Your Road to Academic Success: A Guide for Students

University of Wyoming
Each year, the University of Wyoming admits well over a thousand new freshmen students based primarily on high school grade point averages and standardized test scores. Years of experience indicate that these scores tell us which students have the academic background and intellectual ability to succeed at UW. And trust me, every student admitted to UW has the potential to succeed.

But our experience also tells us that many new freshmen will struggle with the new demands of college life. Learning and studying in college is different than it was in high school. All of those apparent hours of “free time,” really aren’t, and some students will not earn the grades necessary to continue at UW. Other students will choose not to continue at UW because they fail to integrate into the campus community. Why does this happen? Make no mistake, we want you to succeed, and we will do everything we can to support your efforts, but you must do the work.

This guide provides practical, real world advice about what it takes to succeed at UW or any college or university, for that matter. Take this advice to heart. Keep your eye on the prize. You are here to get an education. Others measure your success by the grades you earn or the degrees you receive. We measure your success by what you learn. It isn’t about getting a degree; it’s about getting an education. That will happen in the classroom, and that will happen in the co-curricular activities in which you choose to participate.

Get engaged and take advantage of all of the great educational opportunities here at UW. I promise you—it will change your life for the better.

Thomas Buchanan
President, University of Wyoming
Welcome to the Academic Success Guide!

You’re on the road to academic success—and this is your map! This guide will give you a glimpse of your first semester at UW and offer some helpful tips for making your college experience an all around success. When we talk to first-year students in their second semester, students identify the same “bumps” that they encountered when they first came to campus. The biggest of these challenges include

- balancing all the parts, social and academic, of a busy life,
- keeping up with the heavy reading and homework college classes require, and
- managing the fast pace of material in classes.

But college isn’t always about drastic changes; students also talk about the friends they’ve made, the groups they’ve joined, and the experiences they’ve loved in classes—moments that help them discover a direction for their interests and future careers.

So who are we? LeaRN is a program devoted to helping students transition into college and get the most out of their experiences. April Heaney, our director, has been teaching at UW for thirteen years, and is always busy thinking of new ways to help our freshmen get engaged during their first year. Jessica Willford came to campus as a freshman and liked it so much, she never left. She is LeaRN’s program and project coordinator.

Our guest writers include Mary Aguayo, assistant director of Admissions and coordinator of Orientation and UW’s campus visit programs, David Cozzens, Dean of Students and former director of the UW Counseling Center, and Richard Miller, assistant director of the Center for Advising and Career Services.
Your Road to Academic Success

Table of Contents

1. Big Ideas: What Helps and What Hurts 4
2. Freedom! 5
3. The First Four Weeks 6
4. Wellness and the College Student 8
5. Advice for A’s 10
6. Finding a Major You Love 13
7. Advising Tips 15
8. If You Slip 17
9. Thoughts from Faculty (4 testimonials) 20
   Thoughts from Students (4 testimonials) 28
10. Academic Resources 35
Big Ideas From This Guide

What Hurts & What Helps

**What Hurts**

**Missing class** for sleep or to work on other classes.

**Getting sucked into excessive alcohol and partying.** A good rule of thumb: have fun, but don’t make it your first priority.

**Becoming addicted to video games.** If you find that you have mentally chained yourself to your gaming console and can’t tear yourself away to go to class or study, that’s not good! It’s remarkable how many students report that video games were the biggest obstacle to their success or ability to stay in college. Set limits for your time spent on video games.

**Keeping problems to yourself until it’s too late.** If you’re struggling with anything in or outside class, talk to someone early… a teacher, the Counseling Center, LeaRN—or anyone you’ve met on campus who you connect with.

**What Helps:**

**Pursue an education,** not just a college degree. A degree may get you a job, but it won’t expand your interests, deepen your understanding, or develop your mind.

**Balance** school, work, and extra-curricular activities. After the first few weeks of the semester, map out a typical week on paper (day-by-day) to see how you might use time better and what might need to be cut.

**Get an early start** on class assignments, reading, and studying for quizzes/exams. **73%** of top students at UW name “starting early” as one of the key factors to their success.

**Attend class.** Don’t fall into the spiral of missing class → missing class → missing class → failing class. After missing several times, it’s easy to lose your motivation to go to class, and then the habit of attending slips away. Some students don’t want to show up after missing too often, and then attempt to “make things right” at the end of the semester. By this time, it is too late!

**Duh…do your homework!** Homework doesn’t just mean completing assigned problems. It means reading, taking notes, writing papers, **and** completing assignments. Every semester, college teachers give failing final grades to students who simply don’t make the time or put forth the effort to do the work.

**Get to know your professors.** That professor may seem intimidating in class, but visit them during office hours and you’ll find a person who wants to know more about you and help you out.
Freedom! It’s a word that conjures many visions. For you, I’m sure it’s one of leaving your family behind as you venture towards the next chapter of your life—college. We have seen this year after year at Orientation as incoming students arrive on campus and consider life on their own. However, it is important to recognize that a good deal of responsibility goes with that independence. I’d like to share a few time-tested tricks from our current students about living life on your own here at UW. If you go into your freshman year with these in mind, you’ll come out ahead.

- Keep track of your schedule—get a planner and write every due date from every syllabus in it the first week of class.
- Don’t get behind—with the amount of assignments and tests college students have, you can’t afford to blow ANY off.
- Get to know your professors—act like an adult and they’ll acknowledge that you are one. Talk to them when you’re struggling in or outside class, and definitely visit office hours.
- Pick a club or student organization to join—don’t get in over your head, but college is a great opportunity to meet others and engage in what you’re passionate about.
- Eat and sleep—just because you don’t have to doesn’t mean you shouldn’t! If you are missing class because you’re worn out, pick a more reasonable bedtime and stick to it.
- Find friends, both in and outside resident hall life, who “make you better” as a person and a scholar.
- Moderate or eliminate distractions—all those parties seem like fun right up until you fail out of school.
- Work a job no more than 15 hours per week—research shows that students who work up to 15 hours per week actually have greater academic success. With more than 15 hours, though, the results can turn the other direction.¹

Finally, no matter what you do or don’t do, there is somebody on campus who cares about you. The bottom line is this: if you need help, ask for it. That is truly the secret to success in college.

