FAST FACTS

Your Role as a Partner in Learning

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Set short-term goals for the semester

Goal-setting means consciously choosing the events you want to happen in the days, weeks and months ahead. Goals provide structure and allow you to focus on critical events. Make your goals attainable; don't set yourself up for failure by setting unrealistic goals.

Keep your course syllabus and refer to it often

The course syllabus is prepared by your instructor to provide you with a guide or "road map" of the course. The syllabus may include important information about the overall goal of the course, specific learning objectives, grading information, reading assignments and important dates for exams, projects and papers.

Go to class and sit where you can see the professor and hear what is being said

This is especially important if you are easily distracted. Sitting near the front of the room helps you to stay "tuned" to what is happening in class. You should also make it a point to attend recitations. Recitations are part of the course experience and provide you with an excellent opportunity to work through concepts and problems that you may not understand completely. Even if you are doing well in the class, attending recitations will help you to check your understanding of the course material and make studying for exams easier.

Read your assigned textbooks or at least preview assigned readings before you attend class

Unlike in high school, college instructors do not repeat and review your assigned readings in detail. If you go into class without having read or previewed the assigned material, it will be harder for you to understand what the professor is discussing, and you may have difficulty in making connections among the concepts and theories being discussed and applied.

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Use efficient study strategies

Studying harder or longer does not necessarily yield better learning or exam results, especially if you are using inefficient study strategies. You may never have had to think about the kinds of study strategies that you use to be successful, but it is important that you become aware of them to do well. For example, different types of content and tests may require different study approaches.

Select a study space that is conducive to learning

It is not enough to know good study strategies —you have to be able to implement them as well. If you study in places where you will see friends, receive phone calls and visitors or be distracted in other ways, you will not accomplish much. You may even need different study locations for different kinds of classes or tasks. Make it a habit to assess and prepare your study space before you begin to work. This means you need to select a quiet area where you will not be disturbed and you need to have all of your materials and supplies with you.

Develop a regular study routine

The best study location and most effective study strategies will not help if you do not use them well. You must have a regular study routine that includes a way of prioritizing and scheduling assignments weekly. Time management requires good decision-making skills and flexibility. Since most classes require consistent practice, it is important that you work regularly and methodically, rather than rely on “cramming” to prepare for exams.

Meet with professors and teaching assistants

Professors and teaching assistants, in general, are more than willing to meet with you to discuss course concerns or to help you with problems you may be experiencing. They are often not aware that there is a problem unless you come to see them. Meeting with them also shows your concern. Before meeting with professors and teaching assistants, though, you should try to identify specific problems that you may be having, make a list of questions or begin work on the homework problems or paper so that they can focus on specific areas of help when they meet with you.

Review old exams

Old exams are a good learning tool. They can assist you in identifying problems or error-patterns that will help you with future learning. When you review your old exams, look for the types of questions that you missed and the concepts and ideas that you did not understand. Compare your answer to the correct answer to determine where your problem-solving or thinking faltered. Also, re-read the exam directions to make sure that you did not read them wrong the first time. Check to see if you changed answers from the right answer to the wrong one, which is often a sign of test anxiety.

Seek help as soon as problems arise

Although it may be difficult for you to admit to having a problem, it is easier to correct situations early before they get out of hand. Most of the problems that you may experience are not new to us here at Carnegie Mellon. Your advisor, associate dean, the offices of Student Affairs, Residence Life, Academic Development and Counseling and Psychological Services are just a few of the places you can go to for help.

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