

Your Education An Owner's Manual

An incomplete guide to your Muir College education, and how to make the most of it while you are here.

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Dean of Advising

Welcome to Muir College!

My name is Doug Easterly, and I am your Dean of Academic Advising. That means that I am in charge of the academic advising unit of your college, and am responsible for training and supervising the advisors, for advocating for students, and for helping students in their time at UCSD. This little booklet is written to help you understand what you are getting into as a UCSD student and to start thinking about what you can do to get more out of your experience.

The Secret Origin of American Higher Education

Colleges and universities in the colonies began by training the sons of wealthy, free folk of northern European ancestry how to be Christian clergy. Education focused on theology, morality, ethics and leadership. Through the end of the 18th century, colleges became more secular and the first women's colleges were established. In the 19th century, President Lincoln established land grants to support the establishment of secular schools focused on medicine, farming, and technical skills. The first historically Black colleges and universities were established to help develop a black middle class after the abolition of slavery (but the presence of segregation.)

After World War II, the US invested heavily in affordable higher education to expand the middle class, grow the economy, and invest in the veterans. This lasted through the 1970s as higher education expanded. But by the 1980s, the political climate changed as did the public's view on taxes and government spending, so investment in higher education changed and student loans were privatized. College went from an investment in society through our taxes to a benefit to students that individual taxpayers did not feel was their responsibility.

The Secret Origin of UC San Diego

UC San Diego grew out of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography. It's a complicated story going back to the 1800s, but the short version is that the Regents first approved UC San Diego as a sort of MIT of the UC System, with a heavy science focus. However, our founding Chancellor, Roger Revelle, thought that to do good science, students needed to be well-rounded – which is why Revelle requires students to take 5 quarters of Humanities, a foreign language, and a boatload of science classes.

The second college at UC San Diego (ahem, Muir College) was founded under provost and mathematician John Stewart (who shares a name with my favorite Green Lantern). Stewart was tasked not only with founding a new college, but also with starting up the arts programs at UC San Diego, which is one of the most Muir things ever. Oh, and this mathematician taught a class on James Joyce because Muir College rolls that way. To offer the campus' first Asian American History class, taught by mathematician Jim Lin. Again, because we roll that way.

A Research University

Like all UCs, UC San Diego is a research institution. That means that our professors do a lot of work in their field – our science and engineering professors have active labs, while our other faculty are writing articles, doing social science research, and generally hip-deep in books.

The idea of research universities goes back to German higher education, but the basic idea is that rather than putting your learning in the hands of professors who only read moldy old books, you are learning from professors creating new knowledge on the regular. Cutting edge stuff.

What that means is that professors will train you like they are training future scholars. They expect you to put in a lot of work. They will present you with theoretical knowledge that is generally applicable and expect you to try to learn it in enough depth to apply them to practical situations. They are trying to teach you to think and learn like researchers.

College Was Never *Really* About Job Preparation

College was never *really* built to make sure you had a great job in the future. At best, it was about building a lot of knowledgeable people who could figure out the future for us all. Seriously.

That doesn't mean that a college degree isn't a gateway to a lot of careers, and it doesn't mean that a college degree isn't correlated with greater lifelong earnings (it is), but it has only been only mildly intended to be training for the work world. It's true that you realistically need a college degree to start some careers (engineering, science, architecture, medicine, law, etc.), but college provides only a loose framework for work.

The Hidden Curriculum

We assume that college will teach you how to adult. In addition to your classes, we don't tell you that you are expected to learn a bunch of other stuff:

- **Learning is the responsibility of the student**, not the teacher.
- You **are responsible for following keeping track of your own assignments** using the syllabus.
- You **are responsible for learning the campus regulations and deadlines** to add, drop, or change grading option (and that you will verify your courses are signed up for correctly.)
- You **are responsible for making your own decisions** about your classes, your future, and how involved you will be.
- You will be **able to navigate a complex bureaucracy**.

Are these fair expectations? Heck, no. But they are the basic expectations of our faculty, administrators, and staff regardless. Many of whom are very used to complex bureaucracies and have been in higher education for longer than you have been alive. They don't have the same perspective on this as students do, even when they are trying to be student-centered.

A Career Oriented Approach to School

I know I told you 1 page ago that college is not *really about getting a job*. But when I talk about your “career”, I am not talking about a job. Your career is your life path. That includes jobs but also encompasses all the activities that you do to feel like you are living meaningfully and in accordance with your life goals, spiritual needs, and need for community. **Jobs** are a means to an end (a paycheck, a roof over your head, food in your belly), a **career** is a way of moving through the world.

A “career orientation” means thinking about your time at school as taking steps to some future state in which you feel your life is valuable, productive, and intentional by having meaningful experiences, reflecting on how they help you develop, and being able to express that to future employers, mentors, and volunteer organizations as well as to the people you will mentor and support (even as an undergraduate) in your many communities.

Gaining Experience(s) in College

I get the occasional complaint from friends, family, and random jerks I meet at parties that they/their sibling/their cousin/someone from Reddit got a degree and it was worthless because they didn’t get the job they planned on after college, even though they took all the right classes and passed them and paid a lot of tuition. 90% of the time, when I press, I find out that the student only did the classes for their degree, and didn’t do much else, including learning how to apply for work, how to develop skills other than taking exams, and now they find out that employers want something more. On top of that, most of these stories relate to a student who did a degree they thought guaranteed a job, but which they hated, and now they were resentful of the whole experience.

Of course they are resentful! They did something that did not match their own values, that they didn’t want to do, and which did not have attached to it a realistic orientation to a career – a sense of meaning, belonging, community, and fulfillment. They only looked at a paycheck and the minimum to complete a degree. If you want to avoid being a terrible story someone tells me at a party (especially if you are the one telling it and the story is about you), here are some things I suggest:

- **Focus on more than classes and grades.** Not that grades aren’t important. I mean, you need to maintain a 2.0 to graduate, and medical schools have an unhealthy obsession with GPAs, as do some professional and (to a lesser degree) graduate schools. But grades are literally not the most important thing in college and definitely not to your career.
- **Learn how to market yourself.** Learn how to express your value to others. I know this is hard. I was raised by a Japanese immigrant mother. She taught me that I needed to be humble and as a result it was hard for me to write a good resume or have a good job interview. I al-

ways thought about how she would tell me not to brag about what I had or I could do (or else the *kami would teach me a lesson*), and I internalized that. I had to learn from friends and mentors that the American job market expects you to brag about yourself. Not to lie about your skills, but to talk positively about what makes you unique. I don't care if you have never worked a day in your life, you have skills and strengths, I guarantee it. We just need to uncover what they are and work on how to express them.

- **Do a lot of different things, including things you are bad at.** All your experiences feed different parts of your soul. Some of them because you love them (I am a terrible fiction writer. I have a couple of drafts of detective novels that will never see the light of day .) In the process of doing lots of different things, you will find passions you didn't know about, you might connect to communities you didn't know about, or you might develop new understandings about yourself. Even learning about things you don't like doing will help you change the direction of your life.
- **Explore your own spiritual life.** I am not pushing religion on you (heck, I'm an atheist myself), though if you are religious, lean into that. Figure out what you (and not your parents or friends, but you) see as right and wrong, what is good and positive, what goes against your sense of what is good. If you have no ethical or moral center, you will not be able to make hard choices and you will not feel a sense of meaning in your life. You need to strengthen or develop a spiritual foundation to guide you in tough times.
- **Develop some people skills** by volunteering, joining groups, doing some political organizing, or working. Especially if you can obtain a leadership role over time. The skills, sense of belonging and connection to others, and the connections you develop over these experiences are invaluable. Also, you are more likely to stay in school and graduate if you are involved with the life of your college.

