinner which is open till midnight every day.

To make your year in the dorm a great one, I recommend keeping your door open for the first week or two and try to get to know as many people on your floor or in your hall. You might find that you share classes with them and can form study groups, or just become friends anyway.

Coming home to a friendly and comfortable space every day with people who are struggling and enjoying the college life the same way you are only makes college that much easier. Dorm life might not be for you in the following years, but from the people I’ve met to the convenience of food, laundry, and cleaning, living in the dorm has helped make my transition from high school to college easier.

-Neha Nagar (EFC EIB Committee Member)
Food

The University of Illinois has a lot to offer when it comes to food! For starters, if you’re living in campus housing you will have access to the dining halls on campus. These include the Ike, ISR, LAR, PAR, and more. One of the most common to eat at is the Ike, which offers a wide selection of food. PAR is known for its late night dinners (and stir fry!). An app that is super helpful when it comes to dining on campus is “UIDining”. It updates the daily menus for each dining hall and shows the locations on a map. There are different dining plans to choose from based on how many meals you want to eat in the dining halls and how many cafe credits you want. Café credits act as cash and can be used at A La Carte locations, including 57 North, which is a convenience store/diner located in the Ike.
Other housing options, like private certified, will have their own dining options that differs depending on the building. It’s definitely worth checking out the dining options before picking a living situation.

In addition to dining options included with housing, there are also tons of great places to eat on and around campus. One of the most popular and convenient locations is Green Street. Located right next to the Main Quad, these 2-3 blocks offer many places to eat and hang out. To name a few: Chipotle, Panera, Noodles and Company, Cocomero, Potbelly, Cracked, Starbucks, and many, many more. Also nearby, in the basement of the Ilini Union, there is an Einstein Bagels, Qdoba, Sbarro, Wendy’s, Jamba Juice, and Garbanzo. Both Green Street and the Illini Union are super convenient place to grab lunch between classes when you don’t have time to run back to your dorm, especially for engineers who have classes nearby.

-Beth Callis (EFC EIB Committee Member)
Clubs

Throughout this year, I have joined many engineering clubs and some non-engineering clubs. These RSOs have taught me a lot about what I find important in extracurricular activities and how to optimize your time without getting burned out. Many people will tell you that you should only join 2-3 clubs your first semester in freshman year. Others will say join as many as you want to get a feel for what kind of club/environment you are looking for. I believe both methods can work depending on how you choose the clubs you get involved in. There are 1400+ clubs on campus and the ability to create new ones if needed. However, many established clubs have resources and contacts that you might want or need, so I feel it is best to join a pre-established club before deciding to create your own.

One tip of advice in general for clubs; choose one club that is project-based or project-intensive. A club that can give you hands-on experience, preferably in an area of your major, will not only add to your resume, but also give you an idea of what industry will be like or help you find areas of your major that you are more interested in. When it comes to taking technical elective courses your junior or senior year, you will have a better idea of what to sign up for based on your interests.

Aside from one club that is project heavy, you should join one club just for fun that is not engineering based. Something that allows you to pursue a hobby and meet non-engineers would be beneficial to create relationships outside the classroom and allow you to de-stress from heavy school work.

When you are talking to companies about internships, many will ask you about leadership positions you have had. This is why it is important to pursue leadership opportunities in clubs. If you have the opportunity to become a chair or director in one of the two types of clubs previously...
mentioned, that is great. If not, you might need to look for another club purely for the leadership experience.

A good way to start off the year is to look through all the clubs on campus and decide which ones you are most interested in. Then on quad day, you go to the booths of clubs you already are interested in instead of aimlessly wandering around. However, all of this advice is not the be-all-end-all, so in the end, it is up to you to decide how involved you would like to be. Just keep in mind that schoolwork comes first, so I would stick to a maximum of three clubs. Therefore, you will not feel overworked from both classes and clubs.

A list of clubs on campus can be found at: https://illinois.campuslabs.com/engage/organizations

-Pallavi Narayanan (EFC EIB Chair)
Transportation

One of the first things you should prepare for when coming to UIUC is getting across campus. One of the most important means of transportation you should get to know is the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District. These buses can take you to many places all over campus, even going to Downtown Champaign and stores like Walmart. The buses are always free for full-time students, but you should make sure to have your I-Card ready when boarding farther away from campus.

Within the first weeks of campus, you’ll want to have remembered most of the bus routes, including the usual arrival times and stops. You can also download one of the multiple CUMTD apps on your phone to check for delays and bus schedules. While generally on time, busses can sometimes run late when weather gets poor. Also, be familiar with bus-riding etiquette when entering, leaving, and even choosing a spot on the bus. Enter once everyone who needs to leave is out and try not to block others who will be trying to find a way out.

While the bus can get you within walking distance to your classes, you might also want to consider other forms of transportation, such as bikes. The campus has many bike lanes to help you navigate the streets, though make sure to abide by traffic laws just as if you were a car. With bike racks located all over campus, you can keep your bike locked up during class or at your dorm. For those wanting something more portable and faster than walking, using a skateboard or longboard is another viable option. You’ll have to carry it with you inside buildings, but you won’t have to worry about locking it up.

For your first year on campus, you shouldn’t worry about having a car, especially with the other methods of transportation available. In the future, having a car would allow you to live farther from campus and generally be able to drive directly to more places, but it is unnecessary for your first year in dorms. Other considerations for this would be buying a parking spot and having insurance.
Weather

It truly is a wonder how the same place can have such drastically different weather. Champaign weather takes no prisoners. A common complaint about Champaign is its isolation from large metropolitan areas. While a student at Illinois will likely not engage in the bustle and excitement of Chicago, he will surely experience both the droughts of San Diego and the blizzards of Minneapolis. The unsuspecting freshman who forgets his coat to Quad Weekend will undoubtedly bear the consequences of his ignorance in three weeks when the cold rain and high winds strike. A week in which one comfortably strolls to class in flip flops and a hawaiian shirt on Tuesday, winces as his
umbrella flips inside out from tempestuous winds and rain on Wednesday, trudges through three inches of snow in his boots on Thursday, and steps in puddles from the melted snow on Friday is by no means atypical in Champaign.

All jokes aside, though the weather at UIUC is not exactly desirable, it is by no means intolerable. Anyone with a waterproof jacket, a winter coat, hat and gloves can survive the school year. Champaign-Urbana’s bus system offers convenient transit between all important locations on campus and many off campus as well, meaning no one has to walk through twenty minutes of below freezing conditions. During the beginning of first semester and the end of second semester, the weather is warm and campus is abounding in activity. People set up hammocks in the quad, runners dot the whole campus, and outdoor basketball courts are always full. For the most part, every drab, cloudy day in the winter has a warm and sunny counterpart in the fall or spring. At the very least, one can expect variety.

-Lewis Monaxios (EFC EIB Committee Member)