CHAPTER

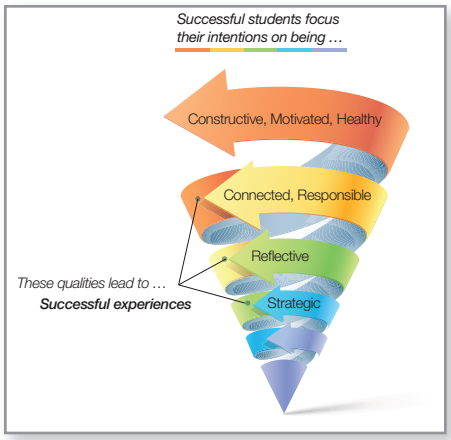
7

Student Engagement: The Context of College, Courses, & Studying

Learning Goals

The goal of this chapter is to help you learn how to:

1. Manage your schedule in the context of course enrollment.
2. Study effectively individually, with a partner, and in groups.
3. Understand the different modes of instruction.
4. Identify effective strategies for managing group projects.



Attitude is everything. In your transition to college life, maintaining the attitude that each and every experience is a learning opportunity can help you make constructive connections with people, information, and resources that will enhance your experience now and in the future. This constructive approach also applies to selecting strategies for how to approach your course schedule and manage your academic workload, navigating the various modes of instruction, and mastering different methods of study—from individual to partnered or group. A positive attitude can also help you balance your academic life with other commitments all on your own.

Preview

(Continues)

Preview

(Continued)

Self-Assessment

Assessing Your Understanding of College Engagement Skills

Next to each statement, mark how often you use each general college success strategy.

Yes that's me!	Not Usually	Do You …
1	0	Make regular visits to your advisor to go over next semester's schedule and review your overall progress toward graduation?
1	0	Mark the add/drop and withdrawal dates in your planner?
1	0	Have a written roommate agreement?
1	0	Check your university email daily?
1	0	Have a signature line set up for your email account?
1	0	Carefully watch your grades?
1	0	Keep track of your options in case you need to withdraw from a course?
1	0	Mark all of the deadlines for each course in your planner?
1	0	Review the syllabi for each course every so often to refresh your memory and make sure you're fulfilling the professor's expectations for each assignment?
1	0	Have all the necessary school supplies?
1	0	Organize your supplies, notes, and materials?
1	0	Attend every class unless you're ill or there's a crisis?
1	0	Have a quiet, focused place where you study?
1	0	Stay focused during group study?
1	0	Study with a partner (without getting distracted)?
1	0	Keep up with group projects, fulfill your individual expectations, and facilitate the overall goals of the group?

Add up your score by giving yourself a point for each "yes" response.

14 to 16 = Great: Your overall understanding of university organization, context, and systems is high. This chapter will strengthen your successful engagement by helping you understand even more about the context of college, courses, and how to study.

10 to 13 = Doing OK: While you have some understanding of the context of college, you may need to add some information and strategies to your toolbox. Review the questions above that you marked with a zero and pay particular attention to those topics in this chapter.

Less than 10 = Struggling: Your understanding of how to engage in the college environment needs some help. This chapter offers valuable information for your academic and personal success.

> *"Cleverness, as usual, takes all the credit it possibly can. But it's not the clever mind that's responsible when things work out. It's the mind that sees what's in front of it, and follows the nature of things."*
>
> — Benjamin Hoff

Can you envision a business that is disorganized, poorly lit, noisy, inefficient, late, and delivers poor-quality outcomes? It would not last for long. Right now, your job is to be a student. You are investing several years of time, energy, and money into the achievement of your long-term goals. Just as in professional endeavors, higher education has rules, policies, and guidelines that provide insight into and boundaries for the work you do. A particular cultural and community context structures the nature of courses you'll take and the ways you'll study, both individually and in groups. This chapter makes the context of college, college courses, and studying more explicit so that, as a student, you will understand the system and how to be successful in it.

7.1 College Context

If you're a traditional student, you will likely go to college for roughly 8 to 10 semesters and take around 15 units of coursework each term (a typical undergraduate degree requires about 120 units). To create an environment in which everyone understands how to positively and efficiently move through their college career, your university has articulated a number of expectations, policies, rules, and deadlines. Understanding this system will allow you to be strategic in your approach to courses, scheduling, studying, work outside of school, and your timeline to graduation—and to be successful in this endeavor. The following sections outline the broad strokes of the college context.

7.1a Expectations

Being a college student carries many demands, responsibilities, and expectations. First and foremost, you are independently managing your own resources, including your belongings, time, and finances. You are also independently managing your relationships with your friends, faculty and staff, and family. If you're a parent or reentry student, you may have a full-time job or children to care for, so you need to juggle their schedule with yours. You get to decide whether or not to go to class, join a student organization, or eat french fries for breakfast. You set your own priorities for the day, week, semester, and academic year. In college, it is your responsibility to get where you need to be, with the necessary materials, on time and ready to participate. However, even with all of this independence and responsibility, you also face a variety of boundaries in the form of college policies and practices.

BVT Lab

Flashcards are available for this chapter at www.BVTLab.com.

Reflection Question 7-1

When you started college, what did you expect from the experience? How have those expectations changed? What are your specific expectations for yourself now?

"Don't lower your expectations to meet your performance. Raise your level of performance to meet your expectations."

— Ralph Marston

Written Expectations: Policies & Rules

Your college has a variety of policies, practices, rules, and guidelines that shape the way the campus community behaves and lives. These are found in a variety of sources. You might receive a written handbook or catalog upon arrival, or your university may post all of these resources online. Either way, it's your responsibility to know the policies and act accordingly.

The list below describes a few of the key written resources you'll want to be aware of:

Enrollment calendar: This resource is likely found on your registrar's website and has all of the **add/drop** and **withdrawal** deadlines for each term—the last dates you're allowed to drop or withdraw from any course without incurring a fail on your transcript. Make sure you know your university's policy, as some limit the number of withdrawals a student can claim during their college career. The enrollment calendar likely also provides graduation applications, grade change forms, and petitions. Be cautious about using petitions as a strategy; they may require documentation such as doctor's notes or legal notices.

Course catalog: The catalog describes your institution's programs, opportunities, academic majors, courses, and prerequisites. It also describes the **program of study** required for each major—you can think of it like a contract between you and the university, specifying what requirements you must meet to obtain a degree in your chosen major. This is typically dependent on the year you began. If the program is changed later, you will probably be "grandfathered in" and allowed to complete the program requirements for the year you enrolled (rather than the new ones). Make sure you save all documentation on the degree program expectations for the year you started that degree.

Add/drop
A schedule change that includes the addition or removal of a course from a student's schedule (These changes *typically* take place within the first few days of the term and don't leave a permanent mark on the student's transcript.)

Withdrawal
A schedule change resulting in withdrawing from a single course or the entire term (Withdrawals *typically* occur later in the semester and leave a permanent record of the changes on the student transcript.)

Program of study
The set of courses and requirements, or curriculum, that makes up a major or minor.

Student code of conduct
The university's set of rules, policies, and procedures describing expectations for student behavior

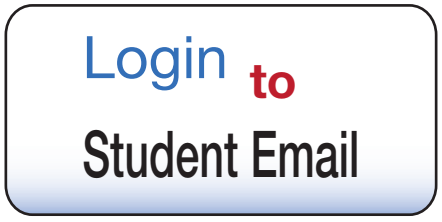
Student code of conduct: The **student code of conduct** describes the behavior expected from the student community. It includes expectations for classroom as well as residential behavior and the institution's policies on harassment, sexual assault, and the use of alcohol and other drugs. Violations of the student code of conduct could result in temporary or permanent suspension from the university.

