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For College Students, Overpacking is in the Eye of the Beholder

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. - Packing for college? Don't forget the Santa Claus suit. At least, that's the advice that one Illinois Wesleyan University student would offer anyone who is heading off to college for the first time in coming weeks.

Randy Krepel, a sophomore, remembers taking everyone's advice on what he'd need in his dormitory room. He brought a crate of file folders to organize schoolwork and other important papers. The folders were untouched. But Krepel and his friends did enjoy his Santa costume when he wore it to distribute Christmas gifts at the end of the fall semester.



The moral to that story? According to students and Illinois Wesleyan student affairs personnel, you can consult those generic packing checklists provided by commercial outlets and Web sites, but packing successfully requires evaluating your own interests and priorities and paying attention to the rules that individual colleges post about what is and is not allowed.

According to the National Retail Federation, the back-to-school season is second only to the holidays in retail revenue. Last year, college students and their parents spent approximately \$25.7 billion on dorm and school supplies, with the average college freshman planning to spend just more than \$1,200. Stores like Bed Bath & Beyond cater to college students, marketing tapestries and paper shredders as dorm room essentials.

However, Sarah Zeller, a junior at Illinois Wesleyan University, reminds students to review their school's residence hall regulations before shopping. Although stores often recommend toasters and hot plates to college students, such appliances are prohibited in residence hall rooms at Illinois Wesleyan and on many other campuses.

According to Illinois Wesleyan's Office of Residential Life Web site, another way to streamline packing is by communicating with future roommates before moving to campus in order to avoid duplicating appliances and large, "space-stealing items." Krepel and his roommate had to sacrifice a corner of their room to store a spare vacuum cleaner, because they each brought one.

Roommate interaction also ensures that both students have a say in the arrangement and decoration of the space that will be their shared home for the year. "The most critical thing roommates can do to set themselves up for success is to arrange a time to meet on campus," said Matt Damschroder, Illinois Wesleyan's director of residential life.

"This allows them both to have equal ownership of the room."

Students must decide how to make room in their new environments for the possessions that they determine to be most important. To some extent, it is a process of trial and error. Many upperclassmen admit to bringing too much to school their first year.

However, the items that make the cut to sophomore year, from stuffed animals to original artwork, are as varied as the students themselves.

For instance, Elizabeth Stith, a sophomore, did not use her iron or her computer printer, but she was glad to have a small light to hang in her dark closet.

Zeller, also a victim of overpacking in her first year, found that her large set of plastic bowls and utensils took up space and accumulated dust. More important, in Zeller's opinion, were the posters and photographs that added color and personality to her room.

Students concerned about bringing too much to school might do well to note the example set by international students. According to Jennifer White-Reding, director of Illinois Wesleyan's International Office, students coming from abroad generally pack no more than their airline allows them to check.

White-Reding encourages international students to pack light, focusing on essentials, personal articles, and reminders of home. A shopping trip to local stores, where students can purchase general items like linens, coats and school supplies, is incorporated into the international student orientation.

According to Krepel, students may simplify their early days at school by packing just what they need for the first few weeks and purchasing low-priority items locally as the need for them arises. This prevents over-shopping and ensures a place in the room for the student's most important possessions.