**Top 12 Time-Management Tips**

**How to balance your college course load and homework (and still have a life)**

By Lynn F. Jacobs and Jeremy S. Hyman

College is like juggling. Five balls in the air that you're trying to not let drop. Between going to class, doing the homework, taking the tests, perhaps holding down a job, raising a family—well, how's a mere mortal supposed to do all this stuff? It boils down to managing your time. But how are you supposed to do *that*? Here are our top 12 tips for managing your overcrowded schedule:

**1. Block your courses.** Many students think that they'll learn better if they scatter their courses throughout the day, with frequent off-hours. Wrong. If you take your courses back to back as much as possible, you'll have larger blocks of time to devote to concerted bouts of studying. Usually, if you have a gap of 50 minutes between classes, it's much more likely to end up as Twitter or Facebook time rather than study time. And if you can group your classes on only two or three days, it will free whole days for studying.

**2. Make a plan.** It's never too early to start figuring out how you'll do all the work in each of your five classes. In fact, the very first day of classes is the right time. Enter all the assignments—including weekly assignments, quizzes, and exercises or short papers—into your electronic or print calendar. Then develop a plan for both your run-of-the-mill weekly studying and the mondo research paper or killer final.

*Rule of Thumb:* 1 hour of lecture time = 2 hours of study time. Plan accordingly.

**3. Aim to make all the classes.** Going to classes is one of the most time-efficient things you can do. When you miss class, it takes much more time to learn the material you missed than it would have taken if you went to class in the first place. And you never learn it as well. Who could, getting notes from that guy who writes illegibly?

**4. Determine whether you're an owl or a rooster.** Schedule your studying for times when you can seriously engage with the work. This can be very different, depending on your biochronology. Some students find 11 p.m. the perfect time to focus, others 7 a.m. Just because your roommate or partner studies at a particular time doesn't mean it will work for you.

*Extra Pointer.* Be sure to schedule time for sleep. Whether you study in the depths of night or at the crack of dawn, you'll need seven or eight hours of sleep. What good is it managing your waking time if you're so wasted that you can't concentrate on what you're doing?

**5. Keep a log.** Especially at the beginning of the semester, you should track how long it takes you to do the homework in each of your classes, prepare for quizzes and tests, and write short papers. Knowing this can help you plan the time frame for future course assignments. Also, writing it down will prevent you from overestimating how long you're really studying (at least if you're recording honestly).

*4-Star Tip.* Adjust your study plan dynamically as the semester progresses. Typically, you'll find that some courses get harder as they go, that some projects take longer than you planned, and that the workload is divided unevenly over the semester in some courses. The more flexible and open-minded you are about time management, the more successfully you will do it.

**6.** **Do your homework on time.** Even though there's no parent or teacher to stand over you, be sure you're doing the outside-of-class work when it's assigned. Doing the reading *in advance* of the lecture, studying for each quiz as it comes along, and memorizing what needs to be memorized on a week-by-week basis are all strategies that will increase your efficiency and cut down on overall study time. Sure, it's tempting to blow off the homework when there's no test looming or when the prof doesn't bother to call on anyone in class. But the fun will quickly diminish when you have 500 pages of reading to catch up on two days before the test.

**7. Balance** **your courses.** Every professor thinks his or her course is the most important activity in the universe. Learn to *triage* your courses—that is, to spend different amounts of time on each course, depending on how important or difficult that course is. Do not spend all your time on the course you find most enjoyable or easiest to do. And if you find you're spending every waking hour on one of your courses, cut back. Keep in mind that you've signed up for four or five courses, each of which will count for 25 or 20 percent of your grade.

**8. Learn to focus.** You're used to getting your content in 140-character units, in 20-second bursts, or with lots of video to go with it. But college is not Twitter, YouTube, or Hulu. In college, whether in the lecture, the reading, or the problem sets, sustained attention is needed. Learn to focus—without breaks and without additional stimulation—for 15- to 20-minute units. We know it's hard to reprogram your brain. But doing so will prevent your having to start focusing again—and overcoming your resistance—50 times an hour.

**9. Plan to do each task once.** It's very time-inefficient to do things twice. Some students think they'll learn better by copying their notes over (more neatly this time) or listening to the same lecture twice (once in person, once on their mp3 player), or doing the reading three times (once to get the general idea, once to focus on the plot and characters, and once to take notes). Fuggetaboutit. All these are incredible time-wasters. And it's not likely that you'll be able to focus or understand better the second time. Advice? Do it once, and do it right.

**10. Divide and conquer.** Break up larger projects, such as research papers, field studies, and cumulative finals, into manageable chunks. And spread the stages over a reasonable number of days. Always add some extra time above what you think you need, because usually there's a major crunch or crisis toward the end. It's better to have a little extra time than to find yourself running around like a madman when your computer crashes at 4 o'clock the morning before a paper is due.

**11. Don't take 10-day holidays.** Some students think it's their God-given right to take off a few days before Thanksgiving holidays and spring break—and a few days after. Instead, consider it your religious duty to tote your textbooks to Cancun and consult them while bonging your beer.

**12. Tell** **them where to go.** During periods of peak work—midterms, seminar presentations, and exam times, for instance—shed commitments that are not absolutely necessary. Tell your parents you can't worry about their Christmas plans; tell your frat head that you can't be bothered with his community service project; tell your boss you need a much-reduced work schedule; and tell your minister (gasp) that someone else needs to help with the reception after church. There are only 168 hours in a week, and you'll be managing your time a whole lot better if you devote yourself exclusively to schoolwork. At least a few weeks a semester.

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