

BALANCING STUDENT LIFE AND ACADEMICS

Seven Tips for Success Inside and Outside the Classroom

By Andy Masters

A college career can be one of the best times of people's lives. It can also be one of the most challenging. Serving on event programming boards, athletic teams, Greek organizations, and other extra-curricular activities can be stressful, and sometimes overwhelming. Below are several keys to be sure you get the most out of your college career, helping prove that you can lead by example both inside and outside the classroom.

1. Control Your Schedule; Don't Let Your Schedule Control You

Organization and time management skills are two of the most valuable skills you will ever have. One of the first things you should do at the beginning of each semester is organize the dates of all class tests and project deadlines from each syllabus, and all required meetings and events from each organization. All obligations should then be logged into a centralized schedule you keep at all times, such as a daily planner, Microsoft Outlook, or iPhone application. For the next 4 months, you now know exactly what you must schedule the rest of your life around.

Next, it is highly recommended for you to set a schedule for yourself in writing to include all other items you want to create as a routine. Most importantly, this should include times of study, such as every Tuesday and Thursday from 3:30 – 6:30. Physically block off these time periods every Tuesday and Thursday for the rest of the semester. Of course, the most important part of creating a schedule is *sticking to it!* So, be disciplined enough to schedule any other activities that are less important around those that are most important.

2. Ask For Help When You Need It

Whether it involves academics or organizational responsibilities, everyone comes to a point where they feel overwhelmed. This is what friends, fellow members, and other university resources are there for. Unfortunately, there are several reasons why people don't seek help when it is available. Some people try to take on too much, trying to prove to themselves that "I can do this all on my own." Some may not want to admit to people that they "can't handle everything." Others may feel they must do everything all on their own, because only then will they know it will get done right and on time (an early signal of being a *control freak*). However, delegation is a learned skill, and (when used properly) can actually aid in tasks being completed quicker, with less mistakes, and less stress.

Academically, seek out help when you don't understand something. There should be plenty of resources available, from writing centers, to computer labs, to graduate assistants, to your professors who offer office hours. There are also other students who may understand that subject better, or who have even taken the course before. Especially in

very large classes, some students may be intimidated to ask for help. But, the sole purpose of the institution and all of these resources is to *help you learn*. So use them. Ask for rope to be thrown down *before* you drown!

3. Keep A Firm Grasp On Your Priorities

Understanding what your PRIORITIES are each and every day is one of the biggest keys to college success. It is also one of the easiest concepts to lose track of. It is a fast-paced world, where it is easy to become sidetracked with social activities, TV shows, video games, etc. Some people carry a card in their wallet, or even a post a card on their PC, where they list the top 1-5 priorities in their life. The card says “Is what I am doing RIGHT NOW with my time directly contributing to one of my top priorities in life?” If the answer is “No,” then that serves as a good reminder that you could be doing something more important.

Everyone has exactly 24 hours each day. People who achieve more in life simply make better use of their 24 hours each day than everyone else. What you do with each of your 24 hours has as much to do with your success during college as any other factor. There is an old saying that “if it important enough to you, you make time for it.” Be sure that *nobody* is in charge of your time except for you. It is one of the most valuable assets you have.

4. Don’t Wait Until the End of Your College Career to Stop Procrastinating (Get It?)

Whether it is an event or a semester project that is two months away, ask yourself each day “What can be done now instead of later?” Write down when you are going to do something, not simply when something is due. Set deadlines for yourself, and put them in writing. Then stick to it. Most people procrastinate because the activity they are supposed to do is not as desirable as what they would rather be doing. However, if you complete tasks early, you can enjoy your leisure time *worry-free*. This is one of the biggest ways to alleviate stress.

If it is the 3rd day of the month, and there is a project due on the 28th of the month, most students hardly have that project on the radar screen yet. Then, they see the project creep up on their calendar on the 24th or 25th, and they say “Uh-oh!” Further, they realize there is an event planned on the 26th, and they have to work at their part-time job on the 27th! This lack of planning is what leads to either missed deadlines, or turning a project in on time, but with poor quality. In addition to poor quality, it also led to undue stress for 4 days. One easy way to tackle projects ahead of time is to break the project down into several smaller ones. For example, instead of writing a 10-page paper in one night, write 1-page per day for 10 days, or 1-page every other day. This will save time, increase quality, and decrease stress.

5. Go to Class

That’s right. Skipping class is one of the most dangerous, yet tempting habits on college campuses today. Sure, you might be able to miss a class here and there—perhaps even

miss a lot of classes—and still pass if you cram hard enough. However, don't make things hard on yourself, make things easy. The *more* you attend class, the *less* you have to study, and the *more* time you have for the everything else you want or need to do. Professors also have a way of telling you what will be on the test, and explaining the answers in class—but you are only privy to that if you are actually *in class*.

Try to get in the habit of forcing yourself to sit in the FRONT of the class, especially in large classes. Studies show that students retain more information, and pay more attention, even if they don't realize it. It also helps keep you awake. That usually allows you to take better notes, as well. And make sure the professor knows your name!

6. Find a Mentor or Example of a Great Student Lifer in your Organization

Almost every organization has one or more students who are shining examples of the balance between extra-curricular activities and academics. They make the Dean's List every semester, hold an important office in the organization, work part-time, and even have a girlfriend or boyfriend. Everyone seems to ask "How do they do it?"

So, are they smarter than you? In most cases, ABSOLUTELY NOT! There have been literally millions of college students that were "smart enough" to graduate, but who failed in the areas of time management, priorities, and responsibilities. So, understand the habits of those who are successful at balancing college life and academics. Ask them what their secrets are, and they will surely be willing to help. Follow the habits of those who are succeeding, not the ones who struggle. Makes sense, doesn't it?

7. Have Fun!

Ok, so most college students don't need help with this tip, right? However, enjoy it while you can--you are only in college once! Many Americans recall their college days as the best time of their life. Believe it or not, professors, administrators, and us college speakers want you to enjoy every minute if it! Making efficient use of your time and controlling your schedule are important ingredients in being able to enjoy yourself. They allow you to alleviate stress and succeed both inside and outside the classroom, so you *can* have a BLAST during your college career. Good luck!

Andy Masters has presented hundreds of college success, leadership, and career preparation programs across North America. He earned an M.A.-Human Resources Development and M.A.-Marketing from Webster University, and is author of the books *Life After College: What to Expect and How to Succeed in Your Career* and *37 Keys to College Success: Balancing Student Life and Academics*. Andy earned "Greek Man of the Year" honors while serving as SGA President at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. To check speaking availability, call (314)368-2250, email andy@highschool2college.com, or visit: www.andy-masters.com.