



Six of the Best

Publish Date:

December 2018

Being a conservative or libertarian at uni can be tough these days, so here are six rules for making the most of student life, from the IPA's National Manager of Generation Liberty, Renee Gorman.

As a campus coordinator for the IPA at the University of Sydney, one of the most common questions I was asked is what advice I would give other students that are conservative, libertarian or classical liberals.

To be honest when I first arrived on campus to begin my postgraduate degree, I was surprised at the prevalence of leftwing dogma. I completed my undergraduate degree at a regional university and even though it was dominated by the left, my time there was reasonably apolitical.

The University of Sydney was completely different. For a while, I struggled, fumbled and stumbled around blindly while I tried to formulate some kind of defence.



However, with a little bit of luck, perseverance and a hefty dose of stubbornness, I managed to find my voice.

As I come to the end of my degree this semester and look back at my time at university I have come up with a set of six rules which I have tried my best to follow and wish I had when I started my university journey some three years ago.

These rules are inspired by the work of the great Dr Jordan Peterson and his book *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*.

I was lucky enough to speak with Peterson directly while he was in Sydney in March, and he inspired the final rule in this series.

RULE 1: TELL THE TRUTH

This is one of Jordan Peterson's rules and I would advise reading the entire chapter, as it is full of wisdom. I feel this commandment has particular significance for students.

Tell the truth, write what you actually think in essays, say what you believe in tutorials, and be open with your peers. This is going to be harder than it sounds, as you are going to come across staff and students who will attempt to shame you for your beliefs.

Remember at the end of the day why you are there: to learn. How will you learn, test your ideas, and develop your intellect if you never voice what you are actually thinking?

Many people who are older and wiser disagree with me on this. Ben Shapiro (a prominent American conservative political commentator, writer, and lawyer) regularly gives speeches on college campuses in the States, and notably tells his followers to write whatever is needed to get the best marks.

Although I understand and sympathise with this argument, I cannot agree. Every time you knowingly do something wrong you make the world a slightly worse place.

Tell the truth, write what you think, say what you believe and be open with your peers

Never assume you are alone. You have no idea how many other students may be thinking something similar or are sitting on the fence and being swayed by your opinion. I met my best friend on my third day of my master's degree when she approached me after class and expressed how relieved she was to meet another libertarian in the course.

If you don't speak the truth and voice your opinion you may possibly receive higher marks, although with a few minor exceptions I generally have found this not to be the case— but at the same time you are denying yourself the opportunity to learn, make friends, and influence others around you.

RULE 2: READ, LISTEN AND ENGAGE



I know most young people are constantly told they should read more, but it's worth saying again: read great books, foundational books, history, philosophy, and great works of fiction. But if you intend voicing your opinion and debating your opponent, I would recommend more than reading, and that is, to listen.

Listen to great speeches and speakers. Listen to debates and intellectual discourse. I have found this has helped me immensely. Watching debating, especially as a spectator sport, allows you to eventually mimic the moves of those who have refined the art.

To take it a step further, practice debating. If you disagree with your tutor, let them know. Seize every opportunity to engage, debate and even change your mind on an issue. See it as practice.

This, combined with reading, courage and a little bit of time will lead you to a point when you are able, as Oscar Wilde once said, to "play gracefully with ideas".

The university system may already be infected with postmodernist, cultural Marxist nonsense, especially in the humanities. But don't let that stop you from educating yourself and using the university space as a place to flex and strengthen your debating skills.

RULE 3: BUILD A SUPPORT NETWORK

It is no secret it can get a little wearing being a conservative or libertarian student on campus, so build a network of like-minded individuals around you so you can vent, swap stories and support each other.

This can happen through happy circumstance when you clearly convey your ideas in class, but the easiest way to do this is to join clubs on campus. Conservative clubs, libertarian clubs, freedom clubs, and, of course, Generation Liberty.

In addition, reach out for advice from older, more seasoned individuals on campus. They are generally more than willing to help and provide advice and guidance.

RULE 4: BE LOYAL AND COURAGEOUS

Ensure your support network remains strong by being loyal to those within it. Stand by them when things get difficult, and never forget the favours and help others have provided you. Loyalty is a virtue that is distinctively lacking on the left and in collectivist ideology as a whole, so make sure it is not lacking in your clubs, groups and indeed in your life.

However, don't be afraid to stand alone. Courageous acts will inspire those around you and provide you with a deep sense of meaning.

Remember nothing worth doing is easy, so don't shy away from topics or events due to fear.

RULE 5: LOVE THE FIGHT, BE A HAPPY WARRIOR



I know more than anyone the tiring nature of always having your views singled out by the tutor, always having to struggle for your club or event to have a space on campus. But I urge you to enjoy the struggle.

Smile to yourself when they use weak arguments or spout virtue-signally buzzwords, because you know how to dismantle them.

See every attempt to silence you as an opportunity to prove your resolve and strengthen your arguments.

And laugh, please laugh. That small but very loud minority of ridiculous radical students that turns up to protest events and pull down posters, along with the administration that assists them, so want to be taken seriously—so I urge you not to. It infuriates them and is the correct response to such childish behaviour. Mock, giggle and gleefully point out their absurdity.

I also think it is good advice overall not to take yourself too seriously; you are at university to learn, but also to have fun. These are the formative years of your life, so enjoy them. Don't let a bunch of bitter humourless academics and activists stop you from making the most of your time on campus.

Embrace the rebellion, be mischievous and fun loving.

We are the new counter-culture, so wear your colours with pride and find satisfaction in being contrarian ... and maybe even a little bit provocative.

RULE 6: DON'T MAKE UNNECESSARY ENEMIES

This final piece of advice comes from Jordan Peterson, the great man himself. In March this year, I attended his talk in Sydney and at the point of Q&A I dashed to the microphone eager to get his views on the recently unveiled “unlearn” program at the University of Sydney.

I explained to him what parts of the campaign particularly worried me, and asked for his advice on what to do next. He asked a few follow-up questions and then stared at me while thinking for a moment that felt like an eternity, and said, “You seem like someone who is honest and well-spoken so keep going, but don't make unnecessary enemies”.

This is an excellent piece of advice, so love the fight—but make sure you don't become vitriolic. Don't take pleasure from the denigration of others, and fight for the truth— not just to win the argument.

Treat your peers kindly, even if they won't return the favour. Rise above the petty behaviour of the authoritarian left, because you are better than that.

As a side note, after the event as I passed over my stuffed toy Kermit and book for Jordan Peterson to sign, I told him I am not sure I had followed this advice, as during the annual socialist conference on campus that year I held an event called ‘The Dangers of Socialism’. He laughed



and replied, “I said unnecessary enemies.”

Renee Gorman was appointed as National Manager of Generation Liberty in October 2018.

As part of the Generation Liberty program, Renee manages a network of more than a dozen campus coordinators—who are all full-time students—at universities across the nation, acquainting students with the foundational ideas of freedom.