

How To Be a Tommie

What can I tell you? To become a true Tommie, you have to kiss someone at midnight under the arches of the beautiful campus of University of Saint Thomas, Saint Paul, Minnesota. If you are reading this, you are very likely a student of the Faculty of Education at the Charles University who just got a scholarship and that means you are not that far away to become a true Tommie! If you want this to happen fast, I humbly advise you to read this modest guide from your fellow classmate. Learn from my mistakes and master the art of becoming a true American college student. Run, run towards that silhouette standing below the light of the lantern and kiss!

Alright, now come back. Sit down with this guide for a minute and read through it. I would like to provide you with information that I myself didn't have. I promise that with these few papers you are guaranteed to have a better experience of studying at the University of Saint Thomas than I have had so far. And I also promise that I will try to make this guide as much fun as I can.

So unless you have anything to say – oh, you don't? brilliant – we can move on to the first step.

Your First Days

I am sorry I can't help you with all that hassle you will have at home when getting ready for the year abroad. But they told me to keep this short, oh, my dear classmate, so let's skip to the part when you have safely arrived to UST, Saint Paul, Minnesota[1]. Presumably you are now sitting in your room which is very likely situated either in Flynn or Morisson Hall. You should call yourself lucky because you do have one of the best lodging of all the students here.

Before you start reading this, go find the air conditioning control. You are probably the first resident of this apartment and that means the fans are on. Minnesota in summer is great, but if you forget about this, you will smile with happiness and chatter your teeth at the same time because your bedroom at night will be too cold! When I got in, I forgot all about the air-conditioning and I had no bedsheets. I covered myself with my jacket and wished that I wouldn't freeze to death before I could enjoy my year of awesomeness. Make sure you don't make the same mistake. There will be plenty time to freeze to death in winter.

Good. I will try to make this as short as possible. You should remember one thing for now. The Office of International Student Services is located in the Murray-Herrick Hall. They will provide you with all the information you need to know. How to get a student ID, how to pick your classes (if you haven't done this already), they will give you an orientation and trust me, that is a good thing to go to. You might also have to pass the language proficiency test if you don't have the TOEFL certificate. I have done that and it's boring and you have to wake up early in the morning.

Speaking of language proficiency, what do you say we combine pleasure with practice in the next chapter?

The Comfortable Campus

Isn't it amazing? The campus is nothing like the Charles University, right? Let me tell you as much about the comfort of _____ (live) on campus and while I _____ (do) this, you can fill the correct words in the gaps so that you get some practice before the test.

You have already _____ (pass) under the arches. This is the place to become a true Tommie. The campus _____ (contain) of residential halls, a gym, cafeteria, lecture halls and classes, offices of all kinds. But there is more! You _____ (find – future tense) even a post office! The commuter center is great for _____ (take) naps between classes. There is a box office, a wellness center where you can borrow equipment for the gym or even a bike, there is a buffet called Scooters, a library (a big one!) a café, a musical center, a football field, a swimming pool, two grocery shops, a barbershop, a health center, a chapel... please, feel free to start _____ (jump) around the room and clap your hands with happiness. Not only you have made it through this little exercise, you now also know that the comfort of the University of Saint Thomas is incredible!

The Triumvirate

Now that you are in a good mood, let me get over with the not-so-pleasant part of this deal. The actual education. A common saying around the UST campus is: there are three things you can choose from, but only do two at a time: studying, partying and sleeping. What's your choice?

- a) study and sleep
- b) party and study
- c) party and sleep

d) I want to go home

Don't cross the fourth option. Actually, for now, don't cross any of these options and let me talk in detail about each of those sections.

Study

I bet you feel really confident, my dear classmate. I bet you are a smart kid. Well, get that smirk off of your face. This is going to be tough. You need to forget all about those people telling you that American college education is much easier than Czech one. This is not true. In fact, in many ways, you are likely to have a hard time studying here. Well of course – implying that you decide to study instead of party or sleep.

Why does everyone say that American college education is less elaborate than Czech (or European one)? Because no one back home understands the way the job's done here! At UST, no one will ever force you to remember all the phonemes of Old English. And come on, we both know this is exactly what would happen back home. At UST, they will force you to think about Old English. They will force you to be creative! By God, they will make you do homework, my friend, every. single. day! And I am talking big homework! You don't want me to tell you how much more homework I will have to do after I am finished with this paper (and it's so late, oh, I am so tired, my friend!).

I assume that since you are reading this, you probably also are an English major. This means that you will pick English classes and thus your assignments may vary between: written reflections on academic essays and articles, reflections on books and whatever you have been doing during classes, your own essays (there will be a lot of them), practice excersises, textbook notes, presentations, reading books. Usually you will be asked to read one book per week, do one or two reflections, spew out one or two essays within two weeks. So far I haven't had many problems with essay writing, therefore I believe you will be just fine with your language skills. American essays are written in a more straightforward manner, you simply open with an introduction and the thesis and finish with a conclusion. If you are not sure as to what this should look like, go ahead and scan through these papers again, see if you can find my thesis and my conclusion. Because yes, this actually is supposed to be an essay. And yes, as I said before: learn from my mistakes.

American essay structure reminds me of another plus of this school – everything is very well organized. You will know all about your assignments from the syllabi which are elaborated and usually you can count on the semester plan provided there. So as I said, I am writing this paper late at night and it's nobody's fault but mine. Ah, I miss being able to accuse the university administration of confusing me!