Develop “Soft Skills”

When employers are surveyed about what skills they think employees need more of when they come out of college, they tend to focus on the fact that students need more work on written communication skills, oral communication skills, and teamwork. The challenge of developing and explaining your soft skills is that you need to be able to demonstrate how you developed and used them effectively. You can't easily say “I have strong written communication because I am a Literature major.” (Trust me, I was one, and no one buys that excuse.) You also can't cite your grade in Muir Writing, because your future employers have no idea how hard that class was.

Instead, you need to express yourself in terms of **experiences** and **outcomes**. “Published a weekly music blog with 200 word entries reviewing new releases and reflecting on my favorite jug bands,” or “edited quarterly newsletter for 50 members of my academic sorority” might help your express

written communication. “Facilitated weekly meetings for 10 member student college student government as president for the 2023-2024 school year” or “speaker at rally of 5000 students at a statewide protest in Sacramento seeking increasing access to financial aid” can help you express your oral communication skills. While teamwork might be “part of a seven member robotics team who competed at five different regional, state, and national competitions,” “facilitator of a six-person planning group for the UC San Diego Latinx Graduation Ceremony honoring 800 graduates and their families,” or “shift lead at Pines restaurant overseeing five other student employees in a high-pressure food service organization.”

In addition to these communication skills, you want to emphasize experiences that show you have a strong work ethic and ability to meet deadlines (whether it is through paid jobs, internships, volunteer work, or academic assignments) with clear examples of how that is demonstrated.

Reflecting On and Expressing Your Experiences

You need to be able to think of what you have done through these career lenses. Studied abroad? That builds cross-cultural communication skills, initiative, and adaptability. You were in a play? Communication skills, teamwork, risk-taking. You have a twitch stream with 100 subscribers? Marketing and content creation. Never take anything off the table to consider for showing people your strengths. You just need to reflect on what actual skills you are developing and demonstrating in your experiences.

When it comes to reflecting on your experiences, you want to be able to express them in three ways: job applications (particularly for entry-level or government positions, where such applications are regularly required), a resume or curriculum vitae (CV – an academic resume), and in job interviews. In general, jobs above entry-level, jobs with the government, and competitive jobs will require either a resume or a CV that explains at the very least the dates of your employment, volunteer experiences, internships or other experiences, your education, and specific details of your experiences and skills developed in those experiences. I won't get into writing resumes in this book, but you need to develop those skills. This is a good thing to work on with the Career Center early and on multiple occasions throughout your career so you are ready for opportunities that present themselves.

Most competitive jobs will require you to conduct a job interview after reviewing your resume or CV if you move to the next stage of consideration. Job interviews are usually a weird and nerve-wracking experience (from both sides of the experience, to be honest.) And too many job applicants – including experienced job applicants – come into job interviews without a plan, without practice, and I have seen people who look great on paper totally bomb the job interview. I have bombed more than one job interview. Some pretty spectacularly. It happens.

To be prepared for job interviews, work with Career Center to learn how to interview. Do some practice interviews to work through some of your nervousness and get some practice dealing with questions – with some feedback on habits you need to break!

The last issue to consider about job interviews is that the job interview is supposed to be your opportunity to interview the employer. You should always have questions ready for the interview – which should not just be about salary, starting time, and when they are going to notify you. Think about questions about the company or organization, their culture, their expectations, and anything about the job that seems unclear or you want more information about. This is a time to show your interest, that you have researched the company, thought about the job, and are trying to see yourself in the role. Seriously, most employers I know *expect a serious applicant to have questions!*

Academic Advising

Academic advisors are (or at least should be) the sherpas to your college experience. Technically, the Sherpa are a people from Nepal, but the term is also used to describe the many Sherpa people who help people when mountaineering in the many tall-as-heck mountains in Nepal. These Sherpa guides accompany expeditions acting as scouts and guides known for being tough, durable, and used to the inhospitable climate at elevation.

Like these Sherpa guides, advisors are here to be your guides, to help you plan your expedition, navigate the confusing and often dangerous slopes of the college experience

Help with Planning and Decision-Making

Advisors will help you identify your own strengths, your goals, and values so that you can make informed decisions about your time in college, to plan out your classes and other experiences that will lead to your goals, and to make decisions that make the most of your experience.

Help Navigating a Complicated System

College is filled with rules, systems, resources, and options that can be overwhelming. Understanding your options, restrictions, and ways to make the most of your education can make a huge difference in your eventual success after college. Advisors are here to help you understand how those rules, regulations, and systems apply to you – helping or hindering your goals – and how to adapt to and overcome any restrictions on you.

Help Overcoming Barriers

College is not easy. *It isn't intended to be.* But on top of college classes being hard, there are a lot of additional barriers that can get in the way of your success. You might have issues with money, roommates, housing, having enough to eat, struggling with your physical or mental health, trouble with your family, or just feeling disconnected, unmotivated, or unable to make a place at UC San Diego. Those are all real struggles, and advisors are here to help you either directly or by connecting you with support services on campus to help you be the best version of yourself you can be – and to be able to get past barriers and on to your dreams.

College vs. Major Advising

To make things a little more complicated, you are going to have at least two advising offices. The college provides general support, kind of like having a primary care physician. We will help you with general regulations, processes, and requirements as well as your General Education requirements.

In addition, you will have an advisor in your major to help you with knowing when your major requirements are offered, the prerequisites for your major, which major electives can best fit your goals, which professors

are potential mentors for you, and how to match your major to professional goals.

In addition, we have a bunch of other offices to support you, most importantly the Career Services office that focuses on helping you prepare for life after college. (We'll talk about them later.)

Confidentiality and Its Limits

Advisors are required to protect the confidentiality of your academic records. Which means that we have limits on who we can release your academic records to. In general, we can't release your academic information, but there are some exceptions, such as sharing your records with other advisors in the college and in your major.

In addition, we are required to report if a student appears to be a danger to themselves or to others, and to report any student who tells us about violence, sexual assault or sexual harassment. We are **mandated reporters** for any sort of sexual violence, harassment, or assault, and for any potential abuse of minors (including students below the age of 18.) That means that we should be telling you in an advising meeting when we can't be confidential about private information that we must report. And we will often work to contact our Student Affairs staff if you seem to be struggling with something that may need to be addressed in your life.

Do You Want to Graduate?

A lot of students don't realize that in order to graduate from UC San Diego, you need to do more than just finish a major. There are a **bunch** of additional requirements, broken down into three general categories: University Requirements (you gotta do them regardless of which college you are in), College Requirements (only for Muir students), and Major Requirements (which I will not get into because there are like 100-200 majors on campus and that's just bananas.)

University Requirements

As a UCSD student, you must satisfy:

- The **Entry-level Writing Requirement (ELWR)**. If you did not do this before you started at UCSD, you need to take an Analytical Writing Program course based on your placement each quarter until you pass the requirement – but you have to clear this by the end of your 3rd quarter at UCSD. Yes, that sounds harsh, but it's not so bad. Honest.
- The **American History and Institutions (AHI)** Requirement. Most students finish this in high school (but that does mean that transfer students need to submit high school transcripts to finish this), but for a handful of students, you might need one US History or US government class before graduation.
- The Requirement in **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)**. You basically have to take one UCSD class from an approved list before you graduate.
- You must complete **at least 180 total units**. If your major and GEs don't add up to 180 units, you have to take some additional elective courses to make up the difference.
- You must complete **at least 60 upper-division units**. Upper-division courses are junior or senior level courses. At UCSD they are numbered 100 or higher. AP, IB, and community college courses are always considered lower-division. What happens if you have 180 total units and not 60 upper-division units yet? You keep taking upper-division courses until you hit the minimum. Many majors require as few as 48 upper-division units, so you usually need to take some upper-division elective courses in any subject (either in or out of your major) to meet this requirement.
- You must have a **2.0 cumulative grade point average in your University of California classes** to graduate. If you struggle with your grades, we are going to harass you to try to get you in a better place and prevent you from being mathematically unable to graduate.

