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Student Activities and Organizations

One of the most enjoyable and rewarding aspects of college is the opportunity to get involved in student activities and organizations. There's no better way to meet new people who share your interests and to have some fun. Check your college's website for a list of student organizations. Here are some examples.

Community Service - Through community service organizations, students contribute their time and energy to serve the needs of the neighboring community.

Honor Societies - Superior scholarship and/or leadership are recognized and encouraged through these associations.

International - These clubs are comprised of students of all nationalities who have an interest in other cultures.

Political - These organizations may be associated with a political party or a cause (e.g., environmental action, election campaigning, world hunger).

Professional - These organizations are directly related to your major or career. Examples include Pre-Law, Pre-Dentistry, Accounting Society.

Social - Fraternities, sororities, and other organizations sponsor and organize concerts, speaker series, mixers, and other social activities.

Special Interest - These cover a wide range of topics: Campus Spirit Club, Mac Users Groups, Entrepreneurship Club, to name a few.

Sports/Recreation - Almost any sport may be offered: paragliding, Tae Kwon Do, lacrosse, hacky sack, Ultimate Frisbee, paintballing.

Student Government - Here you have the chance to work with faculty and administrators to impact the quality of education and campus life.

“The leadership skills I developed by being active in college organizations are invaluable. Now that I've graduated, I feel like I can manage people, organize events, and solve problems in pretty much any work situation.”

Carissa, recent sociology graduate

PART II

Succeed Academically

Now let's get down to business, because academics trump all other college pursuits. Success in the classroom is not just about studying a lot. It's about studying "smart" and doing everything it takes to navigate your academic world wisely and efficiently.



Academic Planning

Once you arrive on campus, you will be assigned to an academic advisor (or academic counselor). It is very important that you make regular appointments with your advisor to ensure that all your academic plans and decisions are sound ones. Do not make academic decisions based on the advice of friends or family. Academic offerings and requirements constantly change and can be very confusing. Rely on an expert.

Meet with your advisor early and often.

Schedule an appointment with your advisor as early in each semester as possible. Do not wait until registration starts - that's when advisors are the busiest. Prior to your appointment, read the academic requirements in your college catalog and determine if tentative courses have prerequisites (i.e., required courses). Also review the general education requirements and the requirements for your major/minor. On the day of the appointment, arrive on time, bring your online degree audit (see below), and a list of questions to clarify and confirm what you read in the catalog. These questions may include:

- How do I access my "degree audit"? (This is typically an online analysis that allows you to assess your academic progress and unfulfilled requirements. At many schools it is called DARS – degree audit reporting system).

- What is a reasonable course load? (You don't want to schedule too many difficult and time consuming classes in a single semester).
- Can I see a list of minors and the courses required for each minor?
- I've reviewed the required general education (gen. ed.) courses, courses required for my major, and elective (optional) courses. When should I be taking these courses?
- My major has the published "minimum requirements" for admission, but what are the realistic competitive admission requirements?
- I'm not particularly strong in the area of _____. Are there any particularly difficult courses in that subject that I should take during the summer when I have more time to devote to the topic?
- I'm thinking of taking courses at a two-year college near my home this summer. Will these courses transfer to this college?
- Which courses can I take pass-fail? How many pass-fail courses can I take?
- When do I need to register for next semester's courses? What's the best way to ensure that I get into my classes?
- I'm considering attending graduate school. Are there any courses that are required or recommended for admission to those programs?
- Can you provide the results of student evaluations of professors?

Keep a written record of everything you discuss with your academic advisor. If you are confused or uncertain, schedule a return visit. If you question the accuracy of the information you have obtained, ask to speak to the Director of Academic Advising or the department chair.

Tip: If your school offers a "College 101" or "Introduction to College" course, take it. The course is seldom difficult, and you will learn a lot of college success tips.

Treat a difficult course as if it were two courses.