All in all, an American college like UST might not fill your brain with concepts, philosophies or explorations that you hardly understand. But they will want you to be able to use everything that you have learnt in praxis. That's why you will be asked to do so much homework and to be so creative. Unlike Czech colleges, where you are often asked to stuff your head with unnecessary information, here you will be provided with just the right amount, but also expected to develop it. To build on it. You still think this is easier? Well, my friend, go ahead and slap yourself now, so that you don't get slapped by all that work.

Fellow comrade of education! Don't let yourself feel discouraged! Should you feel sad, go to the lobby and get some Skittles from the vending machine (yes, yes, I was also very happy when I found out you can buy them here), look out of the window and enjoy the beautiful, soothing view on the football field and the Cretin or Selby Avenue [\[2\]](#). After that, let me tell you something about your free time.

Party

The worst part is behind us! I like to believe. It depends on you, mostly, and your priorities. I have to say I am not a huge fan of parties, so I might have purposely deceived you by calling this chapter *Party* when there wont be more than two sentences about it. But I do promise, my dear friend, that I will try my best to tell you all I know about your free time here – your possibilities as well as your limitations.

If you have started reading this guide right on the day of your arrival (for that I respect your discipline!), it's probably still August. School doesn't start until the beginning of September and thus there are not many parties yet. Yet. This gets better during October. Tommies celebrate the so called Homecoming: "The alumni come back to UST and there is a football game!"

Okay, well, for you that means you can go and get a free sweatshirt and feel like a Tommie [\[3\]](#) and it also means the time has come for the big Homecoming Dance. Go ahead and look for an assisstant for your becoming a Tommie assignment. Just one week after that you will celebrate Halloween – it is wise to plan out these days in advance, you want to know who to party with as there will be so many events and you can't miss out on it because you were indecisive (your ability to decide got you in the USA in the first place, my dear friend).

There will be other great parties and the best way to keep track of them is to, of course, make friends. Or you can become a fan of say the STAR club on Facebook.com. This association takes care of the biggest events at UST.

If you are not a fan of parties, go ahead and borrow a bike and take a ride from Saint Paul to Minneapolis for instance. It takes only about forty-five minutes to get there and you get to ride along Mississippi. This is a really beautiful thing to do – at least if you consider yourself a romantic. Do not hesitate to go out on a bike while it is still hot outside. I hesitated and now I wish I could do this trip to the city again but it's too cold already. While you are in Minneapolis, make sure to check out the Target Arena and all the museums and the First Avenue – if you are a fan of live music. And if you are a fan of live music, or sports, or museums but not a fan of bicycles, get on the St. Thomas shuttle! It takes about fifteen minutes to get from one city to the other and you can get a ride for times in an hour.

Saint Paul, however, is also definitely worth seeing! If you haven't had a chance to see the downtown just yet, make sure to have a walk on the Grand Avenue. The theatre is here, the bank (sets up accounts for free and adds 45\$ bonus for UST students!), barbershops, a bicycleshop, a teagarden etc. On Selby Avenue you will find a very nice pub called the Blue Door. The prices are just fine and they have European beer as well. But don't expect Plzeň or Gambrinus.

If you like nature, I suppose you are in the right place! Go see the lakes!

All in all, my fellow classmate, please make sure you will go and do something. This school is not an easy pass. You might get stressed – many times, mind you. And all the comfort you will be given does have its limitations. Sometimes you can feel imprisoned. You get out of class, you see boys and girls doing their homework. You walk through the campus, if it's a hot day (there won't be many of them), there will be students doing their homework. You get to the lobby of your residence hall, there might be someone playing the piano, someone gazing dreamily into the fireplace, most likely there are people doing their homework. You rush up the stairs to your apartment, your roommates are doing their homework. You go to your room and want to throw your head on the pillow, instead, you go and do your homework. You will never escape this unless you try! So go, go and do things! Because the workload can be dealt with, but not the boredom that comes with the integration and every single day spent on campus! And don't you forget – no matter how many UST shirts, sweatpants, waterbottles, keychains or towels you will get, you are not a true Tommie unless you kiss under the arches!

Sleep

Sleep. Please, my dearest classmate. At least once in a while. It's a bliss. I can't tell you how much I miss my bed everytime I spend a night like this doing my homework. So sleep. After that? Study and party!

Congratulations!

You have made it through!

I honestly wish you the best two semesters of your life. They might be a little busier than you had thought, but the experience (and you will have a lot of it, I guarantee you that) will be worth all those lost evenings in the library or anywhere at the campus just procrastinating. You might get bored with the food (I can't tell you how much I hate it after two months. I should've bought more food I could cook myself), you might be missing Czech pubs and our lazy studying style, but at the same time, if you have read this carefully, I bet that you have already enough courage and inspiration to make this the best experience of your studying life. And even if you don't feel like a Tommie because all those presents just don't make you proud enough to be one, go and kiss someone under the arches – just for the fun of it. Just so you know what it is like to be an American College student who loves being young and happy. Because face it, my dear classmate, on this day you are very likely the happiest Czech in the state of Minnesota.

[1] 3115 Summit Avenue, Saint Paul, MN. Zip: 55105. It's a city within a city. Can't miss it. Also, if you paid more than \$18 for the airport shuttle, they ripped you off!

[2] if your window is facing the patio or is in the first floor and the only thing you can see is the heaps of parked student bicycles, please disregard this and proceed to the next chapter.

[3]

do not forget you still need to find someone to kiss!