Residence life and roommate policies: These policies, applicable to students living on campus, govern the behavior expected from students and roommates within the residence halls. They might include items such as visitation, safety, quiet hours, and privacy, as well as alcohol and other drug use within campus spaces. Your residence hall has specific policies in place about gaining entry to the living spaces that are specifically implemented to keep you and your classmates safe. In many cases, you and your roommate will craft a specific roommate contract that is just between the two of you; however, you must also adhere to the general set of rules that govern the larger student residence community.

If you fail to review these written resources, you are unlikely to maintain the boundaries or adhere to the expectations laid out by your college. Failure to follow the rules can cost you time, frustration, and money, and in extreme cases, can jeopardize your entire college career. It's not uncommon for universities to impose fees for missed deadlines or for processing additional petitions and paperwork. If you live on campus, it is essential to read and adhere to your college's residence life and roommate policies to prevent problems and to help you maximize your opportunities to succeed.

Communication Expectations: Campus Email

Most universities consider email their official form of student communication. Not only is this strategy environmentally sustainable but your university can also keep more students informed of many more important pieces of information and opportunities via email. Plan to read the messages in your campus email account *daily* and develop a system for flagging or saving important announcements. Be sure also to delete information that you aren't interested in (such as event announcements) to keep your inbox streamlined and easy to navigate.



"There are no secrets on the Internet."

— Paul Babicki

You will also be using email to communicate with faculty and staff. Remember to use good email etiquette so that your communication is reviewed with appropriate interest and reflects adequate communication skills. Here are a few things to consider:

1. **Email is permanent.** After hitting the Send key, your email becomes part of your permanent student record. If you are disrespectful, unethical, demanding, or emotional, your email could be cause for concern.

2. **Send it from your student account.** Because email is likely the official form of communication, send it from your official university account. If possible, go into the settings and change the way your name appears so that everyone can easily see your full name (rather than a university-generated id). Add a nice signature line that details your student involvement, major, and maybe even a short, meaningful quote. Set yourself up for success by showcasing your strengths.

3. **Be clear in the subject line.** Briefly explain the subject of your message with something like "Homework Question" or "Missed Test." You may also want to put the class, including days of the week and time, in which you are enrolled.

4. **Address them professionally.** The safest start to your email is "Dear Dr. xxxx," using the recipient's last name. Assume they have an advanced degree. Unless you've been told in class to address them by their first name, the formal approach is usually best.

5. **Keep it brief.** Faculty and staff get many emails a day, so to be respectful of their time and help ensure a better, quicker response, your message should be brief and to the point. Number or bullet your questions or points if possible. If your situation is complicated, let the email serve as a teaser for your general needs and ask for an appointment to provide more detail in person.

6. **Express gratitude.** Whether you asked for an extension, turned your homework in via email rather than in class (so your professor must print it out), or just asked a general question, be sure to acknowledge their response and thank them for their time and/or consideration. Do this even if you didn't get the answer you wanted.

7. **Don't use social media shortcuts.** Don't use all caps—that's considered shouting. Emojis and acronyms (LOL) are also off limits. The best practice is to draft the email in a word processing program and run a spelling and grammar check before cutting and pasting it into your email. Remember that every interaction with faculty and staff is an opportunity to impress—or disappoint.

8. **Keep it impersonal.** Don't include constructive feedback about class or extravagant compliments. Don't include political or religious statements, and make sure the quote in your signature line (if you use one) isn't political or religious. Avoid humor unless you really know the person—it usually doesn't translate.

Career Connection

In the workplace, you'll be subject to calendar cycles for projects and evaluations that are similar to how a semester works. You'll also follow guidelines, policies, rules, and expectations for communication. No matter where you are, you must engage in the life of the community within the bounds of its culture.

7.2 Course Enrollment

The process of enrolling in courses each semester is an important task that facilitates your progress toward graduation or certification. There are several steps that you can take to ensure that you have enrolled in a set of courses that optimizes your ability to progress towards your goals while accommodating both your preferences as a student and your other scheduling priorities (e.g., work or family). There are plenty of resources to help you along the way, and your university has processes in place if you need to make corrections to your schedule after you've enrolled. The following sections highlight these resources and policies and will help you become a savvy course scheduler!

7.2a The Role of Advising & the Registrar

Advisors and the office of the registrar play very different roles, but both resources are there to facilitate your semester enrollment and progress toward graduation.

The registrar's office typically handles the actual mechanics of enrolling in—as well as dropping, adding, withdrawing from, and auditing—courses. The office also manages your transcript. They are responsible for taking faculty course grades, stamping them on your transcript, calculating your semester and cumulative GPA, and posting your academic standing. The registrar's office will also help you move through the graduation process and, after graduation, you'll contact them to get copies of your transcripts.

Advisors play a key role in helping you decide what courses to enroll in each semester and can address questions about your progress toward graduation. Advisors can also arrange academic help during the semester and may be a key resource in career decision-making and finding opportunities for preprofessional experience, such as internships and fieldwork.

Your campus may have a very sophisticated online advising system that tracks your movement through your particular major or program of study. However, some campuses only articulate the programs of study in the online catalog, so to determine which courses to take, you must match that list to the list of courses that are actually being offered for a specific term.

The program of study is your roadmap toward degree completion. However, during your first 2 years, it may not include any major-specific courses; instead, you may start by completing your general education (G.E.) requirements, including history, science, math, and English courses. Some colleges offer choices in G.E. requirements; for example, you might be able to choose between creative writing and world literature to satisfy an English requirement.

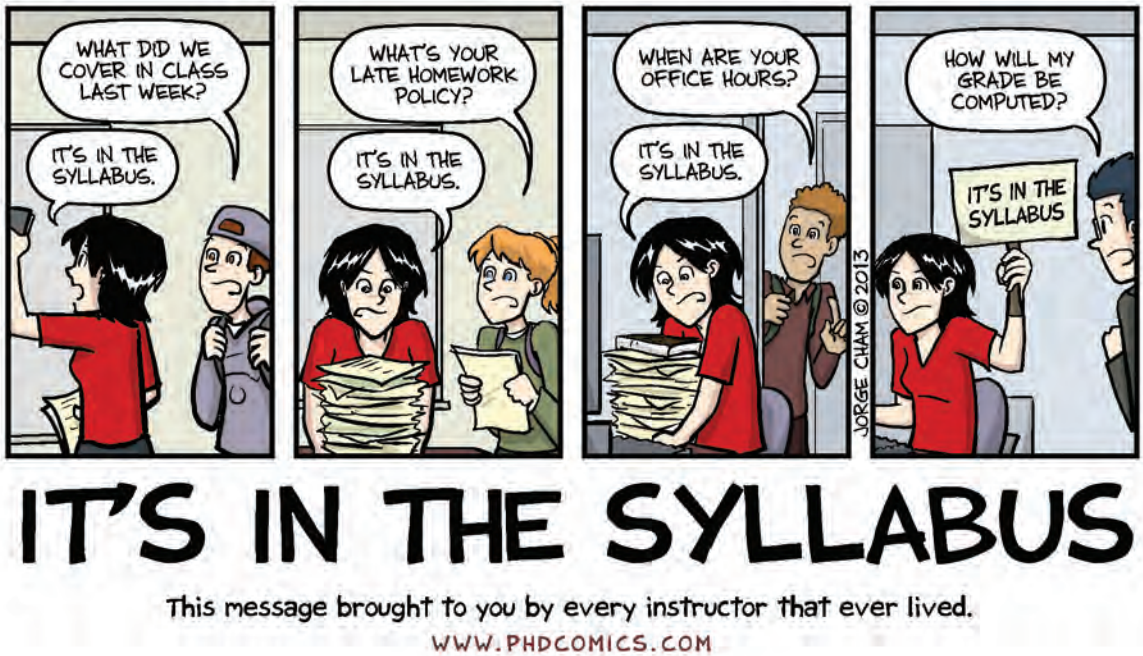
Once you've selected the courses you need, you have to create a schedule. This involves choosing class times, based on what's available, that don't conflict with each other or any other commitments you may have. You might have a choice of different sections (days and times a class meets) for the same course; you may also have access to different faculty members teaching different classes that meet your requirements in different ways. During the course selection process, consider the following tips:

If you can, take an introductory course in your major. This should provide you with some balance to your general education (or liberal studies) requirements, and your motivation in this course should be higher because it's for your major. This offers the opportunity to "test drive" a major by exploring it and deciding if it really is a good fit with your interests and goals before you finalize your decision. If you wait to take all your major courses together and then decide to change majors, you could be set back an entire term or more.