College Requirements

I would not say that Muir has the easiest requirements at UC San Diego. But we are up there. Our GEs are, unlike some other colleges (cough, Rev-elle, cough), intended to be flexible and focus on broad areas of learning. Our

goal is for you to be well-rounded in your approach to academics, but to have many options (and a little focus) along the way. As a Muir student, you need to complete:

- **2 writing courses** (MCWP 40 and MCWP 50), which you need to complete in your first 6 quarters at UCSD (or you will will delay your graduation) and must take for a letter grade. AP, IB, and community college courses cannot be used to satisfy this requirement. Only Warren has this few writing or core classes required of students.
- **3 Math or Natural Sciences.** We want you to work on numeracy, science literacy, and deductive reasoning because those have been important in the Western world for the past couple of centuries.
- **3 Social Science courses.** These focus on inductive reasoning, the process of making a theory about observed activity and testing it against data. And they teach you a bit about human behavior, because we hope you won't be a hermit.
- 6 courses in **Fine Arts, Humanities, or a Language Other than English.** So the theme here is to focus on critical thinking around culture, language, and artifacts of culture (narratives, philosophies, literature, art, etc.) Why? Because we want you to understand how to talk about culture in a thoughtful way so that you can interrogate your assumptions, biases, and thoughts and be better at engaging with problems that don't have clear right and wrong answers.

Muir GEs are grouped into broad, interdisciplinary GE themes, so that you are choosing some courses that are connected to each other rather than just taking random classes. You can find the GE themes on <http://muir.ucsd.edu>,

We do accept GE and IB courses toward some of our GEs, depending on the exam and the score you received, and we do accept P/NP grading for everything but Muir Writing. However, we do not accept language proficiency for our Language Other than English GE option. We only accept college credits (including some AP and IB exams) for our GEs.

If you **transfer from a community college**, we also have an agreement called IGETC (the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum – what a mouthful!) that you can use to waive your GE sequences if you completed IGETC before you transferred to UCSD, but we will still require you to do one writing course. If you did IGETC while in high school, though, we will not accept your IGETC to waive GEs, but we will work with you to fit your transfer courses into your GE requirements.

IGETC students will need to take MCWP 125 to finish their last college requirement after transfer. If you are partial IGETC or IGETC for STEM, you will have some additional courses as well as MCWP 125.

Other transfer students gotta talk to an advisor, because things get complicated without IGETC.

Major Requirements

Majors vary *a lot* in their requirements. At a minimum, every major will require at least 48 units (12 classes) of upper-division courses. Most will also have at least a few lower-division requirements as well, particularly in the sciences, and some (like Music and Engineering) will require a crap-ton of units (and a lot of planning) to graduate.

As a general rule, most majors require letter grades of C- or better to count toward the major, and some require a GPA of 2.0 or higher in the upper-division courses for your major and may require a minimum number of courses for your major be taken at UCSD.

Prerequisites and Restrictions

Some classes have prerequisites (classes you need to complete before you take the class) or restrictions (only certain students can take the course, like juniors and seniors) that restrict whether you can take the course. Take the Prerequisites in particular seriously, since the course probably relies heavily on content from the prerequisites listed. Skipping into a class without prerequisites, even with the professor's blessing, may be setting you up to get a disappointing grade in the course.

Taking Classes Away from UCSD

Can you take some of your classes away from UC San Diego, like at a community college? Maybe. You need to look for an equivalent course on www.assist.org if you take the class in a California community college, or you need to talk to the department that offers the UCSD course you want to replace if you are taking it anywhere else. Courses taken outside of UCSD have a few drawbacks:

- They do not count toward your UCSD GPA unless they were taken at a University of California Campus.
- They take about forever to be posted to your transcript.
- Some professional schools (okay, I'm mostly talking about medical schools) may get a little squeamish about students taking courses at a community college that they could have taken at UCSD. This isn't a hard and fast rule, but seriously, if you are thinking of taking organic chemistry at a community college hoping it will be easier than UCSD, just don't. There is not trick that someone hasn't tried before you to get into Medical School.

Grading

The highest grade point value is 4.0. An A is worth 4 grade points, a B 3, a C 2, a D 1 and an F is worth 0. Grades of A, B, or C can be appended with a + or -, which adds or subtracts 0.3 from the grade points (except for an A+, which still counts as 4.0. It still shows up on your transcript, though, and professors eat that stuff up when reviewing applications to grad school.)

There are no bonus grade points for honors classes. Typically, the handful of honors classes offer the benefit of being more intense for students who are also more intense. There is no bribe for doing honors except for the boost to your ego that you are just that more hardcore, and that you get to be better prepared to be hardcore in later classes. Honors classes are for Hermione, not Ron.

Grades of D will get you units for your class and may count toward your total units, toward your GE requirements, and may or may not be usable for your major.

You can choose to take some classes (but not Muir Writing) pass/no pass. Only 1 in 4 of your UCSD units can be taken pass/no pass, but you want to keep the number of P/NP units pretty low. Grades of P and NP do not factor into your GPA. To earn a grade P, though, you need the equivalent of a C- in the class. Remember that many majors and minors do not accept pass/no pass grading, nor will a P grade typically count toward requirements for graduate or professional school.

Failing and Repeating Classes

Getting a grade of D, F, or NP in the class will feel like a huge disappointment at the very least, if not a disaster. And may make you mad at the professor and this stupid university. This will suck. However, we also assume that some students will have a lousy quarter at some point of their academic career. So our academic regulations allow students to repeat any class they failed (got a D, F, or NP). In addition, for the first 16 units you repeat, the new grade will count in your GPA instead of the original grade (we basically are giving you one quarter of disastrous grades to repeat.) The original grade still shows up on your transcript (and may be something we talk about you addressing in a personal statement for graduate or professional school later on), but the new grade is all that counts to your UC GPA.

The intent here is to allow a student who stumbles a chance to recover and return to good academic standing. There are some limits

- You can't repeat a passing grade (P or a C- or better) until you get the grade you want.
- You can only repeat a D, F, or NP in a class once. If you fail twice, you have to appeal to repeat the class. We may say no, which may make you have to consider a new major.
- You can't repeat and replace a grade in your GPA if you failed a class as the result of an academic integrity violation.
- After those first 16 units, any repeats are counted alongside your original grade in calculating your GPA, which makes it much harder to raise your cumulative GPA.

Academic Probation and Subject to Disqualification

If your cumulative GPA or your GPA in any given quarter falls below 2.0, you will be put on academic probation. This sounds scary AF, but all it

means is that we are watching you. Okay, I guess that does sound scary. Our goal is for you to raise your GPA in the next quarter, and we will hound you about resources.

If you continue for at least two consecutive quarters on academic probation and your cumulative GPA falls below 2.0 as well, you will become subject to academic disqualification. Also, if your gpa in any given quarter is below 1.5, even if your cumulative GPA is above 2.0, you skip straight to Subject to Disqualification. This also sounds scary AF.

When a student is Subject to Disqualification, they end up on the Dean's radar to review their record. If you are Subject to Disqualification but seem to be still on track to finish your major and graduate, you will be given an exception to continue. If you are Subject to Disqualification but you earned at least a 2.0 in the quarter you just finished, the Dean will see you as improving, and allow you to continue. But if you are looking like you are in a spiral of failing grades, particularly in your major, your records will be reviewed by the Dean, and you may become ineligible to enroll at UC San Diego for at least a year.

We don't disqualify students often, but when we do, we are trying to get students out of a negative cycle of grades and to prevent them from reaching a point where it is mathematically unlikely or even impossible to raise their GPA high enough to graduate. And we hope to get students to take a year to deal with the problems getting in the way of school and to come back when they are more prepared to get out of the hole they are in and move on to success in their goals and dreams.

