

Destination: Dorms

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Deciding what to take with you for the first year of college is important and can be stressful. For most people, it's the longest they've ever been away from home.

Chase Schneider, 23, is a resident assistant at the University of Illinois Springfield. He's seen many college kids move in on the first day. And it's not uncommon for students to forget something simple but important.

"People forget really common things like toilet paper," he says. "Pencils get left in the rush of packing and getting here."

BEFORE YOU MOVE IN

Every college offers a slightly different list of amenities, different living arrangements, and different rules about what sorts of things are allowed in a dorm.

For example, most dorms offer you a bed ... but not sheets. Most dorms offer you a desk and a chair ... but the other furniture may be up to you. Some schools do not allow you to have a microwave oven, a lava lamp, a halogen lamp, or anything else that might be considered a fire hazard. Some have a suite of rooms where only a few people share a restroom, while others will require you to walk down the hall to brush your teeth and shower.

So check with the school first. Talk to current students. Many schools have lists on their Web sites that provide a comprehensive collection of items to bring.

For example, Illinois State University has a list of What to Bring (www.housing.ilstu.edu/seasonal/move_in/bring.shtml) for incoming students. The list is categorized into sections such as Bed Articles, Desk Items and Toiletries.

Other colleges and stores have lists online about what to take when you're packing for college. These lists refer to specifics about your college or can help you find good deals at certain retailers.

Lauren Ladd, 18, recently graduated from Glenwood High School. She will enter Saint Louis University in the fall with her organized lists of supplies. Her lists are based on a list a friend made last year, and information provided by the college.

Based on that information, "I heard the mattresses are pretty uncomfortable," Lauren says. So she bought a pillow-top mattress for her room.

Some things are better left purchased after you arrive.

"I tell people to buy some things when they get here," said Chad Franks, a marketing and promotion specialist at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston. "Such as carpets or rugs that you don't really want to attach to the roof of your car."

KEEPING CLEAN

Lauren is bringing items for her own comfort, and to keep herself and her room clean.

A Swiffer sweeper, including a dry sweeper and wet mop, cost \$9 at Wal-Mart. Thirty-six wet mopping refills cost \$11.47 and six dry duster refills cost \$8.47. A spray bottle (9.7 ounces) of the deodorizer Febreze cost \$2.66.

Learning laundry is another aspect of going off to college. Lauren has been practicing at home before doing her first load at college. Bed Bath and Beyond sells wheeled laundry hampers made of mesh with a drawstring that make transporting clothes across campus easy. A tabletop ironing board costs \$9.99 at Bed Bath and Beyond.

Bed Bath and Beyond sells bath towels by Wamsutta, Paramount, Bath Essentials, Cannon Classic, and many more for as low as \$4. Wal-Mart Supercenter sells \$3 bath towels by MainStays.

Colorful shower totes with drainage holes and handles cost \$9.99 at Bed Bath and Beyond. An Ultimate Luxury bath sarong costs \$16.99 and is helpful for campuses with communal showers.

Toilet paper is essential for college rooms with a personal or shared bathroom that students are in charge of maintaining, such as the ones at UIS. "Your mother isn't with you anymore," Schneider says.

SLEEPING

Jessie Toft, 18, a recent graduate of PORTA High School who will attend Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville this fall, has been shopping for supplies.

"Get bedding, as soon as possible. Mattress toppers are a must," Jessie says, noting that one store's bedding selection was depleted by the time she got there.

Find mattress pads at stores such as Wal-Mart or ShopKo for \$10 to \$50. Bed Bath and Beyond sells Laura Ashley mattress pads at \$29.99 for any size, and Comfort Supreme mattress pads with five zones of foam for \$14.99 for a twin bed.

Bed Bath and Beyond offers body-length and standard-size pillows. Wamsutta sheets cost \$9.99 for twin flat or fitted. A twin sheet set from Pure Beech costs \$19.99. A Madison twin complete bed set costs \$59.99 and includes a comforter, four-piece sheet set, two shams, and two decorative pillows. At ShopKo, twins can be \$79.99 down to \$7.99 (Cannon) or \$99.99 down to \$24.99 (Dream Style).

ELECTRONICS

Lauren and her roommate are dividing the cost of many of the electronics, such as the microwave and TV, to lessen the cost.

"I didn't want a huge bill at the end," she says. "So I've been buying things through the summer, getting things on sale."

Jessie's also taking her iHome — an alarm clock/radio with a port for an iPod (\$99.99 at Best Buy). For what a college class costs, "being late to class is not good," she says. Simpler alarm clocks can be had for as little as \$4 at Wal-Mart.

Schneider at UIS strongly advises having a laptop computer. Many professors encourage it and many campuses offer free wireless connections.

Wal-Mart sells an Acer Netbook laptop that weighs just 2.44 pounds — important if you're going to be walking around campus a lot — and has 1 GB memory and 160 GB hard drive for \$278.

Other options spotted recently:

- + An Acer Notebook laptop, 5.94 pounds, 2 GB memory, \$398.
- + HP Pavillions at Wal-Mart with 3 GB memory, 7.75 pounds, \$798.
- + A Toshiba or Dell laptop with 3 GB memory and a 250 GB hard drive, \$499.99.
- + A Dell with 2 GB memory and 160 GB hard drive, \$429.99.

Space is at a premium in the dorm. Schneider says a 27-inch television set is big enough. Best Buy sells a 26" TV by Dynex for \$299.99. An Insignia at the same size is \$329.99 but with a DVD combo.

Target sells desk lamps by Room Essentials are \$7.99, 16.5 inches tall, and come in green, blue, and pink. A general purpose four-pack of 60-watt light bulbs costs \$2.14 at Target. Bed Bath and Beyond sells \$14.99 organizer desk lamps (17 inches tall) with plastic compartment bases in different colors for paper clips, pens or sticky notes.

THINGS YOU MAY NOT THINK OF

Other items that are helpful when setting off for college include a fan for hot rooms or bug repellent. Wal-Mart has a 9-inch fan with three speeds that costs \$15. Raid ant killer costs \$3.28 a bottle.

EIU's Franks recommends buying a dorm refrigerator instead of renting one.

"It's the same amount of money to rent as it is to buy it, and you don't end up with a fridge when it's over," he said.

Target offers a half-cubic foot Chefmate fridge for \$40.58. Other fridges can be found at Wal-Mart but make sure to get a small one.

For storage, Bed Bath and Beyond sells a \$29.99 three-shelf bookcase that is sliver with black shelves; stacking cube sets with bins and cubicles; totes ranging from \$7.99 to \$12.99, and other space-saving equipment.

Jessie also is leaving room for improvisation once she gets there. She was surprised to find no mirror in her dorms and now plans on taking two.

An 18-by-24 inch standing mirror costs \$9.97 at Wal-Mart. Bed Bath and Beyond has over-the-door mirrors in assorted sizes for different prices.

The Wal-Mart on Freedom Drive in Springfield has \$4 calendars by Jackie (Hot Chocolate) with large date blocks and space for notes. Bed Bath and Beyond has a 17-month calendar and message board with a marker and planning grids by Avalanche. That way, you can plan ahead for when term papers and exams roll around.

FINALLY ...

Make sure you bring your housing application and contracts and any other paperwork you need to prove you belong in the dorm.

"If you don't, you can't live here," UIS's Schneider says.

Farah Tamizuddin is a junior at Springfield High School.

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