Vary the formats of your courses. Try not to take all lecture or all problem-solving courses. Ask your peers about how the different professors teach courses to find out if some sections are more interactive (less straight lecture, more discussions and activities) than others.

Consider scheduling your classes in consecutive blocks, starting as early in the day as possible, concentrating on either Monday/Wednesday/Friday or on Tuesday/Thursday. This has several advantages. First, if your courses are scheduled back-to-back, you will be less likely to skip the first class of the day, using the rationale that you have to get up soon for the next one anyway. Students who schedule breaks in between classes sometimes have difficulty using that time productively. If you are planning to work or be involved in extracurricular activities, scheduling your courses in a solid block will provide larger blocks of available time. However, keep in mind that if you schedule too many classes back-to-back without a break, snack, or meal, you will likely feel mentally and physically fatigued by the time you begin that last class.

Be a conscientious student. Attend all classes, do the readings and homework, and scrutinize the syllabus before or during the first week of classes. Take a critical look at the relative workload, instructional style, and level of difficulty of each course and decide which combination of classes is the best for you. Use your add/drop privileges to make any changes that will help you balance your load. If the syllabus is available during registration, look at it while you're registering to avoid add/drop situations as much as possible. The first day of class is the most important one of the whole term because that's when the instructor explains their expectations, syllabus, and policies.



"Piled Higher and Deeper" by Jorge Cham www.phdcomics.com. Reprinted with permission.

Vet your professors. Prior to signing up for a class with a specific instructor, ask your conscientious, reliable classmates about their reputation, instructional style, level of difficulty, and workload. Don't avoid a course because it has the reputation of being difficult; instead, create a balanced schedule that allows you the extra time you'll need to be successful in that difficult course.

Make every course count. Make sure every course you are enrolled in fulfills some degree requirement or purpose—and yes, exploring a new major is a good purpose! If it doesn't fulfill a degree requirement, make sure there's some legitimate reason to take it. Federal financial aid requirements have a limit on the maximum number of units you can take while supported by federal aid, so you'll want to be careful that extra courses don't cause you to hit that limit. Don't take a course if you've already received that credit through AP, CLEP, or standardized test scores.

Create balance. Take subjects that require different kinds of work. For example, some classes (such as literature and history) require a lot of reading, while others (like journalism) require a lot of writing. Courses in math and science will have you solving problems. Choose a variety of subjects so your schedule isn't unbalanced with too much reading, writing, or arithmetic.

Plan for enrollment. Have your optimal courses at the optimal times selected *along with several backup plans*. Know when your enrollment window opens and closes and be prepared to get online at the earliest possible moment. At many universities, first-year students enroll for courses last; if that's the case, course offerings might be pretty picked over by the time it's your turn to enroll. If you don't get the schedule of your dreams, mark the add/drop dates on your calendar and check in during the first week of classes to see if seats have opened up for the courses and times you prefer.

7.2b Schedule Changes

There are several ways that your schedule might change after the beginning of the term. You might initiate a change to your class lineup or your advisor or a faculty member might initiate a change to the course schedule. Keep the key dates and policies on schedule changes on hand in case you need to change your schedule.

Student-Initiated Changes

Dropping a course On your university's website (check the registrar's area first), you will find a semester calendar with all of the enrollment deadlines. At the start of the term, students typically have a very short window, often only 3 to 14 days or so, to drop a course before it appears on their final transcript. If you don't think the course is right for you, it's best to drop it during this period and substitute something else. If you have a financial aid package that requires you to be a full-time student, make sure you don't fall below full-time status when you drop a course. Some residence life policies also require students to maintain full-time status to live on campus.

Adding a course At the beginning of the term, you will also have the opportunity to add courses to your schedule. Given higher education's limited resources, your university likely plans its course capacities and offerings with narrow margins. Therefore, there may not be many options to add courses that meet your degree requirements. The period to add is also typically very short. Every day that you aren't in the course, you are missing information and assignments. If you do add a course late, immediately visit your instructor during office hours to get the syllabus and find out what you need to do to catch up. Because of heavy workloads, some faculty don't allow late adds.

Withdrawing from a course After the add/drop window has closed, you can still withdraw from a course. However, you should review your university's policy on withdrawals. Campuses differ on the particulars of how they work (for instance, some campuses limit the total number of times you can withdraw over your academic career), but it's a pretty safe bet that it will be noted on your transcript. A future employer or graduate admissions office might see frequent withdrawals as a sign of academic distress or a lack of responsibility or commitment. However, if used carefully, withdrawals can be a necessary strategy for removing yourself from a bad situation.

Don't view withdrawing as a personal failure. Rather, it can be a sign of your ability to reflect and set boundaries for yourself. Depending on the circumstances, staying in a course that you can't successfully complete, or one that reduces your chance of success in other courses, can be more damaging than withdrawing from that course.

Withdrawing from a Term

Withdrawing from an entire term is a much more serious situation. This means that you are withdrawing from all of your courses—leaving the semester (or quarter) without finishing. Depending on when you withdraw and the situation that caused it, you may not be eligible for a refund of tuition, housing, and other fees. However, in special situations (such as illness, crisis at home, or academic failure), withdrawing from the entire term is the best course of action. Carefully contemplate this decision and talk to your advisor, mentors, and/or family. Similar to withdrawing from a single course, it's typically better to have a semester with all W's than all F's. There is usually no impact on your GPA for withdrawing, but if you fail, you will be placed on probation or warning status, and if your poor performance persists into another term, you could be academically suspended. Be sure to consider the impact of withdrawals on your financial assistance package: Even if you have a valid reason for withdrawing, you may be left with obligations to repay student loans.

