what every science student should know

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A survival guide for undergrads
How to Manage College Life

Time is what we want most, but what we use worst.

William Penn

The typical student arrives on campus excited and nervous about the coming year. He moves into his dorm room, signs up for interesting courses, makes new friends, and starts receiving invitations to join all sorts of extracurricular activities from mock trial to rock climbing. As the term goes on, he gets progressively more exhausted. He starts missing classes. His laundry starts piling up. A fuzzy black mold begins to grow on his shower curtains, and—to his horror—he doesn't know how to clean it. He feels as if he is spread too thin with classes, club events, and social obligations demanding his time and attention, but he is reluctant to drop any of his commitments due to a fear of missing out on novel experiences. Suddenly, at the end of the term, finals period rears its ugly head, and he focuses for days in a state of caffeine-fueled jitteriness only to find out that he scored much more poorly than he ever did.
in high school. Only then does he realize that he needs a new strategy.

College demands a different attitude toward work and play than what may have worked for you in high school. Academic expectations are higher, and you have more control over your life than ever before. This chapter and the next will help you adjust to a new pace of working by teaching you to manage your college life and prepare to excel in your STEM coursework. If you take these lessons to heart, you can avoid repeating this frequent college pattern by anticipating the challenges that you will face in college and planning accordingly.

Success: It's Personal

Comparison is the thief of joy.

Theodore Roosevelt

Before you set out to “succeed” in college, you need to define what that means to you. Is it earning good grades, conducting meaningful research, gearing up for a specific profession, or something else entirely?

Your idea of success may not be the same as that of your friends, your professors, or your parents. Take some time for self-reflection, sort out what is most important to you, and think seriously about what you would like to get out of college and in your career. One University of Michigan student whom we interviewed summed this thought up nicely: “Always proceed with the end in mind. Yes, you have time to figure out what you enjoy and want to go into, but it should bother you if you do not know where you expect to be after graduation. If you don’t have a plan, devote your spare time to figuring it out. It isn’t the smartest people who succeed in life, but the most
driven.” The sooner you figure out what your own goals are, the better you can decide how to get there and what you need to do during college.

You and your classmates come from a wide range of academic backgrounds—from inner-city public schools to prestigious preparatory programs. At the beginning of school, students will find themselves at different levels of readiness to tackle college work. In general, however, your college classmates will be more intelligent and driven than your high school peers; after all, that’s how they got to college in the first place. Moreover, your classmates will have different amounts of responsibilities in their lives. Some students may be earning money through work-study to pay for their education; others may be preoccupied with family obligations; still others will be free to devote their whole energy and attention to their classes.

Define success in college in a way that takes into account your educational background and responsibilities. Continually set short- and long-term goals that will leave you satisfied at the end of the day, term, and year. A goal is both a destination and an anchor: you have to chart out what success means for you before you can get there, and having your objective in mind will keep you from going adrift.

Regardless of where you place yourself in the spectrum of college preparedness, don’t let your assessment of your peers’ academic abilities lead you to doubt your own abilities or lure you into thinking that college is going to be a breeze. More so than anything else, your performance in class depends on your willingness to work hard. If you find yourself having less science background than some of your classmates, it may take some extra time and effort, but by keeping at it, you will catch up.
When you've decided what your goal is, write it down and post it in a location that will be visible to you: on top of your desk, on the door of your room, across from the toilet, wherever. Every time you feel discouraged, remind yourself of what you are working for and hold yourself accountable for realizing your goals. But don't psyche yourself into thinking that you have to stick to the first goal that you've set for yourself. College is a period for development, and you may realize what you wanted to accomplish more than anything as a freshman is no longer relevant for you during senior year. Be open to changing your destination, but always think about how you can get there.

**Students Say: How Can Students Find Their Own Meaning of Success?**

Know yourself and what you want to get out of your education. You can always make time for something if it is important to you. Also, know your limits, as it is always better to do a few things well than to do many things half-heartedly.