The way students divide and spend time in the first 4-5 weeks of their first semester in college has proven to stay consistent throughout the semester—and sometimes throughout their academic career!

However, the way you might spend time in your first few weeks often does not match with the habits that will help you succeed later in the semester. This is especially true when it comes to blocking out chunks of time for schoolwork. While the first four weeks can feel very manageable, instructors tend to structure the semester on a scale that ramps up as the semester goes on—with increases in workload at mid-semester and final periods.

The following chart gives a picture of a common semester workload. This chart is based mostly on student perceptions and syllabi from a handful of first and second year courses:

After looking at this chart, it may not surprise you to imagine that your energy will probably dip after mid-semester, and you may feel overwhelmed and discouraged. By the time the last two weeks of the semester come, many students have run out of steam and give up the chance to perform well on the final exam or project.

**Common first semester workload**

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<td>No work</td>
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<td>Moderate work</td>
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<th>Weeks in the semester</th>
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**setting off**
I want to encourage you to be purposeful about setting your habits in the first weeks of the semester. In our interviews with second-semester students, we ask them for advice for new students. Invariably, we hear these words over and over: “I would tell new students to schedule in homework time every week.”

Don’t listen to the low-key flow of the first few weeks—set habits around the crazy future that lies in front of you. When you come to campus, begin by mapping out a typical week and blocking out several hours every day for schoolwork. Use the time you have between classes to work on homework and review.

When things are slow in the first few weeks, use this time to get your planner in order and jump ahead in class readings and projects. When the madhouse time hits, you will already have steady school-time set aside, because you set the habit at the beginning of the semester.

► When instructors are covering the syllabus in the first week, write down 3–4 things at the top of the syllabus you think could be important (absence policy, late-work policy, assignment guidelines). Teachers won’t cover this information again, and it will make it easier to pay attention after the fourth teacher hands you a syllabus.

► Be careful about the habits you set in the first several weeks—this is the window of time to make “putting school first” a lifestyle.

► Anticipate that school will get tough at midterm and toughest during finals. Get to know your instructors in the first few weeks, and ask them to share some advice about how to do well in the class.

► Update lists of things to do daily.

► Don’t wait until 11 or 12 at night! Schedule time to do schoolwork, especially in the time between classes when you could head to the library (instead of to your room). Staying on campus to work has saved many students from time management troubles.
Among the possible goals of each college student, one that should be at the top of the list is to work on “wellness.” Wellness is made up of at least six domains:

- **Intellectual:** giving your academic course-work its “due.”

- **Occupational:** remember that your occupation while in college is being a student; eventually it will entail your chosen job or profession and its importance in your life.

- **Emotional:** our ability to experience the full-range of emotion, from joy, to sadness, to anger…so that we are not stuck in any one or two emotions.

- **Interpersonal:** having good social support from friends and family, and feeling a good connection to people.

- **Spiritual:** our spirit needs regular sustenance which may include doing something for others (e.g. community service), being part of a religious group, connecting with a larger purpose than self, finding meaning.

- **Physical:** getting adequate sleep, nutrition, exercise, etc.

We spend our lives in differing levels of balance with these domains. When we aren’t doing well it is often because we haven’t taken care of ourselves in one or more of these areas. The more you intentionally seek to find balance among these domains the more likely you will find success and health…or wellness.

This search for balance is a very important aspect of your college life as well as your successful life after college. The following are indicators that you may be out of balance: feeling disconnected to yourself and/or others, getting sick a lot, using substances to feel okay, failing in your coursework, feeling hopeless, not knowing where you are headed with your life, etc. If you are concerned about how you are doing with wellness, there are a number UW services you might check-in with: University Counseling Center, Student Health Service, Campus Recreation, Center for Volunteer Service, LeaRN program…to name a few (all of these services are free to students).
Wellness is about much more than cold & flu season. Being “well” is equally important for your intellectual, emotional, interpersonal, spiritual, occupational, and physical domains.

When things are going downhill in any of these domains, it can affect all of the other parts as well. Being aware of how you’re doing in each area can help you identify when something is wrong, and where it’s most likely coming from.

Don’t underestimate the importance and value of talking to someone close to you about everything—good, bad, and downright frustrating—that you’re going through.

Be alert to the signs that you might need help: talk to a teacher or someone you trust, and consider calling one of the resources on campus.
Students often lament that college classes can include only three exams for a total grade, that a speech in college might involve only a week’s notice, or that the pace of learning a language moves at lightning fast speed. The level and amount of reading and writing you do in college will probably also be much more than you’re used to. Students and teachers testify that sitting near the front of the room can actually make a big difference in your success in the class—as well as visiting the teacher at least once during his/her office hours. The following section gives advice for two of the most challenging “sides” of college work.

### Reading/Writing/Thinking

1. **Develop your mind—put in the time.** In general, college instructors are not out to shape your opinions. What they *do* hope to see in your class participation and written work is a willingness to grapple with new ideas, to explore, to reach new insights that you didn’t see before—not just reciting what you’ve read or heard in class. This takes more time than superficial thinking. So, it’s crucial to start assignments right away rather than waiting until the night before (it can help to set your own individual due dates before the instructor’s assigned dates). Also, read everything on the syllabus—this takes discipline, but believe me, you will see the rewards! Meet with the instructor to talk over and discuss your ideas. To sum up: take risks with your thinking, accept big feedback, push yourself.

2. **Write in your books.** It’s encouraged at college! You will remember more than double the information if you write brief notes in the margins of what you read. Jot notes to yourself that highlight the point of the paragraph (in your own words), talk back or agree with the author, and mark important ideas. Create symbols, such as question marks or exclamation points that point to key sentences. Underlining/highlighting alone won’t do much for you, but scribbling notes on the page as you read will help enormously when you go back to study the material.

### Studying for Exams

1. **Use dead-time when you study.** Dead time means no cell phone, no internet, no TV, no computer/video games. The power of the “avoidance cycle” leads us to use a cell phone or the internet to escape from the...
Keep the following 7-day study plan in mind (although some exams will need more than one week of preparation). Study a maximum of 2 hours at a time per subject, and attend any review sessions offered during the week.