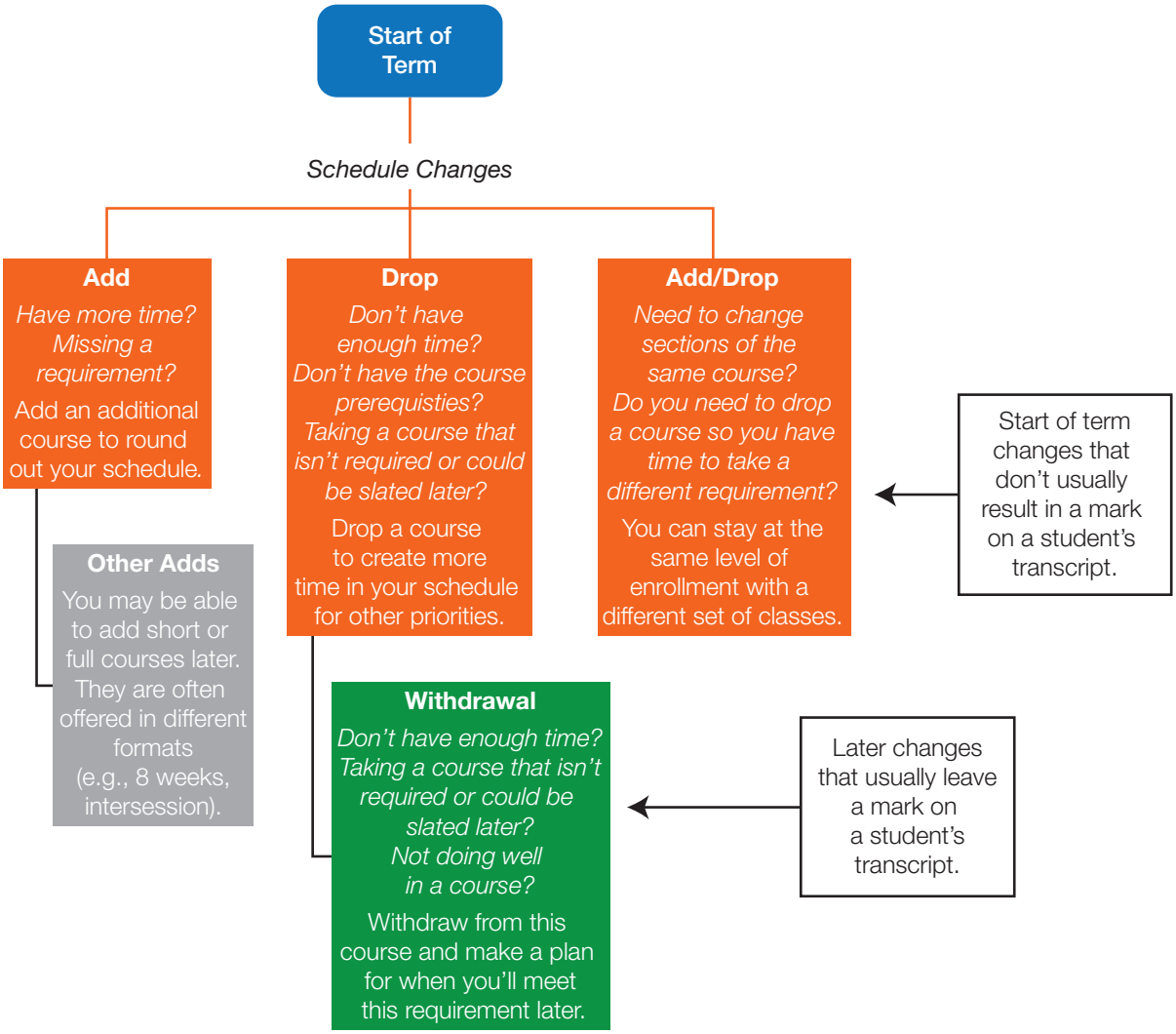
Career Connection

At some point in your career, you will likely find yourself in a position that requires you to juggle multiple projects. Just as with your semester schedule, when one project gets added, you may have to negotiate a way to drop something else to accommodate this new priority. Thinking about each course you are taking now as a unique project, with timelines and deliverables, is a good way to model how to manage your professional responsibilities later.

Reflection Question 7-2

How would you feel about withdrawing from a course? What would factor into your decision? Who would you seek advice from before you acted?

FIGURE 7-1 Add/Drop Timeline



University-Initiated Changes

Faculty, Instructor, or Administrative Drop

In certain situations, the university may drop you from a course. If you manage to enroll in a course for which you do not meet the prerequisites, the department, faculty, or advising team may drop you. Some universities have minimum participation standards, and if those are not met, you might find that you've been administratively dropped (also called a faculty or instructor drop). If you don't go to class during the first week of the term or fail to

submit homework assignments, many universities have policies that allow faculty to drop you from the course. They won't check to see if this impacts your financial aid eligibility, and if you're dropped from enough classes, you might face the negative consequences of falling below full-time student status for financial aid or residence life. Familiarize yourself with your university's policy regarding administrative, faculty, and instructor drops.

7.3 College Courses

Now that you've created the optimal schedule of classes, it's time to take a look at each of those courses individually. To be successful in your classes, you will want to take a careful look at each course syllabus, taking note of the description of how and when you'll complete work, policies for what happens when you miss deadlines, and how you'll be assessed. Your syllabus may also describe the mode of course instruction (e.g., in person or flipped) and will therefore describe the specifics of how you will be expected to participate in class or online.

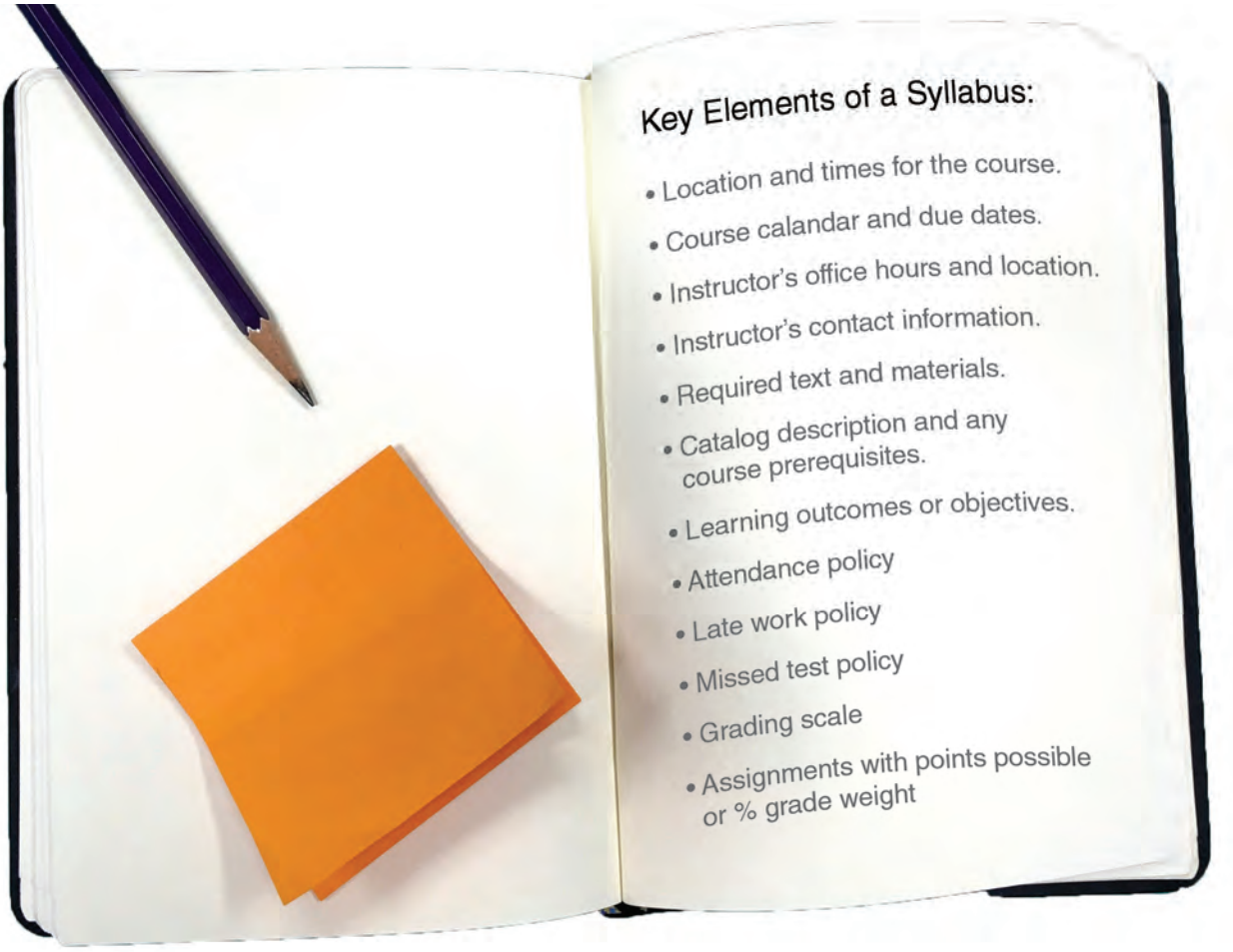
7.3a The Syllabus

> *"Where's my syllabus to guide me through life?"*
>
> — Megan McCafferty

On or before the first day of each class, you'll be given the course syllabus. This document contains many important details about the course, such as a course outline, policies for attendance, late work, missed exams, and how the work in the course will be graded. It might also contain a full list of all of the homework, papers, and tests for the class and a description of the expectations, points, and due dates for each.

