



How to Fit Pursuing a Degree into Your Busy Life

A QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE



You've probably heard the adage, "the more you have to do the more you get done." These words often ring especially true in the case of today's college students who balance work, life and family responsibilities in addition to rigorous study schedules. Yet they still manage to get it all done.

According to the United States Census Bureau's data, 72% of college undergraduate students worked in 2011, and 20% of this group held a full-time job year 'round.¹ So how can today's busy students find balance with so much going on? Read on to find out.

FINDING A DEGREE THAT FITS YOUR LIFE

Before ever embarking on an undergraduate or advanced degree, think long and hard about your career path. The last thing you want to do is waste time. Make sure you do your research to find a school that fits your life and a degree program that can help you move your career forward. Here's what to look for:

Flexibility:

An online education can be a great choice for busy professionals. It can give you the chance to work around what you already have going on in life – anywhere, anytime, 24/7. Choose a curriculum that lets you listen to lectures and participate in other learning activities on your own time as well as partake in virtual study groups to make multi-tasking far more feasible.

In-Depth Specializations:

General study is important to build a working knowledge of your major, but today's careers are more specialized than ever. Look for a degree specialization that allows you to concentrate more of your time and effort in your area of interest. After all, having a specialized program can help you learn more efficiently and gain an edge in the exact area in which you want to work.

Professors in the Know:

Ideally your professor should be an industry specialist with in-depth knowledge and/or experience in the subject area or industry he or she teaches. This can help you gain up-to-date knowledge as well as industry-related skills. Experienced professors are often willing to share



their real-world perspectives and work with you one-on-one when you need it.

FOUR ESSENTIAL SURVIVAL SKILLS FOR WORKING COLLEGE STUDENTS

Use these handy survival tips to help you survive and even thrive when you're simultaneously juggling an education, career and a busy life.

1. Set goals—with rewards

Getting an education while you're working and raising a family is tough—that's just a statement of fact. Therefore, it's important to set both short and long-term goals so your eyes remain on the prize. Then when you reach those goals, reward yourself.

2. Stay organized

It's important to not only have a plan but also a way to keep the chaos in check. When you're multitasking, it's more important than ever to stay organized. That means taking good notes, establishing (and sticking to) study routines and planning out how you will accomplish everyday tasks that could easily bog you down.

3. Take care of yourself

Don't allow yourself to get lost in the shuffle. That means recharge and reboot as needed. Remembering to attend to your own needs can help you keep your morale up and be more productive in the long run.

4. Cut yourself slack

There are times when, try as you might, you just aren't going to be productive. That's okay. You need

to give yourself the freedom to deviate from the plan from time to time—provided you have a way to make up for it down the line.

MANAGING YOUR TIME

For busy students who are balancing schoolwork with their professional and personal lives, the traditional to-do list just doesn't cut it as a time management tool. Use these methods and tips to help you make the most out of the time you have.

USING AN ABC LIST

Using an ABC list can help manage your time more efficiently and get more done by organizing tasks by importance. In an ABC list, "A" tasks are ones that are most urgent and important, "B" tasks are important but not as urgent, and "C" tasks are neither important nor urgent. The goal of using an ABC list is to make sure you are spending most of your time on the tasks that are really important to your education and other important goals. Follow these five simple steps to get started.

Step 1: Brainstorm Tasks

Start out by making a list of all the things you need to accomplish for school. Write down everything that comes to mind without censoring yourself or trying to put the items in any sort of order. This should include everything from writing papers and reading chapters to memorizing terms, commenting on online bulletin boards, completing research, and finishing assignments. Non-school tasks can be included in addition to all other task that need to be accomplished.



Keep in mind that as you create this list, some tasks may not be as important as an “A” or “B” task and perhaps should not even be included in the “C” category. As you brainstorm your list, take into consideration what needs to be accomplished in a week’s span, particularly if it is a “C” item. This will help keep your list current and relevant for the time period.

A few quick tips:

Be specific: “Study” is far too general, but “Study History 265: Chapter 9, Lesson 2 for Friday’s essay test” is more clear.

Break down large responsibilities into smaller ones that will take no more than two hours apiece. In order to make a huge task like a research paper more manageable, you could potentially write separate items for the research paper, such as completing library research, compiling notes, drafting the actual paper and so on.

Step 2: Estimate Time

Next, try to figure out how much time each task will take you, realistically. Write the expected time frame next to each item on your list. If your task involves traveling (such as to a library or other workspace), be sure to include traveling time in your estimate. Use your prior experience and your self-knowledge when estimating.

Step 3: Rate Each Task by Priority

Here is where the letters come in: Rate each item on your list as either “A,” “B,” or “C.” Your “A” tasks are things that you must do or suffer severe consequences. Examples might include studying for upcoming exams or completing high-stakes assignments. Identifying your “A” tasks tells you

what you absolutely must do, no matter how short the time available. If you have multiple “A” tasks, you can prioritize those by labeling them: “A-1,” “A-2,” and so forth. Your goal is to complete the most critical tasks first. These tasks are going to be what you should spend most of your time working on as you study.

ONLINE STUDENTS SHARE THEIR TOP TIME-SAVING TIPS

Ask any AIU student or alumni the key to succeeding in an online class, and the majority will likely share the same (seemingly simple) answer: time management. But what sounds straightforward in theory isn’t always so simple in practice. For students juggling the demands of their job and family amid their schoolwork, spare time is often a rare and precious commodity.

Fortunately, our students and alumni are experts at finding creative ways to make sure their work gets done. Read – and heed – the advice they share below:

“Starting early in the week with the reading assignments will allow you time to properly do your assignments. Actively participate in the discussion boards; there may be information you read that can help you research for the assignment.” – Glenn F.

“Block times for reading, discussion boards and essays.” – Virginia K.



Time Management Tips: How to Use An ABC List

“Turn EVERYTHING OFF and eliminate distractions! ... I had to log out of everything, turn my phone off, and just make the most out of the time I allotted myself to get it all done.” – Victoria W.

“I start my reading for the week on Friday prior. Then by Monday I have the reading done and intelligipath completed with 90% or greater in each node. Then I am ready to concentrate on my individual project. I arrive at work at 6 a.m. and work on school for two hours before my workday starts. Then I work as I need in the evenings. This goes on from Monday to Thursday. Then Friday starts the next week reading all over again.” – Mike H.

“Use the SQ3R [Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review] study method.” – Kent V.

“Make a schedule where certain hours are set aside for school. I have two kids, so I would work on school while they were at school or do homework at night after they went to bed.” – Kia C.

“I tend to do my discussion boards on Monday, that way I can comment on others through the week.” – Leigh C.

This guide is presented by American InterContinental University (AIU).

1 United States Census Bureau. School Enrollment and Work Status: 2011. <http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/acsbr11-14.pdf>. [Retrieved November 6, 2014].

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