

MANAGING YOUR TIME & YOUR LIFE

“What is the best use of my time right now?”

When we asked new students in the Class of 2015 what aspects of college life they thought would be most challenging for them, more than 85% of you indicated that time management topped your list of concerns. Students who successfully balance coursework, campus leadership responsibilities, part-time jobs, and family responsibilities do so because they set **daily goals** and develop **action plans** to achieve those goals. They are always asking themselves *“What is the best use of my time right now?”*, determining the appropriate answer, and acting accordingly. No one has to tell them what to do or when to do it. They make those determinations on their own, with no prodding from others. They take themselves, and their education, seriously and it shows.

Becoming A “Self-Regulated” Student

Every day you will be making important decisions which will impact your life as a college student either positively or negatively. Whether you make good choices with positive consequences, or poor choices with negative consequences, is all in **your hands**.

There are some students who begin college already possessing *self-regulating* attitudes and behaviors. These students are able to utilize their time out-of-class in a consistently effective manner. They have developed the internal discipline and skills necessary to direct their time and their energies for maximum productivity.

If the description above does not yet apply to you, commit to becoming more self-disciplined and self-motivated while you are at Martin Methodist. Remember, this is a new chapter of your life, and a time of tremendous personal growth for you. Set your sights on becoming a self-regulated learner during the course of the next four years.

Planning Ahead

Managing your time and your life for maximum effectiveness requires a significant amount of organization and purposeful planning. Using a wall calendar by your study desk or other highly visible location, and posting all of your assignments and exams on that calendar as soon as you receive your syllabi are very effective ways of staying organized. Have you done this yet? If you have—GREAT! If not, consider using this strategy. It has proven to be extremely effective, and encourages you to always be planning and looking ahead to future deadlines and due dates.

Prioritizing: Doing First Things First

One way to help you stay organized is to develop a weekly “to do” list, which includes everything that you need to get done that week. Then divide up the list into the 7 days of the week, and formulate daily “to do” lists for that week.

One of the challenges new college students face, concerns the *prioritizing* of their “to do” list items. At the end of the day, some students find themselves wondering why they completed so few of the items on their list, and why they completed the least important items and left the most important items undone. A simple strategy for insuring that this will not happen to you is to employ the A-B-C prioritizing system:

“A” Priority Items are those which must get done today

“B” Priority Items are those which should get done today, but could be carried over to the next day *if absolutely necessary*

“C” Priority Items are those which could be completed any time this week

It can be tempting to complete “C” items before “A” or “B” items because they frequently are the easiest, quickest, and most enjoyable items on your “to do” list. But, they typically should only be done *after* your “A” and “B” items are completed. We say “typically” because if you have only 15 minutes of time available to you right now, and cannot address your “A” and “B” items in that short of a time period, it is better to complete a “C” item than it is to accomplish nothing at all!

Once you have your weekly and daily “to do” lists prioritized in A-B-C order, designate time in your daily schedule for each item. When will you complete each task today?

The final step, implementation, is the most critical. We can develop “to do” lists and daily plans, but if we do not stick to them we will not complete our tasks! Draw on your developing sense of self-discipline and personal motivation to help you accomplish your priority items each and every day.

Getting Right To Work: Resisting The Temptation To Procrastinate

Many college students struggle with their tendency to procrastinate; to put tasks off until the last possible moment. Some students have even convinced themselves that they work best under this type of self-imposed pressure, and write their best papers at two o’clock in the morning. They could not be more wrong.

If your instructor gave you a writing assignment today that was due in three weeks, how would you spend that time? Most college students indicate that they would do absolutely nothing the first week. Many indicated they would not do any work on the assignment during the second week either. Why take a three-week assignment and make it into a one-week assignment? It just does not make any sense to do this.

Start working on assignments as soon as they are given! Fight the temptation to procrastinate. Getting right to work on a new assignment, gives you the best chance for success because you will be able to see *right away* what the assignment entails. You will be able to develop an effective strategy for doing your best work on the assignment, by planning out when you will work on various stages of the assignment throughout the course of the three week period.

Peak Performance Times

One of the most important tasks new students must complete within their first few weeks of college, is to identify their *best* study times. When you were in high school, you were in school from early morning until mid-afternoon, so you had no choice but to study in the late afternoons, evenings, and on the weekends. This will not be the case in college. You may have your early morning hours free, at least a few days per week. You may have 2-3 hours of discretionary time in the middle of the day to do with as you please.

If you are a “morning person” and you do not have classes all morning, it makes good sense to use the morning hours to complete your most intense studying. If you are at your peak in the middle of the day, and you have time between classes then, use that time to study.

