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The Top 10 Things You Should Know About Your Professors

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On behalf of the faculty, it is my great privilege to welcome you to The Ohio State University. Yes, I am a faculty member, a professor of chemistry. But who are these people we call professors? Are we the same as the high school teachers that you have come to know and love over the past several years? Not exactly. You will find more beards and tweed jackets on professors than on your high school teachers. And if you thought your high school teachers gave you the impression that they knew everything, you ain't seen nothing yet! But that is not what

distinguishes the professors you will come to know and love over the next several years. In my few minutes—and believe me, it is hard for a professor to speak for only a few minutes—I want to give you a sense of these creatures who will be a central part of your lives.

Before I do, however, I want to tell you that for me you are a very special class of students. Most of you graduated from high school earlier this year. My daughter was also a June graduate of high school, which is why I want to say a special hello to Justin, Tyler, John, Jeremy, Melanie, Giulia,

Hanna, and her other friends from high school who are here today. You know who you are. So I will be watching you, peers of my daughter, and I want you to succeed magnificently. With that in mind, how can I give you a better sense of who we are? Now I know that Top Ten lists are cliches, but if they still work for David Letterman, maybe they will work for me. So, to give you a sense of what you will be facing starting on Wednesday, let me present the Top Ten Things You Need to Know About Professors:

10. Professors are passionate, especially about what they do and the students they teach. You will find yourself at times wondering how Professor Smith can sing the praises of mathematical models of microeconomics with the same fervor that you will have when singing Carmen Ohio at your graduation. But she can, and when she does her job well, she will impart that passion to you. It's what we do.

9. Professors are not stupid. We have seen every form of brown nosing, we know most of the Web sites that tell you how to pass classes without doing the work,

and, if you've been around as long as I have, you've pretty much seen it all. It may be hard to believe, but all of us were once first-year students, two days away from our first classes. We were you, and we know you.

8. Professors are stupid. Sometimes we don't know that there is a big football game or a major concert or something else that should cause us to think twice about the amount of homework we assign or when we have quizzes in our classes. Or maybe we do know...

7. Extra credit? Fuhgedaboutit. Most of us will make sure that you work plenty hard to earn the credit in our classes that you deserve. Work hard and you won't need anything extra.

6. If you really do want to suck up, try sitting in the front of your lecture hall and taking very good notes. It won't necessarily impress your professor, but it will help your performance on these little exercises in critical thinking that we call exams.

5. Your professor is one of the world's leading authorities, if not

the leading authority, about something. Go ahead and ask what it is. You will see the passion for research and scholarship that makes a professor what he or she is. We publish papers in international journals, we give talks at conferences around the world. And we love to tell students about what we do. President Holbrook, while very busy doing the myriad activities that a university president must do, remains one of the world leaders in understanding the factors that lead to fetal skin development. Ask her about her paper entitled "Periderm cells form cornified cell envelope in their regression process during human epidermal development," published in the *Journal of Investigative Dermatology*, and you are likely to get a big smile.

4. Professors do exist off campus. You might see one of your professors at a grocery store, and wonder to yourself "What is he doing here?" Let me clue you in: He's probably buying groceries.

3. Professors are almost always nerdy, but often are not nerds. Professors do get excited about nerdy stuff. Don't get me started

about the profound effects of relativity on the behavior of the 5f electrons of the actinide elements and how that influences the bonding in uranium complexes. But just because we like nerdy stuff doesn't mean that we know nothing outside of the university. We go to movies, we have hobbies, and we even read stuff just for fun. And most of us know, like you do, that Eminem sucks. And that has nothing to do with his being from Michigan...

2. The only stupid question to ask a professor is the one you don't ask. Except for the really stupid questions. Your professors will prepare course syllabi to answer those for you. Read them! It is embarrassing to ask a professor when her office hours are, only to hear, "As it clearly states on the syllabus I gave you three weeks ago..." Your professors will prepare hard to teach you. You need to prepare hard to learn as much as you can.

1. Professors are the kindest, smartest, most interesting, best looking, and most modest people you will ever know. And if you don't believe me, just ask one of my colleagues.

Realize that not only will you get to know professors over the next several years, you will get to know Ohio State professors. Now I mean no disrespect to the other fine colleges in Ohio that many of your high school classmates are attending. But you are to be congratulated for your decision to attend Ohio State. We are the highest ranked school in Ohio, and one of the top public universities in the country, because of the quality of our faculty and the quality of our students. The faculty at Ohio State are not only excellent teachers in the classroom, but also produce some of the best and most important research in the world.

And that leads to one of the most exciting parts of my message to you, although it is one that you will probably have to store away for a year or so. We passionately want you to be part of our research experience. Once you know more about what you want to do, ask one of your professors about trying undergraduate research. Two current undergraduates are doing state of the art research investigations under my supervision. Keith Thornley is exploring the synthesis and dynamics of tris(cyclopentadienyl)

complexes of the group 4 transition metals. Really. Kurt Frey is benchmarking modern computational methods as applied to small molecules of the actinide elements, using the Ohio Supercomputer Center and supercomputers at National Laboratories. Kurt is also a member of The Best Damned Band In The Land, which is the hardest working bunch of students we have at Ohio State. It was not that long ago that Keith and Kurt sat where you do now.

Let me close with a couple of words of advice in dealing with your professors. Nothing impresses us as much as hard work and dedication. Even if you think that you're not the smartest student in your class, you should try to make sure that nobody works harder than you do. Use the marvelous libraries and other resources that Ohio State has to help you learn more better. But your number one resource for helping you is the faculty. When you have questions, go to office hours. You will be challenged, you will be pushed, and you will learn. Set a goal each quarter to know at least one of your professors well enough that you can ask him or her for a letter of recommendation

sometime in the future. You have a tremendous opportunity to learn from—wait, let me check my notes—some of the kindest, smartest, most interesting, best-

looking, and most modest people you will ever meet. Make the most of it. Congratulations on starting one of the most exciting and challenging periods of your lives. Have fun and work hard. Thanks very much.