**Day 1:** Organize all your notes, handouts, and materials you’ll need to cover. Check to see if anything is missing. Prioritize what will be most important to study through what is least important to study. Divide your study materials into at least three sections (sometimes the teacher does this automatically through the course units—you might divide by date, topics, etc.). You can also break this down by “lecture notes” and “book notes.” *Some students re-write or re-type their class notes at this point; others find this strategy unhelpful.

**Day 2:** Study/review all the materials for the first section you identified, both in the course book(s) and in your own notes. (If you are breaking things down by lecture/book, study one or the other).

**Day 3:** Study all the material in the second section.

**Day 4:** Study all the material in the third section (if relevant).

**Day 5:** Meet with a partner or small group to compare notes, formulate possible test questions, and quiz each other. Review ALL material.

**Day 6:** Study/review your weakest sections.

**Day 7:** Study/review ALL material, possibly with a group.

**Tips:** Think positively! Get a full night’s sleep the night before an exam. Eat light, and eat healthy (choose oatmeal and fresh fruit, not cold pizza and Gatorade) before the exam to keep the blood circulating to your brain. And, **most importantly, spend 5-10 minutes after difficult classes reviewing your notes, and 30 minutes each week reviewing the whole week’s notes.** This will make a BIG difference in your ability to ace the material and study effectively.
work because it’s difficult, and it’s not always fun. We all know that starting work on something is the hardest part! Schedule homework times during the week (if it can be the same time every week, even better).

**Don’t go back to your room between classes.** Go to a place where you will have the best conditions for you to work, and knock out an hour or two of “dead-time” homework. If you can’t take the silence, play some music. You might even consider listening to Mozart. Studies show that listening to Mozart can enhance intellectual functioning!\(^3\) At the end of the day, you can kick back and really enjoy your guilt-free leisure time.

2. **Start studying at least a week before an exam.** One of the biggest mistakes students make when it comes to studying is trying to do all the studying the night before. One night of studying—even two—will not be enough to do well on an exam. Instructors are often looking for two things when they give exams: your ability to store information, and your ability to apply information to brand new scenarios. Storing information involves starting one-to-two weeks in advance, and studying material in chunks (rather than trying to study everything every time you study). Studying far in advance will also help you to internalize the concepts, so that when you encounter a new kind of question, you can better apply the material.

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A reminder that successful students:

- Sit in front 1/3 of the classroom
- Attend class no matter what
- Visit the teacher outside of class at least once
- Put in the time to develop insightful approaches to assignments
- Study for exams 1-2 weeks in advance
- Study material in chunks
- Review notes right after class
- Turn off cell phone/TV and nix the internet during homework
Finding a Major You Love

By April Heaney, LeaRN Director

One of the key parts to finding a major you love is to be flexible. It’s easy to be seduced into choosing a major for reasons that don’t mesh with your own interests and strengths. Parents, friends, the promise of a certain paycheck, and many other outside influences can play a large role in the major you start with in college. Think carefully about your choice in the first year of the program. Consider why you’ve chosen this path. Find out (in plenty of detail) about the lifestyle that accompanies this career. How do the working environment, hours, travel, range of tasks, etc. suit your personality and future plans? This includes where you want to live, how much variety/challenge/opportunity for advancement you need, and how a typical day on the job suits your strengths? Most important: talk to people who are in this career about what it takes and what kind of personality and interests make a strong match.

If you come to college as an undeclared major, you will quickly find that a favorite question for many people (teachers, staff, other students…) is “what is your major?” In other words, you may feel that you should have a declared major, and that in some way you’ve done something wrong by choosing not to declare a major immediately. Keep in mind that studies show that undeclared majors actually earn their degree in a shorter time and tend to drop out of college at a lower rate.⁴

Whether declared, undeclared, or on the fence about a major, when you do find a major that suits you, don’t give up! Don’t worry how long it takes to get a degree, become intimidated by difficult classes, or surrender to peer/family pressure to turn back. Re-take classes if you have to, take all the help that is offered, and keep a concrete picture of the final result in your mind. No matter what, keep moving forward.

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If you find yourself needing help with settling on a major, the Center for Advising and Career Services has career counselors who will meet with you one-on-one to determine your interests and strengths and the fields that may be a strong fit for you (including a personality questionnaire that will help pinpoint some career possibilities). They also have many resources, such as a webpage that connects majors with potential careers. You can find their website at www.uwyo.edu/CACS/.

**TRAVEL TIPS**

- Be open-minded about possible majors when you come to campus and throughout your first year(s).
- Don’t feel shy about telling people if you’re undeclared. A large percentage of UW students change majors several times, the average nearly three times per student.  
  
- If you find your perfect match in a major, don’t let the time it takes to get the degree, tough classes, or peer/family pressure turn you back.
- If you need help thinking about your options, contact the Center for Advising and Career Services for an appointment—they will help you determine where your strengths lie and which paths might suit you: www.uwyo.edu/CACS

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Advising time will roll around just after mid-semester in fall and spring semesters (typically late October and late March). It’s important that you find out who your advisor is (if you don’t already know) and contact the major department to find out how advising is handled in that department. Some departments will have you make an appointment to see your advisor DURING advising week, and some will have you wait until a date closer to your registration date. Students register based on their class standing. Seniors first, then freshmen, followed by juniors and finally sophomores. Some groups such as Honors students and athletes are given priority registration and are allowed to register before seniors. Most department advisors post a sign-up sheet on their office door.

If you have declared a major, your advisor will probably not contact you to set up an appointment—this is your responsibility. Some department advisors expect you to meet with them during advising week. If you wait until after, you are cutting into their time (and they are busy!) so they may get a bit grumpy. College of Arts & Sciences has a new policy of advising students based on registration date and not advising week. Students should contact their A&S Advisor roughly one week before their registration date to set up an appointment. Registration date and time can be found in WyoWeb in the “Student Resources” tab under the “Registration Status” link in the “Registration Tools” box.

If you are an Undeclared major, the Center for Advising and Career Services (CACS) will usually send out an email reminding you to call or use an online scheduling application to set up an appointment. CACS also uses a “staggered” advising approach and will schedule advising appointments based on your registration date.