In addition to identifying your peak performance study times, you will also need to develop a keen sense of how long you should study at one time. Some students can study effectively for two or three hours at a time without taking any breaks. Other students can study for two or three hours at a time, but must take 10-15 minute breaks every hour in order to study most effectively. Figuring out what your study timeframes should be, and blocking out your study times accordingly on your daily schedule, will serve you well as you strive to make every minute of study time count.

Why It’s Better NOT To Take A Nap

When college students are asked what they do when they skip classes, or how they spend their time between classes, over 60% of them indicate that they spend that time *taking a nap*. Why all of this daytime napping? There seems to be two primary reasons:

- 1. Napping as avoidance—students take naps to avoid doing their schoolwork.**
- 2. Napping as a poor substitute for a good night’s sleep---students who stay up too late at night and fail to get 8 solid hours of sleep per night, do not have sufficient energy to get through the day.**

The typical 18-25 year-old needs 8 solid hours of uninterrupted sleep to perform at their best in the classroom and on the playing field. Piecing together 4 hours of sleep per night with a couple of two-hour naps during the day, is an insufficient substitute. Sleep at night. Daytime naps do not provide the kind of rest and energy you need, and can actually make you feel more tired. Commit to getting at least 8 hours of sleep each night. It will make a world of difference in terms of your focus, concentration, and performance.

Don't Be A "Time Waster"

Try not to "waste" time. It is a precious resource you cannot get back.

This list illustrates some common ways that college students "waste" time. Check the ones which you might have the tendency to succumb to, and commit to avoiding these situations by employing our stated "solutions":

- _____ Interruptions, drop-in visitors (Solution: study in a location where you will not be interrupted, and have people call before they drop by)
- _____ Personal disorganization; hunting for things you need (Solution: in your living/study space practice the "a place for everything and everything in its place" approach.)
- _____ Doing routine things of minor importance, instead of what you *really* need to be doing (Solution: employ our A-B-C prioritizing approach)
- _____ Attempting to do too many things at once (Solution: when you start to do something, stay with it until it is completed. Then start the next task.)
- _____ Indecision (Solution: utilize our daily "to do" list approach. That way you will never waste time trying to decide what to do next, because you will have figured it out in advance.)
- _____ Inability to say "no" when you should (Solution: Learn to say "no" to friends and family when they try to entice you to stop studying and do something fun with them instead. Politely but firmly tell them that you will be happy to spend time with them *after* your work is completed.)
- _____ Failure to use short blocks of time constructively (Solution: Plan out in advance what you will do with the breaks that you have between classes and meetings/practice, and then stick to those plans.)
- _____ Taking "breaks" that turn into "vacations" (Solution: If you plan to take a break of a certain length, be disciplined enough to get back to work after that break period is over.)

How Managing Your Time Effectively Helps Reduce Stress

A time management plan that includes the most effective use of your time, and sets aside time for personal enjoyment is a great asset if you are looking for ways to reduce the amount of stress in your life. You will be more relaxed and prepared as a student, and will not be subjecting yourself to the kinds of self-imposed stress that some college students suffer from.

In spite of your best intentions, some stress is unavoidable. You will need to learn how to effectively *manage* stress. Here are some suggestions:

- *Commit to doing things that you enjoy on a regular basis.
- *Exercise for 30-40 minutes 3-5 times per week, doing a variety of physical activities that you enjoy.
- *Take time to relax!!! If you don't know how to relax.....learn!!!
- *Eat a balanced diet. Watch out for excess fat, sugar, and caffeine.
- *Talk with those closest to you about the things that are stressful for you. Talking it out can help you work it out!

Other Helpful Time Management Tips:

- * In addition to your wall calendar, use a portable calendar or planner. The MMC Student Handbook is ideal for this purpose. Since plans can be made or changed at any time, it's best to keep a portable planner with you to help you stay organized.
- *Do tasks which require a lot of energy and concentration during those times of the day when you are at your peak. Do routine tasks when you are not at your most energetic because tasks such as doing the laundry don't require much "brainpower".
- *Make sure your friends and family members are aware of your daily goals, and ask them for their support and cooperation as you work to complete your planned tasks each day.
- *Be realistic about the time it will take to complete each assignment. You cannot read a chapter of economics in 30 minutes!
- *Break up larger assignments into smaller segments.
- *When you find yourself reading the same page over and over because you cannot concentrate, take a break and/or switch to working on something else for a while.
- *Guard your "learning" time as fiercely as you guard your other time commitments.
- *Commit to being punctual; to class, to meetings, to appointments, and when turning in assignments.
- *Don't overcommit yourself. Take on the responsibilities that you can handle. Purposefully choose the campus organizations you will join.
- *Change how you think about certain tasks. If you are not looking forward to doing something, find a way to have fun with it or view it in a more positive way.
- *Remember that YOU are in control of your time and your life.