*Max, University of Minnesota, Goldwater Scholar, Churchill Scholar*

The most important part of being successful is finding something that really excites you and figuring out how to focus on that throughout your career. Explore as much as you can during your first few years of college and think about which aspects of what you explore grab you the most.

*Sam, University of Chicago, Goldwater Scholar, Rhodes Scholar*

Time management and your own definition of success in college accompany one another. If athletics and academics both matter to you, as they did for me, you will find a way to do both. What may seem like sacrifices to others, such as reduced social time, will be easy decisions for you if you have a strong, self-motivated sense of what matters. Developing this sense requires introspection. You can learn much about yourself by considering your own thoughts and embracing challenges. Do not be afraid to think for yourself and do not shy away from courses in other disciplines. You will only become more independent, resilient, and creative.

*Chris, Amherst College, Goldwater Scholar, Churchill Scholar*
For most of my life, I’ve defined success by how much I was living up to others’ (namely, [my] parents’) expectations, whether it was getting good grades or getting into a top whatever college. But having the freedom to do what I believed in and love in college has taught me to rethink my definition of success. Because no matter how happy other people are for you about getting into a prestigious school or taking on a crazy course load, if you are absolutely miserable and forced into doing something you don’t like, then what’s the point of being “successful” in other people’s eyes? This should be obvious, but the best scientists are not those who do it for the degree, money, or prestige, but rather the people who are truly passionate about the discovery-making process and contributing to the ever-growing world of scientific knowledge.

Melanie, Emory University, Goldwater Scholar

The Importance of Time Management

Time management is really a misnomer—the challenge is not to manage time, but to manage ourselves.

Stephen Covey

College will probably be the first time in your life that you have almost complete autonomy, with no one to tell you why eating microwavable burritos for breakfast, lunch, and dinner is a terrible idea. Such liberty can be exciting, but with all the new social and extracurricular opportunities of college demanding your attention, you may find it difficult to keep focused on your classes and your well-being. Because of this, the first step to transitioning into college is learning how to be independent, and a key part of that is learning how to manage your time.

In college, time spent in class is only a fraction of what it was in high school—perhaps as little as an hour or two in a given day. Attendance is rarely taken, especially in huge introductory lecture courses. Given this lack of supervision, it’s up to you to build some structure into your life to balance your academic, social, and extracurricular tasks.
The following section discusses time management methods that have worked well in our own experience and for the many successful STEM students whom we’ve interviewed. If you apply these techniques diligently, you will be well on your way to getting the most from your college experience. It will require discipline to establish this practice, but it gets easier with time and will be well worth it in the long run.

Every Term: Use a Planner
Get a planner and fill it with your short- and long-term goals and course assignments. As soon as you get your hands on your class syllabi at the beginning of each term, take the time to analyze them and jot down due dates for lab reports, projects, and tests for all of your classes, in addition to any important social obligations and fun events (e.g., birthdays, concerts, parties).

By understanding your schedule early in the term, you can pinpoint your “Hell Weeks,” those unavoidable stretches when you have to juggle multiple papers, tests, and other commitments. This way, you’ll know when you have to put in more work than usual and you can get yourself prepped for it in advance. Finally, list any personal or academic goals you have for yourself and make the time to achieve them. For instance, if you want to ace a particular course, set aside an extra chunk of your time before every major test and assignment to ensure that you will be able to focus on that class.

Physical planners and digital calendars are both good options to keep organized. A digital calendar like iCal or Google Calendar will let you set reminders before events (e.g., desktop notifications or auto-generated text messages). Do what works
best for you and stick to it; planners will keep you organized, prompt, and focused on your goals.