Your advisor (or the department’s main office staff after your advisor has signed the course request form) will give you your PERC number that you need to register for classes online. Your advisor will also help you to figure out a schedule that includes classes you need and classes you just want to take. Many students give little thought to their schedule before they meet with an advisor—this is not a very good approach. When it comes to class times (scheduling classes close together or not, in the morning or not, etc.) and how much difficulty you can handle in one semester, you know your needs best. Remember to balance your course load so you don’t take more than two high difficulty courses at a time.

The advising appointment may feel like a whirlwind, so it’s important to come prepared. Look carefully ahead of time at your requirements—for both the University Studies Requirements (USP) and your major (if you have one). All the requirements for your major are listed in

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6 PERC: Personal Electronic Registration Code; a 6-digit number that you will enter to clear the Advisor Approval hold prior to registering for each term.
the Degree Evaluation. It shows the specific requirements for the department, college and university. You can look at your Degree Evaluation online on WyoWeb. The link for the Degree Evaluation is also located in the “Student Resources” tab in the “Registration Tools” box. Look at the course catalog to see which classes might fulfill these requirements and check the course descriptions in the UW Bulletin (it’s in your Student Resources tab in WyoWeb). Remember that it’s a good idea to satisfy the first-year USP requirements in the first year rather than waiting until you’re a senior! Coming to your advising appointment with a preliminary class schedule saves time for discussing other concerns with your advisor—such as where to go for assistance if you are not doing well in a course or choosing a class that will benefit your future goals or tie in well with your major.

Most importantly, ASK A LOT OF QUESTIONS. Don’t leave the advising appointment until you are completely clear and satisfied with what’s been discussed. If you are not clicking with your advisor, talk to the office staff in your department or to the Center for Advising and Career Service staff (if you’re Undeclared) about switching advisors. Many students also talk with advanced students in their major and professors for additional advice.

Know that you can meet with your advisor any time during the semester to talk about challenges or plans for the next semester. Pay attention when advising time rolls around and make an appointment with your advisor. For students with a major, the advisor will most likely have a sign-up sheet on his/her door the week before advising week. For Undeclared majors, the Center for Advising and Career Services will send an email reminding you to call for an appointment.

The advising appointment basically has three parts:

1. Prepare ahead of time by looking at your WyoWeb degree evaluation for the USP and major (if relevant) requirements, looking through the online class schedule, and putting together a rough schedule. Avoid scheduling more than two high-difficulty courses in one semester!

2. Go to your advising appointment, polish your schedule, talk about any areas of confusion—get your PERC number.

3. Before registering online, make any final adjustments, check for mistakes you or the advisor might have missed. Register online (advisors cannot register for you).
If You Slip

By Jessica Willford, LeaRN Program, UW Learning Community Coordinator

You never want to expect the worst, especially when so many great things are going on: new school, new classes, new freedoms, new responsibilities. The truth is, college is hard, and you may find yourself starting to slip. Even really good students who have a plan for everything can stumble.

There are thousands of ways to lose your balance in college: when you get your first exam back and it’s covered in red, when staying in bed seems infinitely easier than going to your 8 a.m. class, if your high school relationship goes downhill… attending classes can start to seem like the least of your worries. Suddenly you have that choking sensation that you are losing control of things. What do you do if you start to slip?

Common signs you may be slipping

- You opt not to go to class because you haven’t done the reading/papers/homework
- You opt not to go to class because you’d prefer to do something else (video games, zone out watching Netflix, do homework for another class)
- You sit in the back of the classroom, hoping that your instructor won’t notice you
- Your instructor insists you visit him/her during office hours
- You have to ask your neighbor what’s going on
- You sit in class texting/reading the paper/eating/watching YouTube, etc.
- You continuously ask for extensions on readings/papers/homework
- You haven’t looked at the syllabus in weeks

If you think you’re starting to slip, even if you have an inkling, a nagging feeling: don’t wait. We meet with so many students who had that same feeling, but didn’t act. They waited, either because they felt things would work out by themselves, or didn’t want to admit things were becoming unstable. Remember, the longer you wait, the harder it will be to set things right.

First: go talk to your professor. In high school, “going to the office” meant you were in trouble. Not so in college. Going to visit your professor during his/her office hours or sending them an email means you’re developing a relationship. By letting your teachers know what’s going on right away, they will be more willing to help you if things go terribly awry. Your instructors want to help you succeed.

Second: Identify what it is that is hindering your success. If it’s partying, then cut back on that. If it’s studying, then change the way you study (see our Advice for A’s section). If it’s time management, buy yourself a planner and stick to it.
If You Slip

Set your alarm and actually get up. Arrange specific times in your day to study, eat, exercise. The easiest part is writing it down in your planner. The hardest part is doing it...but you didn’t get into college on looks alone, did you? You can do it, and if you do, you’ll find a marked (positive) change in your college experience.

Sometimes you can’t fix it on your own, and if that’s the case, the Counseling Center on campus is available for you. The Center is free for all students, and covers all kinds of problems that interfere with academic progress: daily living, adjustment to university life, substances, or relationship issues. They do this through individual, group, or couples counseling, crisis intervention services, or brief problem solving sessions. The UCC Professional Staff are trained in helping students cope more effectively with the stresses that interfere with their academic progress. You can contact the UCC by visiting their website (www.uwyo.edu/ucc), calling them at (307) 766-2187, or dropping by (341 Knight Hall).

Third: Realize that you are certainly not alone. Almost every student will struggle in the first year, and it doesn’t mean you won’t be successful in college if you’re having a hard time right now.

► It’s better to get a “W” (Withdraw) on your transcript than an “F.” If you’ve fallen behind and it’s impossible to catch up (your professor will tell you if you ask!), then be aware that you have options. You may have to apply for a special withdraw if you’re past the Withdraw Date. You can do this with the Office of the Registrar.

► Tell your professors the truth. They know every excuse in the book. Believe me, telling them that you’ve fallen behind and you need a couple more days on the paper is much more believable (and appreciated) than telling them that your dog ate your USB drive.

► Don’t get discouraged by that one person you see who is excelling at everything, successful in all their classes, doesn’t have to study, or read their papers, or go to class. They are not always the best student, and may not be getting everything they could out of college.