That doesn't make the process not suck, but it is intended to get students to get the help they need to finish their degree!

Your Degree Audit

If you go to the Student Tools section on students.ucsd.edu, you can find yourself a handy link to the Degree Audit. This document will take a while for you to learn to read, but it is basically your guide to what you need to do to finish your degree. In general, some rules:

- Red marks something as unsatisfied. Blue means in progress. Green means complete.
- The first line of a requirement will list a number of "requirements", which usually lists a number of sub-requirements under a secondary heading (but also calls them "requirements" because... heck, I don't know why. Programmers!) For example, the audit will list each GE theme you need to do as a single requirement, with three (sub-) requirements below that.
- If something seems wrong, assume that it needs fixing, and reach out to an advisor on the Virtual Advising Center (<http://vac.ucsd.edu>) noting what seems to be an error, and asking the advisor to fix it. Either it really is an error and we will work on it, or it isn't an error, and we will explain the issue to you!

Making an Academic Plan

Do you want to make sure you can finish in four years (or two years as a transfer student)? Are you trying to figure out if you can fit in study abroad, or finish in just 3 years, or do a double major? You can start your planning now.

1. Go to <http://plans.ucsd.edu> where we list a sample 4-year plan for all the majors on campus, sample two-year transfer plans for most majors, and 3-year plans for some majors who have overly enthusiastic freshmen. Look up your declared or proposed major and pull up that plan!
2. Pull up your degree audit to verify what you have completed, are in progress on, and still have left to go!
3. Go to <http://degree-planner.ucsd.edu> and use the four-year plan as a model, making sure you adjust for anything you have already taken or are ahead or behind schedule on in the major plan.
4. Consult with the advisor in your major to make sure you didn't miss anything you need to account for – when courses are offered, prerequisites, etc.
5. Finally, meet with your advisor in the college to make sure all of the college and university requirements are accounted for (we don't want you not graduating due to a technicality!) and to discuss other things you might want to fit into your plan (internships, study abroad, that kind of thing.)

Kicking Ass (Academically Speaking)

am going to make an assumption that you didn't come to UCSD unless you had dreams of Something Big in your future. Medical school, law school, starting a company, insider trading, whatever it was, I figure you want to make your mark on the world.

All that said, I want to let you know that when I envision "thriving" in college, I think of more than GPA, prestigious graduate schools, and the like. Sometimes thriving means being the first person in your family to go to college, much less graduate. Sometimes it means finding your voice and being able to cause Good Trouble. Sometimes it means finding a way to give back to your family or your community. Success and Big Dreams can be a lot of different things to different people.

That said, success at college is going to require you to learn some new skills. It's easy to focus on academic skills (and trust me, I am going to talk about that), but it's also important to learn to be a self-advocate, to accept help from others, and to build a community where you feel you belong and have people who have your back.

Belonging

In movies and on TV, every character who goes to college has a great time and finds their life-long besties, and parties, and it's sunshine and puppies, and some sort of crap. But the reality is, that sense of feeling like college is a place where you fit in isn't automatic, and it isn't universal. College can be weird and isolating for some students. College life assumes a lot about your cultural, class, and academic background. It's easy to find yourself suffering from *imposter syndrome* – *that feeling that you don't belong here and that somehow you fooled a bunch of people into thinking you were smart enough to be at UCSD but everyone else is moe on top of it.*

Let me tell you officially that that is your brain lying to you. That's stress, that's fear, that's what we call disequilibrium, the feeling of being out of place and off-balance, and it triggers a lot of anxiety (a neurological reaction where your body tells you to fight or flee) and depression (a neurological reaction where your body tells you you are helpless) making your brain lie to you to get out of a tense situation.

The way you counter those feelings of being out of place are to create spaces where you feel you fit in. This can happen by finding friends, joining clubs, or finding places on campus (the community centers, the cross cultural center, the veterans' resource center, the transfer center, etc.) where you can find people who share your values and experiences and you remind yourself you are not alone.

Wellness

Wellness is a broad term for taking care of your body, mind, and spirit. For me, as a person with type-2 diabetes, chronic depression, high cholesterol and a family history of strokes, wellness includes care for my diet, taking time to exercise (which I am bad at), medication, and meditation

as well as maintaining the friendships that keep me out of deep depressive episodes. It may mean different things based on your own needs, but at the very least your wellness should be focused on taking care of your physical needs, your mental wellness and stress, your need for connection to others and to higher values (whether religious or secular), and your need to address health or disability issues and seek accommodation where needed.

We have several resources for your support including the Health Center, the Zone, Counseling and Psychological Services, and the Office for Students with Disabilities to make sure your wellness needs are met and the barriers that can arise if your wellness needs aren't met can be addressed to help you thrive.

Co-Curricular Activities

School is not your only important activity at college. Seriously. Doing things outside of class will help you develop leadership skills, teamwork, oral and written communication skills, and a sense of belonging by building a community of people with whom you share values, interests, goals, and experiences. The challenge of co-curricular activities is that they are often more fun than class, so they will require you to make a lot of hard decisions about how to organize your time, which will lean on your time management skills.

Making Decisions

Making decisions well is something that people assume just happens to smart people and is easy. In reality, making good decisions is a matter of developing skills about how to deal with information, how to identify options, and how to predict outcomes in complex situations. Making decisions well is seldom easy, and it often turns out that decisions have unpredictable outcomes in the best of circumstances. So here are some tools to think more critically about how you make decisions.

Deciding with Reason and Intuition

Often, we tend to think of making decisions with either pure reason (mind) or pure instinct (gut feeling) as if the options are part of a binary opposition. In truth, you can and should use both in your decisions.

Reason Considers

- Facts.
- What is probable, not just what is possible.
- Risk and reward.
- Pros and Cons.
- What you do know and what you don't know.

Intuition Considers

- Does it feel right (deep emotions and memories.)

- Does it feel consistent with your values and sense of self?
- Does this feel impulsive?

Barriers to Effective Decision-Making

- Insufficient information.
- Too much information; it overwhelms you.
- Too many people involved in the decision.
- Someone involved has a vested interest in a particular outcome.
- You have no emotional attachment to the outcome, making it hard to decide what is right or wrong.

Defining & Dealing with Problems

This is a cyclical process as you keep dealing with issues....

- **Define the Problem:** Is it a challenge, goal, or opportunity?
- **Gather Information:** What are the facts? Who is affected? What are your assumptions? What are people's opinions? What are the limitations on the situation?
- **Consider Alternatives:** Brainstorm, identify criteria for evaluating options, identify constraints and advantages to each option.
- **Choose the Best Options:** What is *possible*? What is *feasible*? What is *suitable*? Can you be *flexible*?
- **Implement Your Solution:** Develop a plan. Inform relevant people. Compromise if necessary.
- **Monitor Your Progress:** How is the plan being implemented? What are the results? Do you need help?
- **Review** and learn from your experience, **and revise** your plan as needed.

Setting SMART Goals

Developed for project management in business, SMART goals allow you to understand exactly when you have developed an actionable goal. A SMART goal is:

- **Specific:** What is the exact thing you want to do?
- **Measurable:** Can you track your progress to completing the goal?
- **Achievable:** Can you articulate what you need to do to achieve your goal?
- **Realistic:** What resources (internal and external) do you need to reach your goal?
- **Time-Bound:** What is your deadline or timeline to achieve your goal?

WOOP: Maintaining Motivation when You Encounter Barriers

WOOP is an idea of positive visualization while also anticipating contrasting barriers to implementation. Cognitive scientists find that when in-

dividuals visualize success, this releases positive neurotransmitters as if they have achieved success already, decreasing motivation. But visualization of success while also imagining internal barriers that might prevent your success and how you will overcome them help you keep motivation in the face of barriers.