**Keep Track of Your Time**

In addition to filling out your planner for the academic term, plan your schedule on a weekly basis. Ask yourself how you can use each week to keep up with your classes, lead a healthy lifestyle, and still have time for fun. Take fifteen minutes every weekend and write down your academic, social, and personal goals for the coming week into your planner. How many labs, problem sets, and readings do you have this week? Would after class on Tuesday be most convenient to get lunch with your roommate? Do you need to do your laundry this week or can that wait until next week? Plan out your tasks every week, reviewing them each night or early morning to greet the new day with a sense of direction. Soon this type of thinking will become second nature.

A weekday schedule might look something like the following:

**Today’s TO DO List**

- 8:00 to 8:45 a.m.: Wake up and eat breakfast
- 8:45 to 9:45 a.m.: Preview and prepare for class
- 10:00 to 11:00 a.m.: Lecture #1
- 11:10 a.m. to 12:10 p.m.: Lecture #2
- 12:15 to 1:00 p.m.: Lunch and break #1
- 1:10 to 3:10 p.m.: Review lectures and solve practice problems
- 3:20 to 4:20 p.m.: Hit the gym
- 4:30 to 5:30 p.m.: Go grocery shopping
- 5:40 to 6:40 p.m.: Do laundry and review flashcards
6:50 to 7:50 p.m.: Dinner and break #2
8:00 to 8:50 p.m.: Attend club meeting
9:00 to 10:30 p.m.: Do practice problems and problem sets
10:30 to 11:30 p.m.: Break #3
11:30 p.m. Get ready for bed

Take note of two things in this schedule. First of all, much of the day is accounted for and there are buffer times between activities to account for time needed to get from place to place. Secondly, notice that free time is built right into the schedule; this way, you’ll be able to enjoy your breaks without feeling guilty or going overboard and shoving aside all the work you still have left. This schedule is comprehensive and covers the time that you spend in class, studying, sleep, meals, exercise, errands, and extracurricular activities. Careful planning will help you be focused when you need to work and relaxed when you need to rest.

That being said, you will almost certainly deviate from your schedule. Your problem set may be harder to solve than you’d expected, a quick dinner with friends may turn into a lengthy conversation, or you may just feel like you need a break. Leave some flexibility for the unexpected. At the end of each day, review your schedule, cross off everything you’ve accomplished, and reschedule anything you couldn’t finish for later. Figure out what kept you from getting things done (not having enough time, procrastination, etc.) and think about how you can avoid these pitfalls next time. Keep making your schedules for each day even if you don’t end up following them to the letter; writing down your schedule is an exercise in self-discipline and planfulness, not an attempt to tell the
**Divide and Conquer Any Task**

Whether it’s studying for a final, writing a paper, or planning the party of the century, simplify any task into a checklist of smaller mini-tasks and jot it in your planner or on a note card. Make each mini-task as simple as possible and set a deadline for each item on your checklist. The process of making the checklist will make you think seriously about how you can approach a given problem and will make the task—no matter how big—seem less overwhelming. The deadline for each mini-task will keep you on track and help you fit them in your daily calendar. Carry the list with you to remind yourself what still has to be done.

There’s also something deeply satisfying about checking off each mini-task as it is completed, but don’t just take our word for it! Here are a few examples of how you can take a complicated task and break it into measurable bite-sized pieces:

**Example Task #1: Organize a club dinner to raise funds for a charity**
- Get catering quotes from food vendors (10/5)
- Book venue from Facilities Department (10/6)
- Finalize programming for the dinner (10/9)
- Design and print out flyers (10/10)
- Send out email invitation to the campus and ask for RSVPs (10/11)
- Update food vendor with estimated food orders (10/18)
- Set up and run the event (10/23)

**Example Task #2: Study for the final**
- Review notes and briefly skim through the text (12/15)
- Review previous problem sets and midterm (12/16)
- Go to office hours to ask about questions that I haven't been able to figure out (12/16)
- Take practice final 1 and review answers (12/17)
- Take practice final 2 and review answers (12/18)
- Go to office hours to ask about questions that I haven't been able to figure out (12/18)
- Go over concepts that I still feel weak on (12/19)
- Take the test (12/20)