► Talk to your RA, if you don’t want to talk to anybody else. They’re there to support you!
The simple truth is that students come to college for very different reasons. Some enter college to go after a dream job or explore a beloved discipline, to follow family advice, or to just figure out the next step. Whatever your own reasons for coming to college, I urge you to take a moment to imagine what you hope will be “highlights” of your college years. Often, these are not what you might at first expect! What subjects or courses could you imagine exploring—even beyond the field you’ve chosen? What interests or skills do you want to develop for your life? Would you consider joining a club or student organization, spending a semester at another school in the U.S. or abroad, participating in student government, or doing community service? If you’ve never felt it before, this is your opportunity to redefine your scope. The next four or five years you spend in college belong to you. Get involved! Discover what you love.
Emily Hind, Spanish

On grades

What I know now is that grades don’t even really matter that much, and so if I had only been able to talk to myself as a freshman, I would have said, you learned this information. And you’ll remember it when you’re 35, which is how old I am now. You’ll still remember a lot of it, because you worked so hard. And no one cares what the grade is. You’re here to get skills and not a GPA.

On time management

I don’t think students really understand the relationship between one hour in class, and three hours outside of it (although some of my colleagues think one or two hours) for studying and preparation. I think students should shoot for three, and if it takes less than that, great, but three…if you don’t have time for three hours outside of class for every hour in class because your job, or whatever else is taking up your time, it’s too intense. I think that when students are working that first semester, they can’t keep focus. I think the time element is what they don’t understand.

On what she wished freshmen knew

I don’t think new students understand how accessible professors are, particularly at the University of Wyoming. People just don’t take advantage of it. I’ve asked students: come and see me in my office. But it takes something that they needed help with, some specific thing that they need before they come in. They won’t do it just because I ask them to.

On dealing with a tragedy

Don’t be afraid to show your stress. I understand personal problems, and I think sometimes just talking about it makes a student feel better. If there’s been a death in the family, or something similar, I always say, take time to grieve. You need to take some time off, and I don’t expect you to meet the deadlines. People miraculously perform well after that. They just need to hear that it’s OK to be upset and non-functional. And then they come back and they do a fine job. I’ve only had one student who didn’t. I learned that from a professor who said it to me. Take time to grieve.
On common struggles

Come in willing to make mistakes, because you can’t learn if you aren’t willing to make mistakes. Come and talk to me after class in my office. Listen to other students; you’ll learn more when you talk than when I do.

Advice for students

Seriously consider study abroad, because that’s a really important component of undergraduate education in general, and I especially think that going to a country that doesn’t speak English is key to finding out who you are and what you can do in extremely stressful situations. You’ll come back with a different view of life forever.

I think that students have the idea that they can wait, that later after they graduate that then, somehow magically the opportunity will arise, and I think it’s important to repeat that no matter how little time and money you have now, you’ll have less in the future.

To prepare for studying abroad, you’ll need to start planning at least year ahead of time. Consider going in your junior year, and consider going for one year – your experience will be vastly superior than going for only one semester.

If the goal isn’t set high, the students aren’t going to work hard.

Past success in classes doesn’t always predict future performance.

It is difficult to leave your parents be on your own. The difficult part, I think, is establishing an entirely new social network. It’s not easy.

Students really pick which way they’re going to take, which fork in the road. Cause there’s the fork where you work really hard, and you memorize it all- and then there’s the other way, where you come in and complain about the grade, but you haven’t done the work.

I think the students at the University of Wyoming are so respectful and hardworking. I get some extraordinary students, just extraordinary people.
Nyla Bailey: Political Science

On being successful in your first semester

I have a list. First, come to class. Second, do your assignments. Third, get to know your faculty members. And finally, be involved with your classmates.

Make sure you know your teachers if an emergency comes up, a death occurs in the family, you end up being sick and you’re out of school, or something happens at home and you’re called back. If your instructor is aware of who you are, and is made aware of the situation, they’re generally willing to support you. Please don’t think your faculty member is up there on a pedestal and you’re not a person. Even in big classes, you’re still a person and life happens.

On what she wished freshmen knew

I wish students knew how important their education really is. There’s a lot of money involved in a college education, there’s a lot of time invested, and I wish they realized that down the road this education is going to be priceless.

On confidence

In my students’ first writing assignment, they’re asked to answer a question about American democracy, and those papers are traditionally filled with “My dad said,” “My mom said.” “My grandpa says” which is as it should be. The writing speaks volumes about the respect for family.

When the middle of the semester arrives and they have to do another writing assignment, I start to see, “well, this is what I think…is it OK?” I am impressed with the knowledge that students have, and I’m happy when they venture out of their comfort zone to express their thoughts.

Once students become sophomores, what I see is “this is what I think, this is why I think that way, and here’s the evidence for it.” They have gained the confidence necessary to be successful and it is a wonderful thing to be a part of.

On studying & taking exams

Many students have the mindset; “I have to have the right answer, just give me the right answer and I’ll memorize it!” Students can struggle with “here’s the concept, here’s an example,” and if you change the example on an exam, it’s not the same example, so it can’t be right. Some students struggle with how to move from concrete to abstract thinking, or seeing the bigger picture.
On students taking responsibility

First and foremost you have to get to class and you have to participate in the assignments. I am often frustrated with students who have the idea that if they don’t come to class, don’t do the exams, don’t do the papers, they should have a second chance, or third chance, over and over again. I really get frustrated with that because you’re an adult now, you’re in college, you need to take responsibility, and do what you have to do.

Advice for your first year

Don’t be afraid to make a mistake.

It isn’t always the right answer that the faculty is looking for. Personally, I’m looking for whether or not you thought about the material. Since political science is not a black and white science, there’s a lot of gray areas and students can struggle with the gray. And they’re so afraid that it’s not going to be the right answer, that they don’t say anything. But if they start talking, the gray becomes a little clearer.

It’s OK not to agree.