- **Wish:** What do you want to achieve.
- **Outcome:** Imagine what it would look like and what would happen if you achieve your wish.
- **Obstacle:** What are the parts of yourself that stand in the way of your wish?
- **Plan:** How will you overcome your own internal barriers?

Managing Your Time

Professors, administrators, and staff act as if everyone should just be able to manage their time well once they hit a certain age, usually some unreasonable age in their teens, when people are still developing basic self-awareness and critical thinking skills, and when even the adults around teens don't spend any time helping them actually develop those skills. Time management is a skill set, and for some of us who are not neurotypical, time management is a real bear, since we might have a very different perception of time and how it flows than neurotypical folks. (My friends with ADD and ADHD know what I am talking about, amiright?) The problem with time management is that there is no one way to manage time and your relationship with time and tasks. With that in mind, here are some ideas on how to try to manage your time better.

Tools You Need

When I talk about tools, I am talking about cognitive tools, not necessarily about physical tools. Cognitive science folks talk about a phenomenon called "distributed cognition", a process where you use tools, relationships, or your environment to carry some of the work of thinking, remembering, and processing information (your "cognitive load") to help your brain be free to do other things. It's hard for most people to remember more than 3-5 things at a time, and harder to do this when those things are new habits or skills. A lot of things I will talk about throughout this zine are about distributing your cognition in ways to help your brain do its job better.

Managing your time in a way that frees your brain to do other things (like learn a lot of hard material), you need to make use of a set of tools that carry some of that cognitive load:

- **A Planner or Calendar:** at the very least, you need one calendar. This can be a paper planner or an electronic calendar. (I use both for different purposes.) But you need to make sure that you track when you have exams, when assignments are due, and when you have events, plans, and commitments. If you don't track those things, you will almost certainly miss deadlines or flake on commitments regardless of your good inten-

tions.

- **To Do Lists:** It's helpful to have a daily or weekly to do list so you can track what you need to do, what you have done, and what you have not done each day to know if you are on track or not.
- **Syllabi:** You need to use your syllabus to identify your deadlines and requirements in each of your classes.
- **Alarms:** Use alarms to warn you of upcoming events, appointments, and to keep things like a regular sleep schedule. Most of us carry a little portable computer that we pretend is a phone to keep track of all kinds of things in our lives. Use those alarms to remind you of your commitments and deadlines.
- Some **time dedicated to setting this all up.** You need to invest time to manage your time. Seriously.

Let's Do This Thing

At the start of the quarter (or before if you are extra), pull out your syllabi and your calendar. Note the dates of all your assignments: finals, midterms, quizzes, homework, reading assignments. Note the due dates of every assignment. Every one. Seriously. Note when office hours are for class. If you are a daily or weekly planner aficionado (and I suggest you become one if you are not), note when your classes and discussion sections occur.

Write down your other commitments: work, clubs, church, workout time, your volleyball tournament, appointments with your doctor or tattoo artist, date night with your sweetie, your weekly D&D game – anything you need to make sure you attend, put it down.

Finally, go to the campus enrollment and registration calendar (<https://blink.ucsd.edu/instructors/courses/enrollment/calendars/>) and copy down deadlines for key things like :

- Schedule of Classes and enrollment appointment times available
- Billing statement available on TritonLink. (eBill available continuing students)
- Registration fee payment deadline (after this date, late fees apply)
- Late registration fee payment deadline (to avoid being dropped from enrolled classes or wait listed courses)
- First day of classes
- Automatic wait lists officially end
- Deadline for all students to change grading option (undergraduate and graduate students)
- Deadline for all students to drop classes without "W" grade on transcript (undergraduate and graduate students)
- Deadline for Undergraduate students to drop with "W" grade on transcript
- Last day of classes before finals
- Finals week

Habits To Develop

Once a week (like on Sunday evening) review your awesome, detailed calendar you made at the start of the quarter following my instructions so you can look at your commitments. Don't stress if it looks busy. You got this.

-
- Make a to do list of all the stuff you need to do this week.
- Prioritize all the stuff you need to do as:
 - ◊ A (Must do it)
 - ◊ B (Would be nice if I did it)
 - ◊ C (Total icing on the cake if I did it, but no big deal if I didn't.)
- Review your planner and to dos **every day**.
 - ◊ What did you do? Check that stuff off.
 - ◊ What did you not do? Do you need to carry that to tomorrow's to do list or are you really not going to do it. Adjust the priority as needed if you carry it over

Breaking Tasks into Manageable Chunks

When you have a big task, break it down to smaller tasks. For example, "study for midterm 1" is a huge task. But you can break it down into reviewing notes, making flashcards to memorize vocabulary, reviewing homework sets, going to your professor's review session, etc.

Identifying Procrastination

Procrastination is a normal response to feeling overwhelmed and unmotivated. That said, procrastination is a warning sign that you are struggling with motivation and learning.

There are a lot of ways to procrastinate. My favorite is focusing on doing a lot of small bits of work that are unrelated to the task I am doing so that I can tell myself I am being productive, but really I am just avoiding a big task I hate doing.

When you are procrastinating, you need to try several approaches to re-engage:

- Take a timed and specific break. Like take five minutes to clear your mind and envision what you need to do, or write down a to do list that breaks the task you are procrastinating about down into smaller chunks.
- Bribe yourself with rewards if you finish a smaller chunk of a task you have been procrastinating about.
- Call on your cheerleaders. Text someone responsible about your trouble focusing so they can remind you that you can do this.

If You Struggle With Time Management, You Can Do This (but It's Hard AF)!

It is not impossible to manage time with attention issues common to a number of neurodivergent experiences like ADD, ADHD, or chronic de-

pression, but it is harder than it is for neurotypical folks. It takes work, and you *will slip up a lot, but you can do it!*

Customize any time management **to your individual needs**. If you are neurodivergent (say you are on the autism spectrum or have ADD/ADHD), your neurology is going to shape what works for you. My chronic depression, for instance, works well with patterns and schedules *when I am not in a depressive episode, but when I am struggling with a depressive episode, I have a hard time doing much without external cues and having people to help me.*

You have to plan ahead every day. Winging it is more likely to go wrong for you if you struggle with time management, particularly if you are neurodivergent.

Some habits that may help:

- **Have a planner that fits your way of thinking.** I spent a lot of money on a customized planner because all of the commercial ones I found just didn't match how my brain works.. In addition, I use Outlook to manage my appointments and work commitments in a way that is accessible with the people I work with and a third calendar on Google Calendar to share with my wife so I remember any plans we have together.
- **Set aside the things you need when you leave the house.** Every night, I make sure my keys, wallet, everyday carry, and briefcase are by the door and my clothes set aside for the next day and I plug in my cell phone in the same place next to the bed with my glasses so that I don't spend the morning spiraling into anxiety and further delay because I can't find what I need to before I leave the house.
- **Set timers and alarms.** I tend to lose track of time. A lot. Either my mind wanders too much or I get hyper-focused on a task and I lose all sense of time passing. Timers and alarms that make noise or vibrate help me have external cues when things are due or when I need to move on. If I don't have an external cue, hours might pass before I remember to eat or take out the garbage "in a minute" like I told my wife I would. (And sometimes, my external cue is my wife asking me if I had lunch yet....)
- **Assume you will underestimate the time it will take for you to do something.** If you think it will take five minutes, budget 10 or more. Some of us, particularly if we are neurodivergent, have a very different relationship with the perception of time. Don't fight it! Anticipate it!
- **Remember that you will get distracted, and factor that into your study environment and time management.** Try to make your study space chill and organized (at least when you are facing the work surface. If your clothes are all over the bed and your desk looks clean, I count that as a win.) I also keep some sort of fidget toys around to help me manage my own attention issues (you may find that distracting, I find it helpful when I get the inevitable urge to multitask when I should be focusing. Having a fidget cube, worry coin, or Slink nearby calms my

nervous energy and helps keep me more or less on task.