Example Task #3: Major research paper
- Pick a topic (1/20)
- Read 5 to 8 scholarly papers supporting the topic and keep a bibliography (1/21)
- Create comprehensive outline (1/22)
- Flesh out the outline (1/23)
- Finish first draft of paper (1/24)
- Major revision #1 (1/25)
- Major revision #2 (1/26)
- Ask friends for constructive feedback (1/26)
- Break (1/27)
- Major revision #3 + grammar check (1/28)
- Turn in the paper (1/29)

Optimize Your Work Time
Consider this scenario: It’s two hours before a quiz, and you haven't prepared for it at all. What do you do? Most likely, you crack open your notes and textbook, and you work intensely to try to cram as much information into your head as possible. With the clock biting at your heels, you absorb more in those two hours than you would in four or even five hours of your regular study sessions. Although cramming should never be a
part of your planned work regimen, this is the level of focused intensity you should aim for every time you study. Why should you spend four or five hours doing something you can do just as well in two?

When you sit down to study, squeeze as much work out of your time as you possibly can. This could involve working alone, going to the library, studying in groups, whatever it is that allows you to best concentrate on the material. If you don’t know what sort of setting will help you to be more productive, rotate through different study environments to see which one fits your learning style (more on this on chapter 3).

Many students like to listen to music or reruns of their favorite TV shows playing in the background when they study. They say this helps them focus, but to be honest, these are all distractions that bleed your concentration. Time and time again, research has shown that people can’t multitask as well as they think they can and are only really capable of doing one thing at time.¹ Good, efficient studying means you should be able to have complete focus on the material. In fact, for many students, any noise gets in the way of achieving optimal concentration. This is why some students use earplugs or other noise-cancelling devices. Try it out. You’ll be surprised at the amount of ambient noise you block out. There is a reason why many standardized test centers allow test takers to wear earplugs. Students want to block out the noise of the other test takers because this helps them put their absolute focus into the test. Why not do the same every time you study?

A final method for maximizing your study efficiency is to time yourself while studying. Set a timer for 50 minutes right before you start your work and promise yourself that as long as the timer is running you will do nothing other than study.
When the timer goes off, take a 10-minute break to go to the bathroom, get some water, or check your phone, and start preparing for the next 50-minute block of work. A solid, efficient hour of focus is preferable to three hours of problem solving while simultaneously checking email, using social media, texting, and watching videos. The timer will tell you to drop everything and work.

**Don’t Be Afraid to Say “No”**

One of the best things about college is the amazing variety of fun things to do. There are clubs and events to satisfy the most esoteric interests from soufflé baking to Indian classical music. Moreover, many of your new friends will be close by to do these things with you. You will see them in class, at the dining hall, and, if you live in a dorm, at home.

With so many exciting events and interesting people surrounding you in college, deciding how to spend your time can be an arduous task. There are only so many hours in a day, so you will need to prioritize between what you want to do and what you need to do. Your friends may come knocking on your door to invite you to a party at 11 PM. You may want to polish your fiery oratory skills on the college debate team. A professor may offer you a position as a teaching assistant (TA) in her class. In all these cases, you need to think carefully about whether you have the time for it. If you don’t, you need to be comfortable saying no, both to the person who has requested your time and attention and to yourself.

In our ever-connected lives, it’s hard turning down an interesting opportunity due to a Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “anxiety that an exciting or interesting event may currently be happening else-
where, often aroused by posts seen on a social media website.”

Because of FOMO, many college students stretch themselves too thin with clubs and commitments—becoming a jack-of-all-trades and a master of none. Treat your time like the precious resource that it is. Guard it carefully and spend it on the people and goals that matter most to you. It’s okay to try new things in college—in fact, college is the perfect time for that! But remember that you are first and foremost a student, so don’t feel left out if you have to say no to people in order to focus on your academics or on yourself. If you only have time for your schoolwork, your friends and family, and one or two extracurricular activities, this is perfectly fine.

