Time Management

By Ashley Thornton

Your first semester is over. You have been checking on-line obsessively every five minutes to see if your grades have been posted. Maybe you guessed right on those multiple choice questions. Maybe the professors graded on a curve. Oh please let it be so! But no—one more click of the mouse and there they are—your first semester grades. Oh no! Your stomach turns over. Christmas vacation is not off to a good start.

Is this how you want your semester to end up? Of course not! But if that is NOT what you want, what DO you want? What is your GOAL? The first step to managing your time wisely is to set a goal. In college there are a thousand possible ways to spend your time and no one telling you what to do. That’s part of the fun of college, but it can also be overwhelming. Goals make it easier to decide how you will spend your time. If you don’t have a clear goal, you are much more likely to just “go with the flow” and more often than not, “the flow” is going the wrong way, for example, straight to the scene described above.

I suggest that you set a goal right now to ace your first semester at Baylor, to make straight A’s. Write it down. Post it on the wall over your bed. Commit to it. Tell your friends that this is your goal.

I recommend this audacious goal because, if you accomplish it, it gives you the maximum freedom to decide what you want to do next. Making straight A’s your first semester is like money in the bank. It puts you in a position of power. If you make bad grades your first semester you are in a hole, and it is harder to get out of a hole than it is to avoid it in the first place. Yes, there is a lot more to the college experience than just grades. But Baylor is a school, not a camp. Figure out how to get your grades first, and then figure out what else you want to do to round out your Baylor experience.

What does it take to make straight A’s? That brings us to the second step for managing your time wisely: make a plan.

You may have heard stories (and if you haven’t, you will) about students who can stay up all night partying, never crack a book, and still make all A’s. These stories are urban legends. Those people are about as common as alligators in the sewer systems, which is to say—they don’t exist. Success in college is about reading and then re-reading. It’s about writing and then re-writing. It’s about working all the problems and then working them again to make sure you understand them. In other words, it’s about putting in the time.

To achieve your goal of making all A’s your first semester you should count on spending two hours studying for every hour you spend in class. If you are taking 15 hours, that means 30 hours of studying a week. Chances are you won’t get those hours in unless you plan for them. So plan for them you must!
If you have never kept a calendar, now is the time to start. Go through your weekly calendar and block out all the non-negotiables: class times, work hours, etc. Then go through and block out your study hours for each class. Keep those hours consistent from week to week. Don’t re-decide every day when you are going to study, that gives you too much opportunity to decide not to study. Plan your other activities around those study hours. In fact, use your other activities as your rewards: “If I study Spanish for two hours, then I can go to the basketball game.”

Now you have a goal (Make all A’s your first semester) and a plan (block out two hours of study time each week for each hour you spend in class), the next step is to get help early.

In college you will most likely have fewer tests and assignments than you did in High School, but they each count for more. Your mid-term could be a third of your grade for the whole class. You can’t afford to wait until you have already done poorly on your mid-term to go and ask for help. Get help early.

Putting in the time studying is only half the battle; you have to make the time count. Don’t spend your precious study hours turning pages in your book and remembering nothing, or struggling with problems that you don’t know how to work. Maximize your study time by getting the help you need to make your studying effective. You may not have needed help in high school, but most people can benefit from help in college.

Here are three great sources of help at Baylor:

**Professors** - Go to class, get there on time, sit in the front, and turn your work in on time. If you will do those four things, most Baylor professors will bend over backwards to help you succeed. Take advantage of that! If you have questions, stop by during office hours and ask. Take the initiative. Meet your professors.

**The Paul F. Foster Success Center** – The Success Center is located in the Sid Richardson building. Remember this name: Trish Baum. Ms. Baum is the Resource Coordinator at the Success Center. Go to her. She will help you get the tutoring or study skills you need to accomplish your goal. Go early.

**Supplemental Instruction**—Better known as “SI,” Supplemental Instruction is extra instruction that is offered specifically for difficult classes. If you are taking a class that offers SI, you should plan to go to all SI sessions at least until the first test.

Ten years from now, you may not remember everything you learned in your classes your first semester at Baylor, but good time management habits will serve you well the rest of your life. These three time management steps will get you off to a good start: (1) set a goal, (2) make a plan and (3) get help early. Best of luck to you and blessings on your first semester at Baylor!

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