- **Work on your all-or-nothing thinking.** My ability to manage time goes through cycles. Good some days, bad others. Yours will too. If things go south, don't give up on being able to manage time *ever*. *Even the most type-A students screw up their time management. And they don't have their brains sabotaging them.*

Becoming a Better Student

Being a good student is a **set of skills**, not an inherent trait. That means you can be a good student in one setting, and not in another; and if you aren't a good student now, you can be a good student in the future.

- **Everyone learns differently**, with different tools and approaches, and at different paces.
- **College is a weird environment**, particularly when you are on the **quarter system**.
- **Learning is hard**, and takes a lot of **work** and a lot of **time**.

Hand-writing Notes

Several studies suggest (but are not conclusive) that hand-writing notes can be a much better tool for you to reinforce and recall information than typing notes or listening to lectures. The speculation is that the mechanics of writing help reinforce the information in two ways: that you must identify information from the lecture to take note of, and that you must make an effort to think about and write down the information.

Even if you type your notes, writing notes is cognitively more helpful than listening to or re-watching recordings of lectures again because when you write, you are actively reinforcing information in your short-term memory by choosing what to focus on and writing it down in your own words. Passive watching gives you a false sense of understanding. Your brain is not a tape recorder, It works best when it is working.

The same is true of reading a book. If a lecture or a textbook makes sense to you, that is often a reflection on the ability of the speaker or writing to present information well; it is not a reflection of how well you understand the material. The clarity of the presentation gives you a sense that the concepts make sense, but they don't really make sense unless you can restate the concepts on your own. Repeating someone else word for word is not understanding.

When taking notes, make sure you:

- Make note of things that seem important to know; your job is not to transcribe everything, but to pick out the important ideas and make note of them.
- Write things down in your own words; don't simply copy the text word for word. Write it to explain the concept back to future you.

- Leave room for you to correct and annotate your notes later.
- Write clearly. Future you will thank you for readable notes.
- Think of your notes as your guide to the class that you will use to prepare for the midterm or final later on.
- Number the pages of your notes, make note of the date of your notes on the top of the page, and what the notes are about (“Physics 1A lecture, March 5, 2022”)
- Review your notes regularly, preferably within a day or two, to identify questions, problems, missing information, or stuff you wrote but now don’t understand WTH you wrote down.

Reading to Prepare for Exams

When you are assigned readings, most students markup the book or article with a highlighter and some notes in the margins and call it a day. This is an ineffective way to study. This might help you make it through the article as you cram it just before (or after) the reading is due, but it will not help you use the reading as a guide to prepare for future exams or papers.

When reading a textbook (as opposed to a novel or a history), you should read each chapter by starting with the introduction and reading it fully. I thin usually skip to the conclusion section of the chapter and read that fully (so I know what I am supposed to be reading, and what they assume I should know), then I skim every paragraph in between. I am looking for the following cues to important information:

- Definitions
- Dates
- Names/Key people
- Ideas and Concepts
- Examples
- Formulas and Equations
- Illustrations and Diagrams

When reading a journal article, I typically start with the abstract, the introduction, the discussion, then the methods and data analysis, with a particular eye to whether the methods and data analysis make me more supportive or skeptical of the discussion. The guidelines above also apply to identifying important information.

When reading a novel, history, or book of philosophy, I tend to read beginning to end, but sometimes skim when I find it too dense to get through on first reading. Again, use the guidelines above to identify the Important Stuff in the reading.

Most importantly, keep notes on your reading. Seriously. Note what page your note is referring to, write your notes in your own words unless you are pulling a quote out for a paper later on (and even then, make a note of what you understand it to mean) and leave room for more clarifying notes.

Lecture Notes to Prepare for Exams

First of all, no matter how dry and boring your professor is, attend lectures. Get a sense of the instructor, what is important to them, and let them see you as engaged. If you have to miss a lecture, then you can spend some time on the podcast or recorded lectures. But don't be the student who just downloads the professor's powerpoints and thinks that's enough. It seldom is, and often means you miss a lot of cues the professor is giving about what they think is important for you to know.

The mistake many students make is that they assume that listening and re-listening to lectures will be enough to learn the material. In general, this is a fun theory, but it doesn't usually work for students. The reality is that learning is more complicated than just listening to a lecture and letting it soak into your brain. I wish it were that easy. So many classes would have been easier if that were true. In reality, most human beings don't learn just by listening passively and most humans can't remember things faultlessly. Instead, you have to spend some time actively listening, reflecting, and taking notes. Either during the lecture or when you listen to a podcast or recording of the lecture, you should be taking notes during lecture.

- This is going to be a study guide for the exam, so take ***organized, readable notes***.
- Leave room for you to fill in things you missed or need to correct or add to.
- Don't try to transcribe everything the professor is saying or copy their powerpoint slides. Instead, look for things that might seem important:
 - Definitions
 - Dates
 - Names/Key people
 - Ideas and Concepts
 - Examples
 - Diagrams
 - Formulas
 - Any time the professor takes time to solve on the board
 - Any time the professor solves an equation or problem from the homework on the board (seriously high chance that or something like it will be on the exam)
 - Anything the professor repeats the same topic
 - Subtle hints like when the professor says "this is really important", "you should pay attention to this", or "this will probably be on the exam." (Seriously, you would be surprised how many students are surprised when the thing the professor says will be on the exam is, you know, on the exam.)

Practice Problems

Typically, particularly in math and science courses, you will only learn the subject matter if you end up solving a lot of problems. Want to understand calculus? Solve a lot of problems. Want to understand organic chemistry?

You have to push a lot of molecules. This is why I hate it when professors assign homework but don't require you to turn it in or give you grades, because it makes students think that solving problems is optional, since it is ungraded. That's a load of bollocks. And I took calculus for fun when I was 30 and long out of college. (No, really. A year of calculus, a quarter of differential equations, and a quarter of linear algebra. Just because it was *interesting*.)

The thing about doing practice problems is that it helps expose your misunderstandings and limits much more than lecture and reading do. When push comes to shove, you can read and listen to lecture and look at all the examples in the book and *think you understand something, but when you actually sit down to do the work, it still doesn't calculate right.*

My calculus professor, like many math professors I have known, used to assign a bunch of easy problems, a couple of hard problems, and one that made me swear at him. And the place where I learned the most is the terrible have-to-swear-at-the-professor problem. Every time. Why? Because it usually involved having to understand in more depth either how to set up a problem or how to solve a problem by hammering on the kinds of things that people usually misunderstand. Those were usually the problems I went to office hours asking about where the heck I went wrong, and as a result I was able to ace most exams.

So do a lot of problems, and take notes on the side about the stuff that killed you trying to solve them.

Studying for Exams

I told you to take notes and solve problems. Here is the deal: those notes are your study guide for the class. If you keep them organized, fill in things you learned in office hours asking questions, and order all your reading notes, lecture notes, and practice problems by date, you should have a nice catalog of all the stuff you learned.

Break out your highlighters, color code stuff to help you find things you need to know. Make flashcards out of definitions, terms, dates, and formulas, and review problems. Think about what the professor might include on the exam based on your notes. Then get some friends together and quiz each other. Help each other solve problems or correct their notes.

And start this at least a week before each exam.

Get Some Sleep

Sleep deprivation will dull your cognitive abilities, including memory, reasoning, and language. REM sleep, on the other hand, is important in the process of converting short term memory into long term memory, processing stress hormones, preventing illness, and healing from injuries.

Adolescents typically need 8-9 hours of sleep opportunity (restful time in the sleep cycle) per night. Without it, you will end up having trouble focusing, remembering, organizing your thoughts, and controlling impulses.

So if you want to do well in school, make sure you have a fairly regular sleep schedule, and get enough sleep. All-nighters are the enemy of good exam performance (even though students think an all-nighter is a badge of how hardcore you are. Your brain disagrees with you. And your brain is right.)