Summary

- Keep track of your time
- Divide and conquer any task
- Get the most of your work time through sustained focus
- Don’t be afraid to say “no”

Use the four general points we’ve described above to be organized and efficient every day. This advice will ensure that you never miss a deadline. If you find yourself not accomplishing as much as you hope to, speak with an academic advisor, such as an undergraduate dean, an academically successful upperclassman, or your professors. You may need to re-allocate your time between your social, academic, and extracurricular commitments. Maybe you will find that you need to improve your study methods (a topic that will be explored in chapter 3). Above all, stick to your schedule and avoid putting off tasks that you can do right now.

We can’t emphasize enough how crucial it is to learn time
management as you start your college career. Successfully managing your time will enable you to maximize your productivity and imbue all your actions with a sense of purpose.

**Students Say: How Did You Make the Most of Your Time?**

The transition from a small town in East Texas to an urban academic environment was a bumpy one for me. It simply took a while to sink in that at a certain level one cannot play so many sports while maintaining good academic standing and fulfilling involvement in extracurricular activities. Specialization drives our world at the present, and I encourage you to keep in mind that if you spread yourself too thin, you risk jeopardizing the quality of each of your individual pursuits. So choose carefully what to invest in. Dedicate yourself to it and you will enrich those things most important and avoid being overwhelmed.

*Jonathan, Baylor University*

There are never enough hours in the day—and that's perfectly OK. What's important is to use the time you have efficiently because every minute counts. From biking instead of walking to going over those lecture notes while waiting for that gel to finish running in lab, the little things start to add up. There were days I'd spend more time in lab than in class, and it wasn't a huge deal because it helped me learn to adapt and work more efficiently with the little time I do have. Sometimes even I wonder how I survived going to morning classes, afternoon lab work, and evening rehearsals for my music major, but if I can do it then so can anyone else.

*Melanie, Emory University, Goldwater Scholar*

**Healthy Lifestyle for a Smarter You**

Physical fitness is not only one of the most important keys to a healthy body, it is the basis of dynamic and creative intellectual activity.

*John F. Kennedy*

Effective time management isn't just making enough time to study; it's also about allotting time for all the other essentials of a healthy life. Your body is like a car: the better you maintain it, the smoother the ride will be to your destination. Any goal
will be easier to tackle if you have taken care of your mental and physical well-being.

Studying will demand a significant chunk of your time in college, especially as a STEM major. However, don't forget to maintain a healthy lifestyle each and every day. Now is the time to start getting into healthy habits for the rest of your life, and this section explains why.

Get That Heart Rate Up
Doing well in your science courses requires more than just long study-maraathons at the library. While it may seem intuitive that devoting the full extent of your time to your work will improve your academic performance, physical exercise can provide a powerful boost to your studies. A 2011 article published in the Journal of Applied Physiology demonstrated that college students who exercised before class improved their test scores by an average of 17%. Moreover, exercise is correlated with higher IQ as well as better concentration when studying. While taking a break from the library to exercise may seem like a chore, the benefits to your schoolwork are real.

The US Department of Agriculture’s Choose My Plate program recommends two-and-a-half hours of moderate aerobic exercises or one-and-a-half hours of vigorous aerobic exercises each week spread over at least 3 days. Whenever you feel your attention slipping away, go out for a quick exercise. Compared to taking a nap or surfing the Internet, working out will let you feel more refreshed and more focused on your work once you return to your books.

In university gyms, you can always find students poring over their notes on treadmills or between sets. As we've mentioned before, people aren’t as productive with multitasking
as they believe, and letting your attention drift while pumping your muscles is a good lead-up to getting hurt. To get the most out of exercise, treat your workout as a break from work. In any case, with good time management skills, you won't even need to multitask. If you really are short on time, however, you can squeeze in some low-intensity studying, like listening to an audio recording of your lecture.