Students want so badly to have the right answer, to get that A. And the A isn’t what’s important, it’s what you learn. Don’t be afraid to express your opinions, because faculty are not perfect. Sometimes I say things in class that I know are going to irritate three quarters of the students, just so they get frustrated enough that they’ll talk about it, and they’ll participate in the discussion. Understand that it’s OK, you’re not going to flunk the class because you didn’t agree. The point is, you thought about it. And I may not agree with you, but I did ask you for your opinion, so give it to me.
Thoughts from Faculty

Mark Mehn, Chemistry

On what helped him the most in his first semester

Exercise is really important. I took a PE course because I really didn’t know what I wanted to do. I thought math, music, chemistry, or something, I was all over the place. I took a PE course, and I had to bike a certain number hours a week, so I got out to see the community, I met friends that way. It was a real fluff course, but it was a lot of fun. I know some of my students are like “all I do is study all the time.” Well, to some extent, then, you’re kind of missing the point.

On what he wished freshmen knew

It’s OK to visit your professor at their office hours. It’s actually expected. It’s not like a visit to the principal’s office. We’re here to help you. We’re part of your professional network.

On picking a major

I don’t think that there’s one career for everybody. I think everyone can do at least 5 or 10 different things. So a lot of that is just random chance with where your significant other wants to be, where you want to be, and what you’re happy doing.

If you can manage it economically, you shouldn’t necessarily focus on only classes in your major (i.e., that are required to check off on some list). If you find something you’re interested in, do it. A lot of times we end up in unexpected places later in life. It’s a difficult negotiation with parents, family, even friends, but be open minded enough to explore. In the first day in the resident halls, you’ll probably be introducing yourself a lot. It becomes a little trite, ‘Say your name, your major, and where you’re from…’ Some think saying “Undeclared” is like posting an L on your forehead. It shouldn’t be. I think everyone should be undeclared for at least their first year. And then, decide what your major is.

On studying

Suppose for a minute that your chemistry class was like the football team, and you wanted to not practice until the night before the big game. How do you think your football team would do? How would you perform if you practice for 4 hours the night before the big game versus BYU? How do you think we’re going to do?

You don’t just sit down and play Bach’s 3 part inventions… you don’t practice the night before your recital and expect to have a good recital.

On exams

Most students when they get here, they’ve been told in high school that they have to know X,Y, & Z for the exam. In my exams you have to know the concepts: X, Y, & Z and the exam will be the application of these concepts to a problem that you’ve never seen before. So it freaks some people out a little bit, but you have to adjust, and most people get the idea pretty quickly.

Give yourself the opportunity to fail. I tell people on their second exam: I know some of you are perfectly wonderful people. Your grade on an exam is not connected with who you are in my mind. There’s so much of this “what
grade did you get?” and I get leery of people connecting self-worth and class performance. In my mind they’re two totally separate realms of existence.

A student story...

I had a student one year who had an incredibly difficult time with my class because of the applied nature. He was stuck in his high school mindset of “tell me what I need to know, I’ll learn it, I’ll barf it back up on the test, and then it’s gone.”

I don’t know about the other freshman classes here, but that doesn’t work in my course. You’re not going to pass. So he came in, frequently. He asked for help, he got help, he did well on the last two exams and he was on the borderline of that D/C line. Given the amount of effort, and the monumental improvement that I’d seen over time, I gave him the higher grade.

Advice for your first year

Get involved in research, or the activity of your choice. If you want to be a writer, write. If you want to be a scientist, do science. If you want to be a musician…

Find a way to do it, there’s clubs for just about everything, and there’s way to find your group that think that activity is awesome too. Be the alpha geek.
Erin Campbell-Stone, Geology

On her first semester of college

Well, I remember my first year of college, my first semester. I worked really, really hard, studied hard, and I got straight A’s. Then my second semester I started partying hard. My grades plummeted. I remember spending a lot of mornings sleeping through my large classes, and that was not an effective use of my time.

Then I got a new advisor, I guess it was the end of my sophomore year. She looked at my transcript and said, “You’ve either had a really good time, or a really bad time.” Of course I’d had a good time. But working and playing naturally evened out when I found a major that I really enjoyed, and then I wanted to do the work.

On what she wished freshmen knew

I see some students struggle with the organization of their time. Get a weekly planner, and when you get your course syllabus, write down when everything is due and when exams are scheduled. Then backtrack how long it will take you to prepare for those things, and write in your planner when you need to start working on them. If you know it’s going to take you three weeks to write your paper, then write in your planner “start paper now” and actually do that. I see a lot of last-minute work from students who I know could do better, and I have students turning things in late for a grade penalty. Then they’re not getting the grades that they could get if they planned ahead.

On classes and majors

It’s okay to retake a class. If you’re taking an introductory course in your major and you get a C, you should take that class again. And you should keep taking it until you get an A or a B, because that course is teaching you the basics of your field.

If you need to retake the class, it doesn’t mean that you’re not going to succeed in that field. If you got a C because you were figuring out how the University works, or you thought you were studying hard, but it turns out that doing the assigned reading two hours before the exam isn’t going to cut it (and you didn’t know that because it worked for you in high school) that’s OK. But if you got a C in the introductory class because you’re not interested in the subject, you should reconsider your major.

On time management

Try to make use of the small pieces of time that you have throughout the day. It’s hard to concentrate for four hours
straight, so don’t wait until you have four free hours at night to start your reading assignment. If you have 20 minutes, or an hour between classes, sit down and read a few pages. If you can do that enough times during the day you might get to use some of your four hours in the evening for relaxing, instead of working.

On in-class experiences

Sometimes I see students who are intimidated by the outgoing students who work fast and speak up a lot in classes. But those outgoing students aren’t always doing the best in the course. They’re not necessarily learning the most in the class, and they’re not necessarily thinking the most critically about the work. They’re just the chattiest and the fastest. Don’t compare yourself to others in the class, and don’t be intimidated by others.

On grades

I’ve had some students who start out getting very low grades in my courses, and when I write comments on papers like “please come see me” it’s great when they actually come for help. Because the ones that come see me are the ones who might turn it around and pass the class. The ones who don’t come for help usually don’t end up passing. Professors generally want to help, so students should take advantage of it. When I know a student is making an effort to improve, it affects the way I look at their work.

On advising

Come prepared for your meetings with your advisor. Introduce yourself and have an idea about what you’d like to take or what requirements you’d like to fulfill in your next semester.

Advice on courses

Try not to load up too many courses on one subject. Try to spread things out evenly and continue to take classes in your major. However, you should be fulfilling requirements at the same time, in case you change your mind about your major. Because I did (three times), and you might.

