

College corner: preparing for dorm

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Congratulations! You're going to college! The good news is that the stress is over. The great news is that it's time to start the best part of the college process—shopping for your dorm room.

We're in tough economic times, but you can actually use this to your advantage. Many businesses are closing down (Bed Bath and Beyond is one example) and are holding huge closeout sales to get rid of inventory. Shop around for bargains on towels and sheets, as many expensive name brands can be found drastically marked down at stores like Marshall's or Tuesday Morning. Also, be sure to check out Ikea — they have great deals on things like furniture, pillows, and kitchenware. Yes, kitchenware—it's a good idea to bring a plate, cup, and a set of silverware in case you want to cook something in your dorm or kitchen area.

Once your college sends you your roommate application form, be sure to get it in as soon as possible so you can get in touch with your roommate. Coordinate to make sure that you don't bring multiples of the same item—no dorm needs two DVD players or TVs. Check to see if your college rents out microwaves and mini-fridges or if those are items that you need to bring on your own. Also, look on your school's website for a list of items that aren't allowed in the dorms, like hotplates or electric teapots. Think about organization and look for storage containers that can save space. Look for containers that fit under beds and hampers with mesh bags that can be easily transported to the laundry room.

For those flying to school, consider purchasing most of your dorm room needs in the city where your school is located. It's often cheaper to purchase stuff (especially larger items like TVs) at the site of your college rather than shipping it from home. If family or friends ask you what you want for graduation, consolidate credit by asking for gift cards from the same store, like Target or Wal-mart.

In tiny dorm rooms, blank white walls can be awfully depressing. Invest in some good wall-coverings such as posters and tapestries. A corkboard, which can be covered with pictures from home and important reminders at school, is also a great thing to bring. If you're going to a small town, consider looking for good posters here in Portland and packing it in your suitcase, as these won't take up too much weight or space. We recommend taking a trip to Saturday Market for some good wall hangings and posters.

The most important thing is to try and

create a cohesive environment with your roommate. Contact him or her through email or talk to them on the phone to make sure that they're not completely repulsed by or allergic to what you're bringing. Enjoy the next four months of shopping and preparing for college!