

## Advice to new college students

### from the University of Texas System Academy of Distinguished Teachers

The opening of another academic year at our nation's colleges and universities is just around the corner. Close to 150,000 Texans will be going off to one of them in a few short weeks. This is an exciting, but also fairly scary moment.

Recently the twenty-four Fellows of the University of Texas System Academy of Distinguished Teachers met to talk about how to help students succeed in college. We are professors in fields as different as chemistry and music, engineering and English, architecture, and psychology; we teach large and small classes; we teach in the classroom and online; and we hail from all eight of the UT System's universities, from Austin, to the Permian Basin. Here is our best advice.

First, don't be shy. Make friends and interact with fellow students in each of your classes. Find a group of like-minded peers who are studying the same things you are studying; interact with them outside of class. The friends you make your first year will often be friends for life.

Second, keep healthy. Be careful what you eat (and drink!), get your rest, and exercise regularly. Find an activity you enjoy to relieve stress—running, swimming, tennis, dancing.

Third, get to know your professors. In the first week of class visit your teachers' office hours, introduce yourself, tell them about your hopes and plans, ask some questions. Make a connection and show them that you are taking college and your course work seriously. (They will like this.) Once classes are underway, cultivate a habit of talking with your professors before, during, and after class. ,

What about your course work itself? First—be prepared for the work to be hard, recognize that you will need to learn how to learn in different ways than you did in high school. Second, accept the fact that you won't be good at every challenge college presents you—but trust that you can get better, if you will work at it.

Here are some basic rules for classroom success; develop these habits in your first year, and they will serve you all through college and afterwards as well

1. Buy the course materials—your professor *will* use them. If you have the choice between reading an assignment online or on your phone and in a book, choose the book
2. Go to class, even if you didn't do the homework, even if you don't feel like it. Every single member of the Academy put this item at the top of their list.
3. Be ready for class. Do the assignments.
4. Participate actively in class. Take notes, ask questions (professors love questions), do the group work, or whatever your professors assign. They know what will help you succeed and are there to help you do just that.
5. Study early and often. A lot of high school students know how to "do their homework," but haven't learned how to *study* the way your professors will expect. "Study" means read carefully, take notes, think critically about what you have read, talk with others about it, and review or even re-read the assignment. Don't wait till the night before the exam to get started. Trust us, in college, cramming rarely works.

6. Turn in your assignments on time. But, if for some reason you are going to be late, talk to your professor before the due date and make arrangements to turn your work in as soon possible.
7. Form study groups with other students in your classes. You will learn a lot from each other and make new friends as well.

Be responsible when it comes to your college experience. See an academic advisor early and often, keep track of your course requirements, your degree plan, and university policies about financial aid, grading, plagiarism, absence, illness, missed work, etc. Paying attention to these details will get you to graduation on time.

Take teachers not classes; you will learn from and be inspired by the *people* more than the material. Challenge yourself with classes that expand your intellectual boundaries. When you graduate, you are going to enter a constantly changing workplace, so you must learn to be flexible and to develop a broad range of intellectual tools; expect that life's opportunities will take you well beyond the focus of your college major.

Finally, have fun—you are about to embark on the time of your life.