

# Back to School

by Karen Zhang

Karen in America



There're always lots of things to do before a semester begins. In America, as a student, I had to buy textbooks in the university bookstore. Textbooks aren't cheap! If you're a science major, you can easily spend two or three hundred dollars on textbooks. But the good thing is the university bookstore and the Internet—such as Amazon and eBay—sell used textbooks. They're sometimes half of the original prices.

You can also rent textbooks from the bookstore. At the end of the semester you must return them to the seller. Some bookstores buy back textbooks, too. But don't expect to get much money. I once got only two dollars for a literature book that cost me more than twenty dollars, including tax.

The next thing to do is to check the course schedule and location. The university website is where you can find such information. The online network becomes essential in a students' life. Many American universities will give the

undergrad freshmen new laptop computers. (Unfortunately, graduate students don't benefit from it.)

Whether you're an undergrad or graduate student, as soon as you're enrolled in a university, you'll have an online account to access the university website. With this online identity, you can register classes, borrow books from the library, receive and send emails, check scores at the end of the semester, obtain university news and resources, and even take online courses.

Thanks to the Internet, the whole academic communication thing is so efficient. After class, I corresponded with my classmates and professors through emails more often than in person.

Unlike in Chinese universities, students can choose courses as they see fit in American universities, although some courses are mandatory. With an academic advisor's approval, students can even take courses in other majors!

Here I mention an academic advisor. He or she can be any professor in your program. An advisor is significant to every student. Mine happened to be the program director, Dr. St. Germain. She's very knowledgeable about the creative writing program as well as my needs in order to complete my Master's degree. I went to her (either in person or by email) whenever I came across difficulties or questions about my studies.

Some professors will post their course syllabuses online (some will hand them out in the first class). It's wise to read the syllabus before class so you know what to prepare and how to complete the course.

Anyway, don't forget to bring your creativity and confidence to class! 