Enter all of the important dates from your syllabus onto your semester planner and skim the syllabus frequently (every 2 weeks or so); give the sections about assignments a careful read as you are doing that work. The syllabus is the course blueprint; it reflects the instructor's expectations and the students' obligations. Generally, students think of the syllabus as a contract; however, in most cases, details on the syllabus can change during the semester. Most faculty announce these changes in class and hopefully back up that communication in email. Nevertheless, it's very important to go to class in case changes are announced. Keep all syllabi until grades are posted at the end of term. If you have a concern about your final grade, keep the syllabus until that concern is resolved.

FIGURE 7-2 Key Elements of a Syllabus



7.3b Modes of Instruction

College courses are taught in a variety of ways: in person, online, and a full spectrum in between. You should know what the mode of instruction is when you register for classes. No matter what type of class you end up taking, make sure to show up in person or go online on time.

In-Person Courses

In-person courses are delivered entirely with live participation, although the instructional strategies used may vary. In-person courses can be lectures, discussions, seminars, laboratories, or fieldwork experiences. An in-person experience offers the advantage of allowing you to establish a relationship and dialogue with your instructor and classmates; this can help you with the learning process and gives you an opportunity to make new friends and connections. In-person education offers the unique benefit of direct human communication between you and your instructor—and the rest of the class—and in-person courses offer collaborative opportunities as well. The fixed

meeting time of the course will help you create a consistent schedule and can keep you accountable for attending. However, traditional in-person courses also carry disadvantages: They are sometimes scheduled at less than optimal times, and you may end up not liking the instructor's teaching style.

Web-Enhanced Courses

Web-enhanced courses are conducted in person but have extra experiences, homework, or other content provided online. Web-enhanced doesn't usually mean that the course meets less often. Rather, it means that there are extra resources and opportunities that require you to go online.

Flipped Courses

In a flipped course, you are responsible for learning the information before attending class; then the in-person session is focused on critical thinking and application. To learn the information outside of class, you will probably be required to read the textbook on your own and/or watch lectures or videos online. There may be preclass quizzes or reading assignments to ensure you understand the material, and these may become part of the application, analysis, and evaluation activities that the instructor has planned for the in-person class session. There will probably be very clear guidelines for your in-class participation for flipped courses.

Hybrid or Blended Courses

A hybrid course is a blend of in-person class sessions and online activities. In a hybrid format, you will have fewer in-person class sessions than in a fully in-person course, with the online experience making up the difference. For example, some faculty will convert an in-person Tuesday/Thursday course into a hybrid course that meets only on Thursday. However, other faculty will convert that same course to meet twice a week for the first 2 weeks and then only once a week, rotating between Tuesdays and Thursdays. That inconsistency requires students to be very good with their time management as well as consistent about reading email announcements and the course calendar to keep track of when to attend class.

Online Courses

Many courses are offered entirely online. The advantage of online courses is that you can typically participate when it's most convenient. However, it's more difficult to get to know your instructor and peers through the limits of email and discussion boards. Find out if your instructor has offices on or near your campus and stop by to meet them in person. Online courses also require excellent time management and organizational skills—without in-person class sessions to help you stay accountable for meeting deadlines and course requirements, you might find it difficult to stay on track.

Online classes are offered either synchronously or asynchronously. In a synchronous experience, all students are required to be online at the same time. This is usually limited to specific lectures or discussion activities once or a few times a week. In an asynchronous experience, you can complete the course requirements whenever you want, *within the boundaries of the deadlines set by the instructor.* Be careful not to assume that all online courses are self-paced. Just as an in-person class, the instructor will typically lay out a set of deadlines for completed homework and exams that must be met. You won't be allowed to complete everything during finals week.

Student Success Showcase

Roger dropped Calculus 150 because he was failing. He met with his advisor prior to the drop deadline to discuss the situation and learned that there was an 8-week algebra class that was the prerequisite for the course. He had already taken it in high school, so the prereq had been waived, but given how he did in calculus, he has decided to take it again anyway. This will help him get ready to try calculus again next semester.

a. Roger was failing calculus, but his story is provided as an example of success. Why?

b. What policies did Roger take advantage of that led to his making this decision?

c. Which of the SQSS were part of Roger's approach to managing his academic success?

7.3c Class Culture & Dynamics

Generally, two kinds of information are offered in class. First, there's disciplinary knowledge (the class content relevant to the topic of study, such as anthropology, biology, or chemistry). Second, you will learn how to participate in intellectual, social, and emotional interactions in class (part of the covert curriculum). This kind of class engagement is a valuable way to practice interacting with individuals and groups in a focused academic (or even professional) setting. Your grade may, in part, be based on your participation in the course (see your class syllabus).

Class Attendance

Some colleges and universities have mandatory class attendance requirements. These might be for all students, for all courses, or only for first-year students or specific courses. In addition, your syllabus likely explains your instructor's expectations for class attendance. You may receive a set number of points for each day you attend class. Many courses offer no way

to make up those points, so it's important to show up. Just because your instructor doesn't call roll doesn't mean that they aren't taking attendance. Some faculty use clicker participation to log attendance later, and others pass back a set of papers to take attendance (the papers that aren't returned indicate who's absent).

Class Participation

As noted above, it may be implicitly or explicitly expected that you participate in class beyond just showing up. Classroom participation can include responding to clicker quizzes and questions, participating in group discussions, answering instructor-directed questions, solving problems at the board, doing lab experiments, and giving more formal presentations. If there are points associated with classroom participation, make sure you know the guidelines and take part in class with the same diligence as you would complete a homework assignment.

7.4 Studying & Learning

This section describes how to create the most efficient and effective set of practices for your study sessions. When it comes to studying, most students procrastinate. However, if you create habits that optimize the potential that your studying will result in learning, you will be less likely to procrastinate and you will get the most out of time spent studying. This section also includes special considerations for being efficient and effective when you study in groups, with partners, or work to accomplish group projects.

7.4a Creating the Habit

It's essential to develop the habit of studying at regular times. If you do so in the same places each time, you can even condition yourself: The cues from your physical study environment (location, desk, chair, lighting, sounds) become associated with the process of studying (thinking, reading, writing), making your study time more effective. The repeated association of your study behaviors with the physical cues of your location will cause you to connect and visualize the act of studying with that particular environment. Then, when you get to your study location, your study behaviors will be triggered automatically. This kind of behavior hack is a great way to boost your success.

Reflection Question 7-3

Where are you studying now and is that location effective? What factors in your study situation could you change to increase your effectiveness?

