

COLLEGE PREPARATION CHECKLIST

You may have heard the saying “If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.” Never is this more true than when it comes to college. The time you invest in preparing for classes can pay huge dividends in terms of your ability to succeed. We’ve gathered some wise advice from students and educators to help you prepare for success and hit the ground running once classes start.

□ FIND YOUR MOTIVATION

If you don’t have a “why” for pursuing education, you will find it easy to become discouraged when things get tough. Knowing what it is that drives you can serve as a consistent reminder to keep your eye on the prize. Ask yourself the “W” questions:

- Who am I doing this for?
- What do I want to get out of my college education?
- When do I want to complete my degree?
- Where will I be able to go once I achieve my goals?
- WHY? Why is this important to me? Why now? Why will I succeed?

Once you know your motivation, make your own mission statement. Keep it in a place where you can see it often or refer back to it when you get discouraged or overwhelmed. Let it remind you of your “why.”

□ MAKE AN ACADEMIC PLAN

You wouldn’t take a road trip without a map; don’t go through college without a plan!

- Get a complete list of what classes are needed to complete your degree
- Look as far ahead as possible to determine when each of these classes are offered
- Map out a class schedule for each term keeping in mind whether you want to be enrolled part-time or full-time, and how long you want to be in school
- Meet with your academic advisor to review the plan and get started. Continue to meet with your advisor on a regular basis to review any changes to the plan.

□ PREPARE FINANCIALLY FOR COLLEGE

While some form of federal financial aid is available to any student who completes a FAFSA, your financial aid may not be enough to cover the costs of college. It’s important to consider often overlooked fees like labs, technology, or student activities, or you may underestimate costs like housing, meal plans, parking, insurance, books and more.

The financial aid office can help you estimate your true college costs and develop a plan for how to cover it. Be sure to consider all options to keep your costs in check, like federal work study, internships, employer tuition assistance, outside scholarship or grant opportunities, or even paying a portion out of pocket each term.

□ DEVELOP A TIME MANAGEMENT PLAN

Being good at managing your time doesn't just happen. You've got to develop your own system, and then revise that system any time you experience changes to your schedule. Here are a few good ideas to keep in mind as you develop your own plan:

- Know when you are at your best (night owl, early bird, etc) and plan to complete the hardest tasks at that time
- Use a calendar of some sort to block off study time AND fun time. Keeping balance is important!
- Master the art of prioritizing. What is due first? Which project is largest? What needs to be spread out across multiple weeks? Again, use that calendar to keep track of deadlines and due dates and work backwards from there to schedule time to complete everything.
- Keeping lists – not just for groceries! Writing and reviewing a “to-do” list can help you keep on top of daily or weekly items.

□ GET TO KNOW YOUR COLLEGE “HELPERS”

Colleges and universities are full of people who are dedicated to helping you succeed. Get to know these offices and utilize their services. Remember, part of your college costs go toward providing these services – get your money's worth by taking advantage of their help!

Look for offices like:

- Academic Advising
- Career Services
- Student Life
- Health Center
- Writing Center
- Tutoring Lab
- Financial Aid
- Multicultural Center
- Library, and more!

Each college offers its own unique blend of services for students, so make it your job to become familiar with these resources in advance.

□ PREPARE FOR SETBACKS

Let's be honest, there will be times throughout your academic journey that you will feel discouraged. You may even consider quitting. And that's okay. It's normal and even expected. How you choose to handle these setbacks is entirely within your control and you can prepare for tough times now by thinking about how you will choose to respond.

Here are a list of questions you can ask yourself to reframe your thinking about academic setbacks:

- How did my actions contribute to this setback?
- What can I do differently next time to prevent this?
- What college services can I use to help me avoid this in the future?
- What am I saying to myself about this situation? What are my feelings?
- Is what I am saying to myself true? And is it helping me or hurting me?
- What is my motivation? Revisit your “W” questions and mission statement

□ **DON'T FORGET TO ENJOY THE EXPERIENCE!**

All work and no fun will not keep you motivated to stay the course. College is about learning, but it's also meant to provide you with new experiences and perspectives. What you do outside of class can be just as much a part of your learning as what you do in class.

It's easy to keep your head down and focus on your studies, but we encourage you to engage with your peers, participate in student activities, take that group road trip, go on a 3 A.M. donut run, or whatever else adds to your college experience. Maintaining a healthy balance will ultimately benefit you as a student, so don't forget to plan for the fun stuff, too.