_Eat Well_

The stereotypical college student is prone to eating oily and salty meals—like mozzarella sticks or instant noodles—at odd hours. However, nutritional research links healthy eating habits with excellence in the classroom. More specifically, one study found that students who consumed the proper portions of vegetables, fruits, protein, and fiber performed better academically than their peers who did not.⁵

Eat three or four well-balanced meals every day to give yourself adequate mental fuel. We know you've heard this before, but breakfast is an especially important meal. In the morning, your body is starved of the nutrients it needs to operate at peak performance. If you don’t have the time, grabbing a granola bar or a fruit on your way to class is better than nothing at all. Doing so will help you wake up and have enough energy to last until lunch.

Finally, limit your alcohol intake. The Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study found that students who binge drink—defined as consuming “five or more drinks in a row for men and four or more drinks for women on one or more occasions during a 2-week period”—were more likely to miss class, fall behind on coursework, and get a lower GPA.⁶ Some students may consider drinking to be a significant part
of their college experience, but getting drunk or hungover on a regular basis won't do any favors for your academics.

**Get a Good Night's Sleep**

Sleep is an absolute necessity for doing well in college. One student whom we interviewed, Hongyu, a Goldwater Scholar from Dartmouth College, had this to say on the subject of sleep: "I stuck to a strict no-work policy after 10 p.m. This gave me pressure to finish work during the day, which improved efficiency, and led to fun, stress-free nights and healthy amounts of sleep." Getting enough sleep every day is essential for maintaining health and being productive in college. Unlike eating and exercising, poor sleep will affect you *quickly*. Heavy course loads may demand extra effort and in some cases even necessitate an all-nighter. However, try your best to set aside an ample amount of time each evening for sleep. Aim for roughly 7 to 8 hours of sleep a day, the amount the Centers for Disease Control recommends for adults.\(^7\)

Research (and hopefully common sense) suggests that sleeping adequately has significant benefits to both mental fitness and health. A study on undergraduates found that frequency and quality of sleep were among the main predictors of academic success, along with class attendance and past academic achievement.\(^8\) In fact, sleeping only 4 to 5 hours per night or going 24 hours without sleep results in a mental handicap similar to having a blood alcohol content of 0.1%.\(^9\) Consider that in most states, a BAC of 0.08% or more qualifies as legal intoxication. If you are sleep deprived, you won't be able to effectively absorb information, so, in reality, by investing in your sleep, you'll be saving time.

In an effort to stay up late into the night, many of your
peers might develop a dependency on soda, coffee, tea, or one of the many super-caffeinated energy drinks marketed as study aids for stressed-out students. If you can, get some sleep instead. When your body tells you that you’re tired, you should listen to it. Taking a quick nap or going to sleep a little earlier than usual is a much more sustainable and effective way to stay awake and focused later on.

**Make Time for Fun**

In addition to leading a healthy lifestyle, find time for fun. As important as being disciplined with your schoolwork is, it’s equally important that you make time for social and extracurricular activities.

You will be happier if you step away from your coursework now and then. Happier students tend to be not only more successful with their work but also more excited and enthusiastic to learn—they enjoy being students more. Also consider that your academic success will rarely ever be considered in isolation. In other words, no one—employers, graduate programs, your future boss, etc.—wants an academic automaton with a 4.0 GPA. They want a balanced, intelligent, and motivated individual who enjoys the things she does.

Cultivate connections and skills outside of your coursework by exploring the student groups and activities offered by your school—from club sports and volunteering to music ensembles and campus publications. College is a time to develop your existing interests and try out new ones. There are no “right” activities, only ones you will enjoy and find fulfilling.

But don’t go overboard with clubs, especially during your freshman year. As we’ve mentioned, you need to be stingy with your time. Many college organizations operate with little
to no oversight, meaning that students take on the bulk of the responsibility for arranging meetings and events. In addition, clubs will work at a much higher level than what you may be used to. For instance, while the debate team in high school may have been composed of enthusiastic amateurs, the debate team in college may be largely composed of distinguished veterans from their respective high school teams, many of whom are interested in careers like politics that require public speaking skills. Joining a student group in college can be a bigger responsibility than you may realize, so don't overcommit yourself, and say no if you need to. Participating in a couple of extracurricular activities that you are most passionate about is the best way to go.