> *"I believed in studying just because I knew education was a privilege. It was the discipline of study, to get into the habit of doing something that you don't want to do."*
>
> — Wynton Marsalis

7.4b Focus & Concentration

Concentration is your ability to direct and maintain your attention. It is a skill and a power, fueled by motivation, which in turn fuels your actions. You can build concentration skills by constructing an external and psychological environment that is associated with learning and by attending to your physical health. You improve your ability to concentrate when you:

- *Remain aware* of those external and internal conditions that promote and hinder concentration, such as noise, room temperature, fatigue, and emotional issues.
- *Forcefully* create and construct the proper external and internal environment. *Don't deceive yourself into thinking that distracting conditions are unimportant.*

The term *construct* is used because you are the architect and builder of your daily life. If you act on the belief that you have the power to organize and direct most of your day's activities, you can improve your power to concentrate. The following techniques will help you improve your concentration:

1. **Take a break.** Study breaks influence your motivation to continue and remain alert. Build a 10-minute break into each hour of study. Decide in advance how you will use the time, and prioritize physical activity. At various periods of the day, plan a 15- to 30-minute break when you can relax, meditate, remotivate yourself, substitute positive emotions for negative ones, and recharge your physical and psychological energy.
2. **Make nutrition a high priority.** To be mentally fit, don't skip meals. Eat nutritious food and snacks. Avoid heavy meals and lots of empty carbs and fat—they have a tendency to make you sleepy.
3. **Exercise.** Try to get in some activity three to five times a week for at least 30 minutes each time. Getting the wiggles out at the gym or just taking a walk around campus will leave you more able to sit still and focus.

4. **Establish a regular sleep cycle.** Concentration requires energy and focused attention. If you're sleepy, it's difficult to concentrate. Residence life can make this an even greater challenge. A regular sleep cycle can help you get the rest you need.

7.4c Study Environment

The things you surround yourself with while you study make a difference in whether you'll be able to concentrate, stay on task, complete your work, and feel motivated about your success. This section will help you identify the right locations, supplies, and rewards to create the perfect environment for impactful studying.

Location Matters

Your external study environment includes all the places where you learn, including classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and personal study areas. While you can't control much of the environment in your lab and classroom spaces, you do have choice over your personal study area. The following is a list of considerations for managing it:

Comfort Your study area should feel comfortable, and you should be comfortable in it. Choose a location where you have a desk or table that is large enough for you and your materials. Move around often and sit upright to avoid getting sleepy. Select a chair that is supportive and ergonomic.

Distractions (or lack thereof) Your study area should be as free of distractions as possible. Anything that diverts your attention away from learning is a distraction. This includes noises, smells, temperature, light, sights, and your phone. The library or an empty classroom might be a good location for a study because it is away from noisy campus traffic.

Music If music doesn't present a distraction, it's OK to listen while studying. For some students, music is a great way to block out the noise of the location and can even help concentration. If you choose to listen to music while studying, consider the following tips:

Try music without lyrics if you find yourself singing along instead of concentrating.

Keep in mind that tempo matters. Fast-paced music might help you move through material at a faster pace, while slower music might facilitate a more deliberate and reflective approach.

Download a white noise app if you need to block out other noise but find music is too distracting.

As a rule of thumb, if you are aware of the music while you're studying, then you've lost your concentration and it needs to be turned off.

Lighting Avoid extremes of light. Very bright or dim lighting can cause eye fatigue, which reduces study time. A light can be bright and not induce fatigue if it is diffused (indirect lighting). Avoid high-intensity lighting when it is the only source in the room. It creates a disturbing sharp contrast with darkness.

Backup plan If you typically study in your room, there may be times when your roommate has plans that are too distracting. If you like the library, you might need an additional location for after it closes. Have a backup plan at the ready for special circumstances. Don't let anything get in the way of your study plans.

Finally, studying in your room requires some special considerations. The rules of good sleep hygiene dictate that we are not supposed to do anything in our beds except sleep. However, in your residence hall, your bed often serves as a couch, dinner table, and place to pile laundry. Sometimes you'll need to use your bed for studying. Communication with your roommate can clarify the fact that you need your room to study. Talk to them about how long you plan to study, and work out a rough schedule. You might need to use headphones and music or white noise to respectfully block out their sounds. Your room has the advantage of all of your materials, belongings, and snacks being easily accessible, but those same resources could end up becoming distractions if you're spending more time grazing than you are studying.

For Studying Without Distraction

These quick ideas will help you decrease distractions while you study.

- In a busy environment, use music or white noise to block out the racket.
- If it's open, study in the cafeteria in between meals; you'll have ample table space and access to healthy snacks.

For Studying Without Distraction (Continued)

- Turn off your phone.
- Find somewhere comfortable where heat or cold won't be an issue.
- Sit with your back to the door or window.
- Study without your friends.
- Read on the treadmill or recumbent bike at the rec center.
- Study in empty classrooms or conference rooms (but check the schedule first to avoid unexpected interruptions).
- Know your roommate's schedule and study when they aren't home.
- If you can, go home for the weekend where it may be quieter and there are fewer distractions. However, remember that well-meaning friends and family can become distractions if you don't control your schedule!
- Use a city library, coffee shop, or café.

Supplies Matter

To manage your academic life, you will need the right stuff. Carefully read each syllabus to see if any of your faculty have made special requests. For example, does your math instructor want all of your work done in pencil and final answers circled in red pen? Get stocked at the beginning of the semester so you aren't making frequent, time-consuming, and expensive trips to the store later. Most of the major discount stores offer school supplies seasonally (typically around July or August) with special sale pricing. If you are financially strained, ask for school supplies as birthday or holiday gifts. Those pricey but handy highlighters with the built-in flags make great stocking stuffers.

The following list includes some standard supplies you may find useful:

1. A backpack, tote bag, or something similar in which to carry your books, notes, water bottle, etc.

2. A little box or plastic zip pouch with a flash drive, mini stapler, some paper clips, sticky notes, and extra pens and pencils (throwing in $5 and a few bandages and napkins wouldn't hurt, either!)

   Pro Tip: *Aim for something waterproof to protect your flash drive and other items from damage.*

3. A few folders (or an accordion folder or small plastic file box) for paper copies of things you need to hang on to—especially things you can't access online

4. Reference books, including a standard dictionary, atlas, and style guide (MLA, APA, CMOS, etc.)

5. A pencil sharpener

6. A small bulletin or whiteboard for messages, notes, and to-do lists

7. Book shelves or plastic storage crates

   Pro Tip: *These can house everything from books to groceries to plastic tubs of clothes.*

8. A calculator that meets the needs of your highest-level math or statistics class (Don't overpurchase something that will be too complicated and is unnecessary, but don't buy a cheap model if you plan to take more STEM classes.)

9. A tablet computer *if you can afford it* (While these are a luxury purchase, tablets with portable keyboards can provide a more affordable option when compared to laptop or desktop computers and can cut down on trips to the computer lab.)

10. A good alarm clock

    Pro Tip: *Try to get one without a snooze button.*

11. Various sizes and colors of self-adhesive notepads, tabs, and flags (Use them to mark the answer sections in the back of your book, to-do lists, etc.)

Plan Your Rewards

It might help motivate you to study if you plan a nice reward for your efforts. In the U.S., we often think of food treats as rewards, but to maintain a healthy

lifestyle, choose activities that you enjoy instead. Intentionally schedule time with friends, watch a show, or get outside. Do whatever you enjoy. If you don't plan your rewards, you might be inclined to accept last-minute invitations that can get you off track. Planning your rewards will enable you to not feel cheated when you put in an hour of studying instead of going to that tailgate party before the big game.