Taking Exams

Exams all are a bit different, but some general tips:

- Get a full night's sleep the night before. (Just in case you skipped the section above.) It's good for your mental and emotional functioning. Seriously. Coffee doesn't make up for lost sleep!
- If possible, arrive a little early for the exam. It keeps you from feeling rushed and tense at the exam, and to have a little time to focus.
- Visualize yourself taking the exam. Seriously. I know this sounds like hippy nonsense, but visualize yourself relaxing and taking the exam.
- Read the instructions on the exam fully and look at what kind of questions you need to answer.
- Make a plan to manage your time. Figure out how long you need to spend on the hardest parts and make sure you leave yourself enough time for those sections.
- If possible, clear out the quick and easy sections of the exam first. Typically true/false questions are the fastest to go through, then multiple choice questions, short answer, then long answer or equation solving, and finally essay questions. Plan accordingly.
- If you are not penalized for wrong answers, make educated guesses. Try to reduce your options to one or two possible answers, then go for the extra points.
- If your professor gives partial credit, attempt the problems and do as much as you can to show your understanding of the material.
- When you are anxious, take a moment to stop what you are doing, close your eyes, and take a long breath (count to 3 slowly) and out through your mouth. Do this 3 times while visualizing yourself answering the questions calmly, then get back to the exam.
- When you get the exam back, review what you did well, and what you did not. Go to your TA or professor to discuss where you made mistakes and figure out where you went wrong with your answer to learn before the next exam.

Getting Help

You are not alone in your experiences in college. There are a lot of people here to serve as your support, your community, and your cheerleaders throughout your time at UC San Diego.

Advising Resources

- Muir College Academic Advising: <http://muir.ucsd.edu/academics>

- **Major Department and Program Advisors:** <https://blink.ucsd.edu/instructors/resources/advisor-lists/departments.html>
- **Virtual Advising Center:** <http://vac.ucsd.edu>
- **Career Services:** <http://career.ucsd.edu>

Wellness Resources

- **Student Health and Wellbeing:** <https://studentwellbeing.ucsd.edu/>
- **Student Health Services:** <https://studenthealth.ucsd.edu/>
- **Basic Needs** (Housing and Food Insecurity): <https://basicneeds.ucsd.edu/>
- **Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS):** <http://caps.ucsd.edu>
- **Office for Students with Disabilities:** <http://disability.ucsd.edu>
- Students dealing with **sexual and gender-based violence:** <https://students.ucsd.edu/sponsor/sarc/>

Academic Resources

- **Academic Resources on Campus:** <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/success/campus-resources/index.html>
- **Academic Resources by Department:** <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/success/tutoring-study-programs.html>
- **Where to study on campus:** <https://students.ucsd.edu/campus-services/technology/campus-study-locations.html>
- **IDEA center** for engineering students: <http://jacobsschool.ucsd.edu/idea/>
- **Office of Academic Support and Instructional Services (OASIS):** <http://oasis.ucsd.edu>
- **Office for Students with Disabilities:** <http://disability.ucsd.edu>
- **Teaching and Learning Commons:** <http://commons.ucsd.edu>
- **Help for non-native English speakers:** <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/success/english-esl.html>
- **Writing help:** <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/success/writing-programs.html>

Belonging Resources

- **Athletes:** <https://ucsdtritons.com/sports/2020/6/29/uc-san-diego-student-services.aspx>
- **Campus Community Centers:** <https://diversity.ucsd.edu/centers-resources/community-centers.html> Commuter Students: <https://students.ucsd.edu/campus-services/parking-transportation/commuter/index.html>
- **Center for Student Involvement:** <http://getinvolved.ucsd.edu>
- **First Generation Students:** <http://srs.ucsd.edu/support/first-gen.html>
- **International Students:** <http://ispo.ucsd.edu/>
- **LGBT Resource Center:** <https://lgbt.ucsd.edu/>
- **Student parents:** <http://students.ucsd.edu/well-being/wellness->

[resources/student-parents/index.html](https://students.ucsd.edu/resources/student-parents/index.html)

- **Student Veterans' Resource Center (SVRC):** <https://students.ucsd.edu/sponsor/veterans/>
- **Transfer students:** <https://transferstudents.ucsd.edu/> :
- **Undocumented Students Services:** <https://students.ucsd.edu/sponsor/undoc/>

How to Read a Syllabus

If you spend too much time around college professors professionally, you will learn that they almost always complain that their students never seem to read the syllabus.. So don't be one of the students they complain about. Spend some time learning how to use a syllabus to be a better student!



Instructor Contact Information

This will give you information on how best to reach your professor (do they prefer email, phone, Canvas...),

Read this information **before** you email the professor about meeting to talk about a grade to make sure you are communicating in the way the professor



Course Description

Usually identical to] the UCSD catalog, this will give



Course Materials

What books do you need to rent/buy/borrow? Which ones are required and which are "recommended read-

Be aware that some grading scales are very clear. Other classes will be graded on a curve, so your grade will be based on how you do in **comparison**



Grading

Is this class graded on a curve or a fixed scale? How much of your grade is each assignment worth? Are homework assignments graded or not? Is attendance

You should never be surprised by how much work you are going to do in a class once you review your



Assignments

Get a sense of the workload in the class and figure out what each exam, paper, or task you need for the class



Course and University Policies

Check to see if attendance is required, absence policies, deadlines and what the professor considers to be an

For example, "my other professors let me use Chegg **for my assignments**" **ain't gonna cut** it if your professor says that is considered an AI violation in their syllabi



Learning Outcomes

The big picture of what skills and knowledge, you

High school syllabi usually list what you need to do **after** the class on that date; **college syllabi** list what you need to do



Calendar

When are readings due? When are your papers due? When are your exams? When you plan your quarter,

How to Use Office Hours

- ❑ **Be on time or early.** Showing up at the end of office hours and expecting to get time is not going to be seen as respectful of the professor's time, nor is missing an appointment you have set up with your professor.
- ❑ **Come in prepared.** Make sure you are doing the class readings, reviewing the lectures, and doing homework or assignments before office hours. Office hours are a supplement to your work, not a replacement for it.
- ❑ **Come in with specific questions,** concerns, and topics to cover.
- ❑ **Ask for study tips!** At the very least, they can tell you what from the class is most important, most difficult, and most applicable.
- ❑ **Do not expect the professor to repeat a lecture you missed.** If you missed the lecture, you will need to rely on the professor's online notes, podcast, or a friend's lecture notes. But do ask for them to clarify specific points from lecture that you did not understand!
- ❑ **Do not expect the professor to walk you start to finish through homework problems.** When you need help on a concept or problem, you need to be able to show your professor that you started a problem, and where you are struggling with applying the learning for the class.
- ❑ **Don't wait until exam time to use office hours.** Office hours just before exams are the most crowded, and as a result may not meet your needs in the limited time you have in them. So attend regularly, and start early in the quarter.
- ❑ **Understand that you are probably not the only person in office hours.** This means that you need to respect others' time and needs, share attention, and learn from what others are asking about too. This also may mean participating in asking and answering questions, just like you should in class.
- ❑ **Expect this to be a collaborative setting.** Ideally, you, the professor, and other students will all be part of the questions, answers, and help happening in office hours. Be engaged even when other students are having time working with the professor!
- ❑ **Try to get to know the professor.** Professors are less scary than they seem at first if you give them half a chance!

Time Management

Write Down Everything

Don't rely on remembering due dates and commitments. Your brain can only do so much. You need a consistent place to note deadlines, assignments, and commitments. This can be a physical planner, a calendar app on your phone, or a running list in a notebook. But you need a way to supplement your memory to keep track of your obligations!