Take a lighter course load during the semester you're enrolled in a "killer class," and devote twice the normal study time to this class. Avoid taking two killer classes in the same semester. If you're concerned about falling behind because of the lightened course load, take a summer or winter intercession course to catch up.

Register early.

Before the start of a new term, your college will publish a schedule of classes. This will also include the registration schedule. You will likely be given registration dates according to the number of hours you have completed. Some classes fill up quickly, so always register at the earliest possible date. Closed out courses are not necessarily closed out. See the professor and plead your case. The professor may add a spot or put you on a waiting list. Some closed out students attend the first class hoping that the professor will allow them in the class.

Avoid back to back classes.

College courses are typically scheduled MWF on the hour for 50 minutes each and TTH for 75 minutes. Back to back classes give you little time to get to your next class. They also make it almost impossible to arrive early or stay after class for questions. On large campuses you may need 10 - 20 minutes to get from class to class. Only schedule back to back classes if they are located in the same building or very nearby.

Avoid 8:00 a.m. classes.

Unless you're a morning person who can function on less than six hours sleep or there are no other available sections, avoid 8:00 a.m. classes. With nighttime residence hall noise and activity, it's a rare freshman who reports getting to sleep before midnight.

Considering a course for next semester or next year?

Go to the departmental office and ask to see end of semester teacher evaluations completed by students. Also ask for a copy of the course syllabus. Review the course description and requirements, and learn how grades are determined. Talk to students who have taken the course. Go to the college bookstore and leaf through the required textbooks.

Withdrawing from a course.

At some point you may find that you have to withdraw from a course in mid-semester. Consult your college's catalog and meet with your academic advisor to get answers to the following questions: What are the withdrawal deadlines? What are the policies of the college, or my department, regarding withdrawing from classes? Will withdrawing from a course affect my financial aid? *If you plan to withdraw from a course, don't wait until the last minute. You may not get the paperwork completed in time.*



Choosing a Major

If you're in a career oriented program at a 2-year college, you have already decided on your area of study. If you are seeking a bachelor's degree, you typically have until your sophomore year to declare your major.

What exactly is a major?

An academic major is an in-depth study of one discipline or subject. A typical major is comprised of about eighteen 3-hour required courses. Thus, you may take approximately 50-60 hours in your major, and another 60-70 hours of general education and elective coursework.

Major requirements.

Colleges have different requirements regarding admission to certain majors. Make sure you understand your school's policies. Here are three possibilities.

Open Admission - These majors can be declared at any time.

Minimum Admission - In this case, certain courses or a certain number of credits must be completed before you can declare the major. The department may also require a minimum overall GPA or minimum grades in prerequisite courses. If you meet the stated requirements, you will be admitted to the major. Be aware that there may be an application form, and there may be application deadlines.

Competitive Admission - In this situation (also called "impacted majors"), enrollment at the college and the completion of prerequisites do not guarantee admission. Admission is generally dependent upon grades, but may also be based on test scores, portfolios, auditions, letters of recommendation, and/or interviews.

More about majors.

Colleges offer majors within departments such as Education, Business Administration, Arts and Sciences, Engineering, and Health and Human Services. An Interdisciplinary Major is comprised of courses from several different programs of study. The number of majors offered by a college or university varies according to enrollment.

Although majors vary widely, one way of categorizing them is in terms of whether or not they are intended to prepare you for a specific career. Career-oriented majors include Architecture, Mechanical Engineering, Education, Accounting, Nursing, Theater Production, Commercial Arts, Information Technology, and Social Work, to name but a few. Although you have other career options upon graduation, the chances are that you will pursue a job directly related to your career-oriented major.

A great many college majors are not intended to prepare you for a specific career. These majors are often categorized as Humanities (e.g., English, Foreign Language, History), Life or Physical Sciences (e.g., Biology, Chemistry, Geometry, Physics), and Social or Behavioral Sciences (e.g., Anthropology, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology). These and other majors provide students with a well-rounded education and many of the skills required to pursue any number of careers. These majors also provide excellent preparation for graduate school.