▶ Don’t just take classes to get the credit, to graduate. Take classes to learn something and you’ll enjoy them more.

▶ Be willing to ask questions, and think about what you’re doing and what you’re learning.

▶ Find a group of friends that are also studying very hard. It’s useful to have a community of friends that work hard and try to succeed to encourage each other.

▶ I see a lot of last-minute work from students who I know could do better, and turning things in late. Then they’re not getting the grades that they could get.
Morgan Kuchta, Elementary Education

About me
I’m from Fort Collins, Colorado. My parents are both electrical engineers and my brother is going to school for engineering next year at Virginia Tech. In high school I was a tri-sport athlete—I grew up in a family where sports are a huge part of our activities. After I graduate, I want to earn a Master’s in administration, and then go on for either a Master’s or a Doctorate in the politics of schooling. I know it’s shooting for the stars, but I’d really like to be a superintendent or administrator of some sort. I want to impact kids on a day-to-day basis, but I also hope to have an impact on the community at large.

About biggest struggles
The biggest challenge I had my first year in college was learning how to study. I had to learn how to read, learn, and study in college. In high school I didn’t do so well, but even to do well I didn’t have to study or read much. In college I had to read a lot, and it just kind of came as a shock. Now my success is really about wanting to sit down and read a textbook, learning how to pick out important points, and going to office hours to talk to teachers. I guess the biggest change for me when I got to college was I had to learn to find the intrinsic motivation to want to learn, because otherwise you just get left in the dust.

Suggestions for new students
The residence halls are such a great social environment; I think every student should have to live in the halls and learn how to keep peace with the person you’re living with. I didn’t realize how hard it was going to be to have a roommate. In the residence halls, we have around a 12x15 space to work with, so finding your own space is important. I made a deal with my roommate: once a week one of us would spend the evening away. We had one night a week each where one of us would be there and the other wouldn’t. It helped just to get some air, because sometimes when you’re seeing the same person every day, you get in each other’s hair!

Also, put your studies first. I made studying a priority on university breaks, and it is the first thing I do when I visit home. That’s not the way that everyone has to do it, but it helps to establish your study habits the second you get here, and commit to them.

About partying
Be responsible and don’t get into trouble. I think a lot of freshmen forget that an MIP or MUI [Minor in Possession/Minor Under Influence] will follow you. Being a prospective teacher, that’s something I was aware of the day I got here. My record will follow me.
Thoughts from Students

What I love about college

I like the independence. I’m sure that’s a very generic answer, but I love the fact that every consequence is on me. If I wake up late and miss class, the only person I can blame it on is me. Independence goes the other way, too - if I sit down and I do a project and I do really, really well on it, I love knowing that no one is prompting me or checking up on me. I did it, and I did it really well.

Final thoughts

Find what you like to do and get involved! My first year, I was part of the Collegiate Democrats and this year I’m involved with the Triathlon Club.

Go to Friday Night fever! As soon as movies are out of the theater Friday Night Fever has them, and they’re on campus and free. It’s just an awesome program.

Chuck Maike, Undeclared

About me

I’m from Wheatland, Wyoming. My mother works at Basin Electric Power Cooperative and my father works for Platte county School District #1. I have one brother named Dylan who is 13 years old and is very intelligent and eager. I wanted to come to UW because it’s close to my hometown and growing up we always came over to football games. I’m hoping to pursue a degree in nutrition. I have always liked the idea that we must put our energy into our body. I also like to help people and I would like to be able to help people with proper nutrition.

Right now I’m living in the residence halls in White Hall. I enjoy living in the residence halls because there are always people around you. The rooms in the residence hall are very small, so organization is very critical when living in such tight quarters. As a floor we do various things like recycling drives and things like that.

About biggest struggles

When I came to college I struggled with setting times to study, just having all this new free time and not doing what I should be doing. In high school, I didn’t really have to study at all. You have to get your college study habits down right away! After class and after lectures I usually try and read back through the notes that we had covered that day. I think that study groups are very helpful—like the old saying that two heads are better than one. I usually like to study in the library or anywhere quiet. I make an effort to meet people in my classes—that helps a lot too, talking with other people that are doing the same thing.
Suggestions for new students

I found that budgeting my time like a full time job works well. I take however long I was in class and tack on whatever it took to get eight hours a day to do homework and study; my grades actually improved doing that. Also, talk to your professors! It can be intimidating sometimes, but they can give you tips and help you through the class.

Coming from Wheatland, which is a really small town, there are a lot more people here—it can be hard to meet new people with similar interests. I joined an intramural sports team and just made myself get out there and meet people. I’m also involved in MECHA, with Multicultural Affairs. We have meetings every week and we volunteer. MECHA helps immensely in many different areas, from school to personal life. They do things around campus and the community. Students should definitely get involved in something on campus. The programs can help you get involved, and you can start helping other students, too.

What I love about college

I love always having something to do, since there are so many things, people, and places. I had always tried to imagine what college was going to be like and now that I am here it is awesome that there are so many activities to be involved in. I love that I have to be responsible for myself and that I have to power to succeed or fail. I like that I am in control.

Jen Black, Anthropology

About me

I’m from Cheyenne, WY. I never thought that Cheyenne was big, but then I came here! Growing up in Cheyenne gave me a nice mix of a small town environment and a little bit of Denver. I knew that Laramie was more of a university town than Cheyenne, but it still has a lot of the same Wyoming style, Wyoming vibe. My ultimate goal is to go on for a Ph.D in Classical Archaeology and then I’ll probably stay in academia for awhile.

About “college rumors”

I was a little bit afraid when I first came in that the residence halls would be sort of like summer camp—guided all the time, and the RAs being big sisters or big brothers. But they really did a good job giving students opportunities to get out there—they weren’t overbearing. I can be kind of quiet and came to college with more of a “study” goal in
mind, so I was afraid that the residence halls wouldn’t fit well with my personality, but I had a good experience. It’s a pretty good environment for a freshman, so I would say not to be scared of them.

About biggest struggles
I thought because my classes were easy in high school, they were going to be easy in college. For example, I took U.S. History and thought it was going to be a breeze because I’d had it before, and then I got my first test back and realized it was not at all what I was expecting. You just assume you know the basics of a class because you have had it before, and that you are going to do fine in it without trying and without studying. That is not the case, even in 1000-level courses.