Take Care of Your Mental Health

Even changes we want for ourselves in life bring fresh challenges, which require new skills and adaptations. Living on your own, working hard, adjusting to a new social environment, competing with peers, and planning for your career can be stressful even when you are happy and eager to be heading off to college. In short, college is stressful for everyone and even more so when some of the changes are unwelcome or even daunting.

The purpose of this book is to help you succeed as a science student. Anything that interferes with your ability to make the most of your time in college needs your serious attention. Your mental well-being is a frequently overlooked factor in your success. Most of us feel surprised to learn that 80 percent of college students surveyed report feeling “overwhelmed” by all they had to do in the past year and 45 percent have even felt things were “hopeless.”10
Our surprise is symptomatic of a crucial problem for college students: We are often ignorant of the degree and severity of stress that other college students experience because they are all too often endured silently and with a feeling of aloneness and stigma. Keeping stress to yourself makes more stress, which can contribute to a vicious cycle culminating in problems that can interfere with your academic and social life. More than 25 percent of all college students in any given year have been diagnosed or treated by a mental health professional, and a far greater number describe depression and anxiety as among the top impediments to academic performance.\textsuperscript{11} Fully half of all college students report feeling that anxiety is interfering with their academic success and 31 percent report feeling so depressed that it is difficult to function.\textsuperscript{12}

There are things you can do to minimize or prevent pressure from blocking your success. First and foremost, take good care of yourself. But sometimes that’s not enough. If you find that stress in college is causing you suffering or interfering with your academic or social functioning, it is imperative to break your silence and seek help. This could involve speaking with friends and family members or taking advantage of your college’s student health services or services in the surrounding community. You are not alone, and the worst thing you can do is to ignore your stresses and try to carry on.

Also, avoid socializing with people who tire you out, worry you excessively, or generally take your energy (“How do you think you did on the quiz? Did you get the same answer to #41 as I did?”). This will keep you more upbeat and focused of others.
Students Say: What Advice Do You Have for Having a Fun and Productive Time?

Be happy. Fill your life with things that make you happy. Efficiency drastically increases with happiness, along with sleep and a full stomach. Time management is important so you can have time to do the things you love without compromising sleep and food.

Xiaotian, Dartmouth College

In my experience, physical activity best combats stress. Even during exam period, after studying all day, I would always go to the gym before it closed at night. In addition to the well-documented positive effects exercise has on one’s mental and physical state, working out also gave me a moment of respite from all other pressures. The hour I spent working out made the next four hours twice as productive and half as stressful.

Chris, Amherst College, Goldwater Scholar, Churchill Scholar

Get involved with extracurricular activities that you enjoy; don’t lose track of your passions. Surround yourself with people who can help you out and make you feel great.

Vanessa, University of California, Riverside

Take time to be with friends—it is great to have a support network and to have fun! But also keep in mind you are in college to get an education and are paying a lot for that, so keep your partying in check.

Sara, Yale University

Lots of students like to brag about how little sleep they get, as if it somehow legitimizes their effort. Don’t join in their game. Know how much sleep you need, and get enough every night. If you prioritize your sleep, your grades will show it.

Max, University of Minnesota, Goldwater Scholar, Churchill Scholar

Conclusion

College is more than a degree factory. For many, it’s a place to find out more about themselves, explore their interests, and
learn about the wider world. You will be inundated with opportunities, and you will probably find yourself juggling obligations to your family, friends, academics, and other activities. College will be exciting and rewarding but also mentally and physically draining at times. Exercising, eating right, sleeping well, having fun, and tending to your well-being will help you get the most out of your student experience.