Many occupations can be pursued directly from college. Others (including law, college teaching, and many social service and health-related jobs) require post-baccalaureate study (i.e., two or more years of graduate or professional school). Some college graduates transition into graduate study immediately upon completing their bachelor's degree. Others work for a number of years prior to entering graduate school.

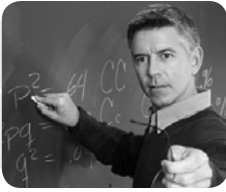
What's a minor?

You must declare a major, but minors (one or more) are optional. A minor typically consists of 6-8 courses (or 18-24 hours) in a program outside your major. The purpose of a minor is to provide supplementary knowledge and credentials.

It is ideal if your minor coursework complements your major by providing additional career-related skills and know-how. Because there can be great value in being bilingual, a foreign language minor is a popular and practical option. Likewise, a minor in English, Business, Communications, or Computer Science provides valuable work-related skills. However, you should consider a minor in any topic that interests you.

How do you decide on a major and minor?

If you have a toothache, you go to the dentist. If you've been arrested, you see a lawyer. When you are uncertain of your major or career plans, you meet with a university career counselor. With thousands of careers available, getting some professional advice is the smart thing to do.



Know Your Professors

College teachers, or faculty, go by many titles: full professor, associate professor, assistant professor, adjunct (part-time) faculty, instructor, and lecturer. They may be young or old, novices or veterans, entertaining and inspirational, or just plain dull. These are the people who will impact the quality of your education. Developing positive relationships with faculty is one important way you can influence the quality of that education.

Develop relationships with professors.

Sit up front, ask questions, and visit professors during office hours. Most professors enjoy sharing their wisdom and knowledge with motivated students. They may provide academic guidance, share valuable career information, and serve as references for jobs and graduate school.

Professors are engaged in writing and research. Visit the departmental website for a link describing each professor's research and professional interests. If you share their interests, volunteer to assist with their research.

If you are struggling in class, speak with your professor for guidance and recommendations. Meet during office hours rather than trying to catch your professor before or after class. If you are enjoying the class and value the knowledge you are gaining, let your professor know.

Tip: Sit in on a course you're considering taking in the future. Before or after class, ask a few students what they think of the course and the professor.

Tip: When addressing a professor, use Dr., Mr., or Ms. When e-mailing professors, be polite, write in full sentences, use correct spelling and grammar, and remind the professor what class you're in.

"I've gotten to know a few of my professors pretty well just by dropping in during office hours. Sometimes we discuss the class, but mostly we just chat about whatever is happening on campus or going on in the world. I enjoy talking to someone's who's older and smarter than me."

Keith, sophomore mechanical engineering major

PART III

Stay Healthy and Safe

Eat well, exercise regularly, get enough sleep, and avoid dangerous and self-injurious behaviors. You undoubtedly know all this; it's just a matter of doing it. College success requires taking care of mind, body, and spirit. You can't abuse your body and expect to succeed academically.



Health Tips

Use common sense.

- Eat a balanced diet including lots of fruits and vegetables.
- Take a multivitamin.
- Wash your hands often to avoid contracting germs.
- Keep a list of any medications or prescription drugs you're taking, including eye glass prescriptions.
- Exercise regularly to keep yourself healthy and in good shape.
- Have information on your health insurance readily available.
- Go to the Health Center if you have questions about immunizations. Ask about getting vaccinated for hepatitis B and meningitis.
- Avoid caffeine and nicotine.
- The benefits of sexual abstinence are obvious. If you choose to be sexually active, make sure that you have the information you need to make safe, smart decisions. Pregnancy and STDs are life changing. If you have any questions or concerns, visit your college's Health Center.
- Alcohol and drugs? If you're in college, you already know the dangers. Plenty of college students abstain. Ask yourself if alcohol or drugs are contributing to your well-being.