Suggestions for new students
I don’t think I would be alive right now without my planner; I live out of that little book. I put down pretty much everything that is going on, whether it’s a club meeting I need to go to or an assignment that’s going to take more than one sitting to get done. I block out time for everything. One time my mother asked me “How do you keep track of it all?” and literally, the planner is my secretary.

When I’m studying, I’m very much a note-taker, because otherwise my brain will wander and I will get 20 pages into a textbook and have no idea what I read. So even if I’m just writing down some key terms that I’m reading, it helps me pay attention. It actually makes me be engaged in what I’m reading. If you’re studying without being engaged in your work, you’re not studying.

What I love about college
I love learning, and I like having so many choices in what I can learn. I’m a little bit on the crazy side because I’m a double major with a bunch of minors, but even though I’m mostly humanities, I can throw in entomology (insect biology) for one of them. So it’s kind of fun having all that available to you.

Final Thoughts
Get involved with organizations. Whether it’s throwing all of your beans in one pot or jumping into five different organizations, you can always start with more and then pick later what organizations you really like. It’s so much better to get involved earlier. I waited until my sophomore year to get involved with campus organizations, and I would say that the sooner you can get involved in those, the better.
Doug Fankell  
Civil and Architectural Engineering

About me
I’m from Broomfield, CO, about 20 min north of Denver. I have four younger sisters and a younger brother. The youngest is eight years old. One of my sisters is attending here at UW in graphic design. Ultimately, I would actually like to be a professor. I would like to work in the engineering industry at first, but end up in academia.

What I love about college
In college, you’re really on your own. It’s a big change! You’re only in class for 14 hours or 15 hours a week. In high school you go to school from 7-3 every day and everything is really spelled out. You are told what you are going to do and everything you’re supposed to do. In college, it’s like “here’s the lecture…now get your homework done by this date.” So you have to learn how to schedule and plan out your own time.

Suggestions for students
I set aside a time every day and try to have all of my homework done by five-o’clock. I think of college almost like an 8-5 job. I like morning classes, but not everyone does. I go to class from eight to twelve or eight to one, and I get home and say, “OK, I’m going to take an hour break for lunch and then finish all of my homework and be done around five o’clock.” Obviously that doesn’t always happen, but it’s a good game plan.

I don’t really use a planner, but I write down all my goals for the day and kind of what I want to accomplish. Sometimes I get through all of them and sometimes I don’t, but I prioritize them in my mind: I need to get this, this, and this done. And I’d like to get to these other things, but if it doesn’t happen, oh well.

When you’re studying, try to think like a professor. I usually think, “OK, I know the professor stressed these concepts.” So then I go through the book and pick out problems that I feel show those concepts. Even if I don’t pick exactly what the professor would pick, I’ve learned the concepts, so I can do the majority of the problems on the test. For lecture classes, I like outlining the notes. I don’t do flashcards though I know some people do. If you read through the chapters and jot down important stuff, it helps.

I tell engineering students that group study is the easiest and best way to be successful. If you find 2 or 3 other people you can work through homework and study with, there’s a good chance they may understand something in a way that you don’t. Then the studying helps everyone—as long as you can stay focused!

About balance
Taking care to balance your academic and social life is huge. I’ve overloaded myself and taken 18 credit hours with three
labs, while also helping with engineering classes and being a leader for Revive, an event for Catholics on Campus. I was getting five hours (at most) of sleep a night and spending 70 hours in the engineering building. It was just an unhealthy lifestyle. You have to be very knowledgeable about yourself and how much you can handle. I know some people who can handle that kind of pace fine and others that would have crumbled under the pressure.

Also, just experience college—don’t take so many credits that all you do is school. If you’re not having fun and enjoying yourself, you’re not going to do well in school anyways.

Final thoughts
Allow yourself to be yourself, and to try new things. I had a professor who said “College is the time for you to be selfish. It’s the time for you to figure out what you want to do and what you want to be.” I got lucky and picked a major that I really, really liked right off the bat, but I think it is important that you take some time to find what you want to do. If you want to change your major, do it. It’s worth the extra money and the time to be happy for the next 30 years, rather than saving it and being unhappy.
Persons seeking admission, employment, or access to programs of the University of Wyoming shall be considered without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, veteran status, sexual orientation, or political belief. • Graphic design by Elizabeth Ono Rahel • 5/2011-WG-3M

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Academic Support

University Counseling Center
341 Knight Hall, 766-2187
www.uwyo.edu/ucc

What it is: The UCC is overlooked as an area of academic support. Counselors can help with time management, test anxiety, study skills, and more.

Residence Hall Staff Members (RAs)

Who they are: Residence hall staff members, including your RAs and RDs, are invaluable resources for academic support. These are students who have already proven themselves to be successful at balancing school, work, and life. Not only do they assist in the academic and personal growth of residents, they also act as a liaison between Residence Life and Dining Services and the students on their respective floors with the goal of enhancing the hall’s overall living environment.

What to do: If you haven’t already met your RA, go do it!

Instructor Office Hours

What it is: Regular, scheduled times your professor will be in his/her office to assist students with questions of any kind. Office hours are often over-looked—this is the best place to go for help. Faculty members are required to have office hours. Take advantage of them!

What to do: Your syllabus will have specific office hours for your professor. If the listed times or days do not work with your schedule, most professors are willing to make special appointments to meet with you.

BetterGrades
www.uwyo.edu/bettergrades

How it can help: BetterGrades is a website that contains useful information about:
- Available tutoring on campus
- Academic Resources
- Study Tips and Help
- Test Anxiety
- Student Resources
- Extra Departmental Support
- And more

Academic Resources

Writing Center
Coe 302, 766-5250
www.uwyo.edu/writingcenter

Oral Communication Center
Ross Hall 442, 766-3815
www.uwyo.edu/COJO/OCC

Math Lab
Ross Hall 29
http://math.uwyo.edu

Student Learning Center (SLC)
Washakie lower level
www.uwyo.edu/reslife-dining

Student Success Services (SSS)
Knight Hall 330, 766-6189
www.uwyo.edu/seo