7.4d Group Study

Although most chapters in this book emphasize the development of individual self-management and study strategies, learning often occurs best in small group settings. Students form groups to prepare for class, complete assignments, and study for exams—either on their own or as part of required class participation. The next sections offer insight and practical advice for group study.

Participating in group study is *productive* only when it is done right. When getting together, classmates can learn information from each other that they missed in class. You can also gain a better understanding of the material when it is discussed and communicated among group members. These are the key qualities of a successful study group:

Successful groups …

- Have a leader of some type who can democratically direct time spent together and maintain some kind of organization.
- Set goals for specific material to be covered within an allotted period of time.
- Divide the material into specific topics and focus on each topic separately.
- Decide as a group what the focus of the study time will be, organizing information from most important to least important and based on what's likely to appear on exams.
- Have some members of the group create test questions and have other members answer them, and then elaborate on the answers with the entire group participating and sharing information.
- Always try to maintain equal participation.
- Motivate each other with mutual support, encouragement, and accountability, but don't hesitate to offer constructive criticism when someone is clearly wrong.
- Encourage the sharing of different ideas, perspectives, and problem-solving approaches.

However, group study can be a *waste of time* if it is done wrong. These are the key factors for avoiding an unsuccessful study group:

Unsuccessful groups …

- Aren't prepared, don't have accurate and complete information, and avoid difficult topics. This can create the illusion of real learning.

  Fix: *Discuss material in an informed way, fact check one another, and take the necessary time to tackle topics that group members are struggling with.*

- Allow a bossy person to dominate the group.

  Fix: *Implement a democratic system so that everyone's voice is heard.*

- Let those who have skipped class or not studied sponge or mooch off the work of others.

  Fix: *Politely refuse to share class notes or other personal materials with members of the group who fail to pull their weight.*

- Get distracted by material that may be interesting but has nothing to do with the class.

  Fix: *Stick to the predetermined schedule of topics to be covered and maintain a focus on the task at hand.*

- Lapse into socializing.

  Fix: *Set aside some time at the end of the group meeting for socializing. This can act as a reward for a job well done.*

Structure for Group Study

The following guidelines will enable you to structure your group study sessions for success. Be concerned about completing your task while at the same time being sensitive to the needs of your group.

1. Consider your study partners carefully. Before you agree to join or form a study group, try to determine your classmates' proficiency and their attitudes about the class and their success. In short, ask yourself how likely you are to learn from each other. Avoid including the "leech" (even if they're a friend or roommate) who never studies but seeks to exploit the group's resources.

2. Limit the size of your group to five or fewer members. It's difficult to get full participation in larger groups, and quiet members can get lost. If you've got too much interest, form two groups.

3. Discuss these guidelines before or at the first meeting of your group. They offer a structure for successful collaboration.

4. Agree in advance that each member should arrive prepared to contribute. Research indicates that the overall quality of a group's efforts is the average of its individual contributions. In short, do not lower group productivity by including unprepared members.

5. Begin each meeting by clarifying the group's goals and agenda. For example, what is the specific purpose of the session? How long will it last? Approximately when will you take a break and for how long? What specific material will you discuss? Agreeing on goals and an agenda reduces misunderstandings and discourages digressions.

6. If the group agrees that a leader is desirable, elect a peer who is respected, has solid communication skills, and can monitor time, discourage digressions, follow the agenda, and still participate in the discussion.

7. Often, an "expert" emerges from a study group—someone who knows most or certain topics better than the other members. If an expert emerges, remember two points:

   First, an expert can quickly transform the role of "equal participants" to "teacher" and "students." Having a peer serve as the occasional teacher can benefit the group. But when that peer teaches too often, full participation is reduced and learning can suffer.

   Second, ensure that the expert is truly an expert. Be willing to question each other; ask for the source of any information that seems unclear or questionable.

8. Assign each person the role of critical thinker. It is easy for a cohesive group of individuals to become passive, complacent, and uncritical to maintain a friendly atmosphere. Members can provide constructive criticism by directing comments to the person's *statements* rather than the *person*. Use active-listening responses such as "If I understand you correctly …" or "What you seem to be saying is …" Use *I-messages* ("I feel …" or "I am concerned …") to communicate your feelings about specific remarks or behaviors that are not appropriate. Conversely, offer positive feedback to group members for insightful remarks.

9. Obtain feedback about the session's immediate and long-range effectiveness. Immediate feedback involves spending the last few minutes of each session summarizing main points and gaining closure on your activities. How productive was the session? Was the time allotted sufficient? Was there a sense of equal participation? Are there topics that need further study either individually or by the group?

10. Good feelings after a study session do not necessarily translate into good grades. To evaluate the long-range impact of your group study, schedule a debriefing session soon after the instructor returns your exam or project. What did you do correctly and incorrectly? Reflect on past group sessions to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of each. How could the group be more effective in the future? If everyone's willing, compare grades. If all or most of you performed well, the value of group study speaks for itself. If the best of you obtained a mediocre grade in comparison with students not in your group, you might need to disband.

Reflection Question 7-4

Who are you in a group? A leader, a follower, or a facilitator? How can you change the way you approach group projects to make the experience more effective?

7.4e Partner Study

The purpose of group study is to help each other review, learn content, and solve problems. In partner study, the purpose is to simultaneously engage in *individual* productive study time *and* spend time with a friend or romantic partner. In partner study, you don't both have to be studying the same thing. Having a study partner can help you stay motivated, pace your progress throughout the evening, have fun during your study break, and keep you accountable. You and your partner should tell each other at the beginning of the session what you're hoping to accomplish and agree on a schedule. Determine details such as how long you'll study before you take a break, how long that break will be, and what you will do during your break.

7.4f Group Projects

Group projects can be a source of stress for college students who have experienced group dynamics that led to rushed deadlines, unequal participation, and poor products. However, group study can be good practice for your postcollege job experiences because, when implemented correctly, it contains several elements that are similar to effective team projects in business settings. You can do several things to work productively on a group project.

1. **Select members carefully.** If you are able to select the members of the group yourself, be cautious. Don't pick friends or roommates who are likely to let you down or rely on you to do most of the work.

2. **Be goal driven.** While the instructor sets the expectations for the project, be clear about the expectations and goals for the group. Is everyone on your team willing to put forward an A effort, or are there members who would be happy with a C?

3. **Create a schedule.** Divide up the different components of the project on a timeline that sets a completion date prior to the deadline so that you have time to practice your presentation and/or proofread your work. You might need some additional time at the end to make the written portion of your project more consistent and cohesive with a final edit. Your schedule should also indicate when the group will meet and what should be done at each of those specific meetings. If you go for long periods of time without meeting, set up a schedule to check in via email or social networking.

4. **Assign roles.** Be clear about who is doing what portions of the project, as well as what each person's role is in group meetings. Who is the leader, who will take notes, and who will be responsible for group communications and managing materials? For optimal results, be honest about everyone's strengths and assign roles accordingly, and be flexible.

5. **Establish a communication plan.** Be clear about how you will communicate and exchange contact information. If you have to meet regularly, it's essential that you can quickly and easily communicate with each other. Texting some members while communicating with others on social media can cause confusion and lead to no-shows. Your communication plan should also include how you are going to share files. Use Google Docs™, Dropbox™, Microsoft® SharePoint®, etc., so that you aren't dependent on the flash drive or email attachment of a single individual.

6. **Use library study rooms.** Most campuses have rooms set aside in the library for group study and group projects. If you agree to meet at someone's home and they cancel at the last minute, your whole group could end up scrambling for a location, getting started late, or not meeting at all. Schedule your meetings on neutral ground.

