The beginning of your college studies can be an exciting time. Most students are faced with many changes and new challenges. These demands can be exhilarating but they also usually require adjustments in expectations and behaviors. We know that many new students encounter perplexing situations as they try to adjust to Cornell and that it is not always easy to understand what is going on. Therefore, we have created this description of some of the new situations you are likely to encounter, as well as a list of resources designed to help you succeed at Cornell.

**SITUATIONS YOU ARE LIKELY TO ENCOUNTER:**

**Number of credits**
Plan a manageable course load. HBHS, NS-CHE, and NS-CALS are rigorous majors with demanding class schedules and you will need to plan a manageable course load. In the first year, you will have to juggle many new expectations, interact with new students and professors, and do these things while adjusting to a new living arrangement. You will need time to develop new strategies for your academic work. Your course schedule should be set to allow you to be successful and feel in control even at the end of the term when you will face the pressures of papers and exams, and perhaps need extra sleep because you have a cold.

Most new freshmen and transfer students should take only 12-15 academic credits (not including physical education.) You will have no problem taking more credits in future semesters, so do not worry about getting behind in progress to your degree. Avoid comparing your schedule to that of your siblings, your roommate, or friends in other majors or at other universities. Your schedule must be right for you at Cornell.

Normally freshmen take both chemistry and biology, but biology may be postponed until the sophomore year. Chemistry in the first year is essential. At some point in your first year you should develop a tentative 4-year plan. This activity will help you understand college and major requirements and also show you how you can distribute your courses throughout the eight semesters. See the DNS Advising Notes in the blue pages for sample schedules for NS-CHE, NS-CALS, and HBHS majors.

**Classes**
In many courses attendance is not usually taken, but attending classes is essential to keeping up with class material, understanding the pace expected, and staying informed about assignments and exam expectations. You need to arrange your schedule and manage your time (including sleeping and waking) so that you get to classes and use class time for active learning. It is easy to fall behind (or fall asleep) in class, but if this becomes a pattern, you will put yourself at risk. You also may spend more time worrying and catching up in the long run.

Most NS-CHE, NS-CALS, and HBHS students find that class attendance is critical to success in courses and their academic goals. Avoid comparing yourself to others who appear to be doing well without going to class.
Assignments
Turning in assignments is critical. You will receive grade penalties for late and missing work. Completing all assignments well and on time can help a grade that suffers from poor exam performance.

Studying
Studying more is not necessarily the same as studying better. Work on balancing details and the "big picture." Ask instructors and teaching assistants (TAs) to help you decide what level of knowledge of the details is required to understand the big picture. Practice applying details to real life situations.

Exams
You will often be asked to apply information on exams. In some classes, it is expected that everyone has "memorized the facts." Exams in those classes will ask students to use that information to solve problems with conditions that differ from those presented in class. Often, old exams are available so students can practice this more demanding way of thinking about the material. You probably will notice that on many exams, students are asked to do original thinking, not just recognize the same material that was presented in class and in the readings.

CU "Culture"
Unfortunately, many new undergraduates feel that saying that they find a class difficult or that they feel like they are struggling is a sign of incompetence. Additionally, you may often hear the apparently nonchalant comments, "This class is a gut" (meaning that it is easy) and "Everything's fine with me." Keep in mind that many people are saying those things even though they are not true. Try not to let this cultural norm keep you from asking questions in class, at office hours, via email or in whatever way you find appropriate. There is some scientific evidence that college students who study in groups have higher GPAs than those who don't. If you would like to group study, talk to people in your classes. You will probably find like-minded people interested in creating and maintaining study groups.

Relaxing
Take time to relax. This is not the same as relaxing all the time, but if you plan relaxation and recreation into your schedule, you can often return to your studies with a sharper, more focused mind. Studies in which people are asked to solve very perplexing problems support this recommendation. In these studies, people who were stumped while trying to solve complex problems but who took a break and then returned to the problems, often solved them quickly when they returned after the break. And the total amount of time spent solving the problem was less than for people who did not take breaks. Some of the no-break people never solved the problems.

REALISTIC GOALS:
Set reasonable expectations for yourself. Getting high grades and being among the top students in a class will probably be much harder at Cornell than it was at your former school. If your plan is to achieve only "A" grades at Cornell, you probably will be disappointed and frustrated in your first year. You may find yourself studying harder than you ever have before and still earning lower grades than you expect or feel you should. Try not to be too hard on yourself. Be assured that as you gain more experience at Cornell you will learn how to study more effectively. Most students find that their grade point average improves after the first year.

Cornell offers many people and resources to help students with general academic skills and to assist with specific courses. By using these people and resources, you can actually speed up the process of developing necessary learning and studying skills. Some students who can benefit from these resources avoid them because they do not want to think of themselves as "needing assistance." Remember that the sooner you take advantage of these resources, the sooner you will benefit from them. And, if you wait until the last weeks of class to see the professor, find a tutor, or go to the Learning Strategies Center, it may be too late to gain much benefit.
RESOURCES TO Assist STUDENTS:

Course instructors
Learn to interact with the professors, instructors, and teaching assistants in your classes. If you do not understand class material or assignments, the instructors need to know. Unless you speak up, they will assume that you understand everything. These teachers usually are happy to assist students who are working hard but having trouble. See them early in the term when they can be most helpful to you.

If you do poorly on the first assignment or exam, contact your instructors to find sources of help. You probably need some new strategies for working with the course material. You may be tempted to try to figure it out yourself by planning to study longer or better for the next exam, but often this approach does not work as well as one hopes — and then it is very late to improve the situation. If you perform poorly on an exam or assignment and do not contact them, they may assume that you are disinterested and not trying.

Faculty advisor
Build a strong relationship with your faculty advisor and work closely with him/her throughout your program. Make appointments to discuss your plans, and be "up front" with your advisor about issues that concern you. See this person if you are having trouble with your classes or course load.

College counselors
Professional counselors in the College of Human Ecology (170 MVR) and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (140 Roberts) are available to help students with any concerns or issues that students have.

Center for Teaching Excellence (420 CCC, 255-3990) (http://www.cte.cornell.edu/)
The CTE offers academic support to Cornell students in all colleges. Their services include supplemental instruction for major introductory courses, tutorial assistance and workshops.

Supplemental courses: Students can enroll in the "1000" courses that support courses in which they are enrolled, e.g. Chem 1007 assists students with Chem 2070. Courses in Biology, Mathematics, Physics, Economics, and Statistics are also offered. These supplemental courses clarify lecture material, help students keep pace with lectures, and assist students with exam preparation.

Tutorial assistance: Free walk-in tutorials are offered for many courses. Check the web for schedules.

Workshops: Group and individual assistance is offered in Time Management, Textbook Mastery, Rapid Reading, Learning from Lecture, Exam Preparation and Strategies. Call the LSC office for schedules.

Study Skills Course: HE 1000 Critical Reading and Thinking is a 2 credit course to help students increase reading, thinking and learning skills. For further information, please call the LSC office.

Writing Workshop (http://www.arts.cornell.edu/knight_institute/walkin/walkin.htm)
The Writing Workshop offers courses for credit as well as a Walk-In Service to assist Cornell students from all colleges. Walk-In tutors at three campus locations help students with particular pieces of writing including academic papers at any stage of development. The focus is on improving the substance and quality of the writing by helping the writer with issues of self-confidence, active use of the imagination, and critical thinking. Tutors do not proofread or edit.