7. **Resolve conflicts.** Group projects can create stress and tension among classmates, particularly when someone isn't pulling their weight or if some members appear dictatorial. If conflict arises, use open-ended questions to ask how to get the project back on track rather than blaming one individual. Your goal is to complete the project on time with optimal results. You might have to take on an assertive leadership role to smooth over tensions that are getting in the way of productivity.

8. **Consult with your instructor.** If you don't understand the expectations for the project, get off track, or need help managing the interpersonal relationships of the group, consult with your instructor. They created the project and may have used it in previous semesters. They should have some insight on how you can get back on track, and it may help them assign grades if you keep them informed about progress and difficulties.

Done well, group work can help you learn how to negotiate with your peers, manage projects, and identify your own strengths and weaknesses as part of a team. Participating in a group might help you manage your own time and can provide you the opportunity to complete a project that's larger and more complex than you could tackle on your own. Your group members could turn out to be new friends and potential study partners as you continue to share classes and ideas throughout your college journey.

Career Connection

Group projects also occur in professional settings. As in college, in your career, you will be asked to participate in a variety of task forces, working groups, or committees that all involve contributing expertise around a common set of ideas and, in many cases, working together to produce something (be it a presentation or a product).

7.5 Connect to Campus

This chapter explored some of the general issues related to success in college: the college culture, course expectations, modes of instruction, and success during personal study as well as group study and group projects. Your campus has a variety of resources to assist you with more information about all of these important aspects of the college experience.

- *Student Life* The office of student life (or dean of students, campus life, etc.) can provide a memo to your faculty about missed classes, help you resolve a conflict with a peer, and serve as a listening ear if you feel overwhelmed. If you are faced with a violation of the Student Code of Conduct, this office will likely become involved. Their role is to serve as your advocate and educator during the process of adjudication.

- *Counselors, Advisors, Coaches, and Mentors* These individuals may be available on your campus to help you organize study times and construct ideas for group sessions. They are familiar with all of the campus policies, deadlines, and rules and can guide you in using the right processes to fit your individual needs. Visiting with a counselor, advisor, coach, or mentor to discuss the pros and cons of dropping a class is also time well spent.

- *Faculty* Your faculty is the core of your learning experience. Visiting your instructor during office hours to ask questions that arise during individual study can help you identify new strategies for approaching material and provide unique insights into that course. If you're struggling to complete a group project, consulting with them is a must.

- *Tutors and Supplemental Instruction Leaders* These individuals usually have expertise in leading study sessions when there's more than one person in the room. If you're having trouble maintaining your concentration or being productive during group study, these peers have the unique advantage of having positive and negative experiences doing those same things. Ask them what they are doing that works. These individuals may have received specialized training and can be very helpful.

7.6 Connecting Student Engagement to Your Career

A student often operates like a self-employed professional. To succeed in any occupation, you must learn how to simultaneously adapt to and engage in your workplace. This chapter explored several key areas for successful engagement in any setting: understanding the rules, policies, and guidelines; familiarizing yourself with the structure of the setting itself (in the case of a college campus, the classroom environment, modes of instruction, and syllabus); and figuring out how to work efficiently and effectively individually, in pairs, and in groups.

Paul's Note

Because I had neither been exposed systematically to learning skills in high school nor completed a course on the topic in college, I had to learn the many concepts covered in this chapter gradually or through trial and error. Had I thought of myself during college as the architect of my own future, as a developing businessperson or professional, I would have been much more proactive and less passive in mastering these contextual aspects: attending to registration policies, establishing a stronger relationship with my advisor, assertively creating a physical and mental environment for effective study, being selective with group study, and other topics discussed in this chapter. The lesson: Transform what you have learned about these topics into actions and your actions into habits—habits that promote success during college and later in your personal and professional life.

Rebecca's Note

I didn't really reflect or think much about how I studied, where I studied, or who I studied with in college. I just did it. After I graduated, I taught high school for a year and lived for the first time in an apartment, in a big city, by myself. To relax myself to sleep, I read every night. One year later I found myself in graduate school, in the office of my favorite professor, assuring her that I loved the readings but couldn't stay awake. She helped me reflect on my behavior, and we realized that I had trained myself to go to sleep as soon as I started reading. This was a recipe for disaster! She didn't really have any solutions but was a tremendous help in identifying the problem. I left the office upset but in solution mode. A few days later I remember that when I was in elementary school, I completed a read-a-thon and had learned to knit while I read. I was back in the car and off to the craft store. I knitted my way to success through graduate school and still use this technique to keep myself alert while reading. I have a little stand that collapses into my backpack that keeps the book upright, and I stop and annotate the text as often as I need to. I found this a major source of embarrassment until other faculty in higher education disclosed that they do the same thing!

Closing Comments

This chapter has covered a range of diverse territory related to the context of college, going to class, and the nature of studying. Familiarizing yourself with the written policies and expectations of your university will ensure a smooth experience that optimizes your chance of success. Similarly, understanding the expectations of individual faculty members through the course syllabus is a significant factor in your academic success. To meet each course's expectations, you'll need to study individually, with groups or a partner, and possibly complete group projects. Your time learning outside of class is something under your direct control. Using the effective strategies described in this chapter, you can be successful in every course, every semester.

Extend Your Experience

What, So What, and Now What?

1. *What* are the types of policies and deadlines you need to be familiar with? What are the elements of successful studying, both individually and in groups?
2. *So what* is the value of understanding policies, course expectations, and how to study for your academic success?
3. *Now what* will you do next to change the way you engage in your campus community?

SQSS Reflection

How is engagement related to the SQSS? Which of the seven qualities will be most helpful in participating effectively in group work? What about in understanding campus policies?

Your Campus Quiz

1. Where on your campus can you go to get information about enrollment deadlines? Where can you go for information about the mode of instruction of a course before you enroll?
2. What information do you need to prepare for an advising appointment focused on enrollment for next semester?
3. What might be hindering your help-seeking behavior and preventing you from getting support?

Case Study

Andrea is a chemistry major who is planning on attending dental school. Her grades are very important—she needs a high GPA for admission to dental school—and comprehension is important so she can get a high score on the Dental Admission Test (DAT). In her biology course, the instructor has assigned a group project. The group met only once to divide up the work and then again about 2 hours before the presentation to merge all of the slides. Andrea's slides were really well put together but some of the group members didn't put in much effort and one student didn't even show up. She is outraged that her grade will be affect by the other members' lack of effort.

1. Describe a better way for Andrea's group to have structured their project.
2. What campus resources could the group have used to get help? What campus resources should Andrea use now about her grade?

Projects

Project 7-1: Add/Drop/Withdrawal

1. Look up deadlines to add, drop, and withdraw from courses on your campus.
   a. Count the number of days from first day of classes to each deadline.
   b. Count the number of class meetings you have prior to your deadline for making decisions.
   c. How does seeing the number of days and classes sessions, rather than just the date, affect your thinking about these deadlines?
2. What are three things you should consider when deciding whether or not to add or drop a course?

Project 7-2: Study Environment

Fill in the study location table below with at least three different locations you could use to study. Using information contained in this chapter, note the pros and cons of each place in the table.

Location	Comfort	Distractions	Noise Level	Lighting	Suitable for Individual or Group or Both	Availability (Days/ Hours)

1. Looking at your locations, rank them in order from most ideal (#1) to least.
2. Why did you choose #1 as the best location for you?
3. Are there any aspects of the worst location that you could change? In other words, if you had to study there, how could you improve the situation so that you can be optimally productive?