Look at the Big Picture

At the start of the quarter take some time to go through your course syllabi and pull out the due dates, exams, and all other important dates and put them all in one place. I recommend the use of a single page calendar for the whole quarter (see the back of this sheet) where you can note due dates and assignments at a glance to plan your weeks and days.!

Break it Down

Once you know your assignments, break them down into chunks. Have a paper due? Work backwards to when you will need to have your first draft, when you need an outline, when you need research, and when you need to have decided on an essay topic so you can set deadlines you can use to manage your time along the way.

Stick to a Routine

A standard routine give you two benefits. One is that you have to do less work to remember details of your tasks for the day. The other is that when your routine falls apart eventually, it will be easier to readjust what you need to do and still get it done!

Stay Organized

All the paper and electronic files you get from school can get out of hand and make it harder to keep on top of your tasks. Set up a system like having separate binders and notebooks for each class, files on your computer for each class, etc. to make sure the information you need is easy to find, and deadlines are hard to miss.

Use Lists

Written lists or checklist apps for your phone can help you by making you identify what you need to do each day, prioritizing important items, and then tracking if you get them done.

Balance and Wellness

If you are not eating healthy meals, not staying active, and not sleeping 7-9 hours per night, your body, particularly your hormone levels and memory function, will suffer, making it harder to manage your time and stay on-task. This can also affect your physical and mental health.

If you are not feeding your soul by living in a way that is consistent with what you value and believe, you will not be able to do well in school. If you are not able live your life fully, you will struggle academically.

If you find yourself stretched thin or overwhelmed, seek help. Counseling, mentoring, and academic advising are all ways to ask for help, guidance, or support, and will help you get your out-of-control schedule back under control!

Dealing with Procrastination

Signs of Procrastination

- Underachievement:** I think my work doesn't live up to my potential.
- Lost Time:** I don't know why I didn't have time for my school work!
- Burnout:** I just can't find the passion or energy for what I am doing.

What kind of problem is causing your procrastination?

Organizational

I can't seem to prioritize my time, space and goals!

Try

- Using lists to organize assignments.
- Use a calendar to plan your quarter, weeks, and days.
- Work from least interesting to most interesting.
- Divide big assignments into smaller, actionable tasks.
- Keep a journal or folder of ideas you think of instead of waiting until an assignment is due.

Emotional

I am afraid of failure, evaluation, or criticism. I feel like an imposter.

Try

- Acknowledge your fears, but act anyway. You may find that the worst result doesn't happen, or isn't as bad as you thought.
- Be aware of how you trick yourself into avoiding problems.
- Don't focus on perfection, set smaller, achievable goals.
- Pretend assignments are not going to be graded or judged as you do them.

Motivational

I don't understand why I am school or why I am taking this class.

Try

- Work with an advisor to clarify your values and identify your goals.
- Take ownership of your goals, and find people in your life who help you feel supported in pursuing them.
- Reward yourself whenever you complete an assignment with a positive experience.

Textbooks: Reading and Taking Notes

Reading a textbook is not like reading a novel or a magazine. The key to reading a textbook is skimming through it to identify important information. The trick is to identify what is important and what is not.

When it's time to read a chapter in your textbook, take the following steps:

1. Read the introduction to the chapter.
2. Skim the rest of the text, identifying any important areas to go over in detail.
3. Read the summary at the end of the chapter, if there is one.
4. After skimming the chapter, return to the important areas of the text to look at them in depth.
5. Take notes based on your reading to help when it's time to review and to reinforce what you have just read.

Why are You Doing This?

Textbooks are important in college. Instructors assume they are tools you will use to teach yourself and form the foundation of knowledge that their lecture will then reinforce. Ideally, reading is what makes the lectures and assignments make sense.

Doing your reading before class will help you master material presented in lecture, and will give you a better basis for your studying before your exams.

Before You Start...

- Put away your highlighter (at least on your first pass). To succeed as a student you need to be an active and critical reader – highlighting can be passive and does not encourage critical reading.
- Remember why you are reading the textbook. If you are taking a math class, you may be looking for principles, formulas and applications; in a history textbook, you may be looking for names, dates, movements and definitions.
- Be alert and awake.
- Be prepared to ask questions and write them down.

What's Important to Read in Detail?

- Terms and definitions.
- Basic concepts, principles and ideas.
- Titles and subheadings.
- Bold or italic text.
- Illustrations, graphs, diagrams, and charts.
- Lists

- Introductions and summaries
- Things that trigger thoughts, reactions or questions

These are often cues to what the author has found essential to reinforce and illustrate. Based on this, look at the passages with more detail, identifying what is identified in each area and noting what is important.

Take Notes on Your Reading

You should take notes on your reading, just like you take notes on your lectures to summarize what you have read and the thoughts, questions, and connections that you make.

- Be brief, clear, organized and easy to review before exams. For example, they should be in outlines or bullet points, written on loose sheets of paper, written on only one side of the paper, and be dated and numbered so you can find topics.
- Summarize what you think is important rather than a sentence-by-sentence copy of the text.
- Include significant details of important ideas or concepts.
- Write from memory as much as possible to help you learn the topic rather than copying from the original.
- Summarize charts, illustrations, and diagrams.
- Include your own shorthand and way of thinking.
- Doodles, sketches, diagrams and cartoons can help you quickly capture a complicated idea or relationship.
- Highlighters and color coding your notes is a helpful way for you to find important ideas quickly and to organize your thoughts on the page.

Lecture Notes

Why You Take Lecture Notes

1. Note-taking helps you pay attention.
2. Note-taking helps you remember.
3. Note-taking helps you organize ideas.
4. A good set of notes is a perfect study guide.

During the Lecture

1. Do the assigned reading before lecture.
2. Come to class early and prepared with writing tools.
3. Choose your seat carefully — stay in the first two rows, away from distractions..
4. Stay awake, alert and engaged.

Organize Your Notes

You notes need to allow you to ...

- Identify key topics
- Read your notes
- See how ideas relate to each other.
- Read them later (so you need to write legibly and clearly)
- Be easy to refer to as a study guide.

Some ways to organize your note

- Outlines
- Page-ruled systems such as the Cornell note-taking system.
- Mind maps

Most people, however, will end up coming up with a hybrid system of their own. My own notes tend to be a mix of sketches, doodles, mind maps and outlines!

What to Take Notes On

1. Is the information notable? ..
 - Definitions, **dates, names, places and formulas.**
 - Information that **reinforces the textbook.**
 - Information that is **not covered in the textbook.**
 - Basic **principles and techniques**
 - Anything the instructor **puts on the board.**
 - Anything the instructor **says is important, or likely to be on the exam.**
 - Any topic the professor dedicates a **large amount of time or energy** to cover.
 - Anything the instructor **repeats or emphasizes.**
 - **Questions the instructor asks** students
 - Any **references to material previously covered**
 - Any **detailed responses to questions** in lecture.
 - **Your thoughts and questions.**
2. Does the information relate to the topic? And note not only if it relates, but how it relates – knowing that one topic is connected to others is essential.
3. Do you need the information?
4. Do you want to remember the information?

Key Words to Listen for in Lecture

- For example...
- For instance...
- To sum up...
- In essence...
- Therefore...
- To review...

Review Your Lecture Notes!

Review your notes the same day you take them – preferably just after lecture. Use that time to clarify your notes, fill in the blanks, and make sure your ideas are legible, organized and easy to find. This helps you in two ways::

1. It makes sure your notes are complete and easy to use.
2. It gives you one more chance to review the lecture material.

Extra Credit

1. The syllabus is a useful outline to the course, to help you see what information is important to take note of.
2. Be careful of technical language – know when to rephrase words and when wording is important.
3. Use abbreviations and shorthand to help you keep up.
4. Leave plenty of room in your notes to add, revise, or clarify your notes.
5. Be brief, clear, organized and easy to review before exams. Write on only one side of loose sheets of paper, and date and number your pages.

Preparing for Exams

Early in The Quarter

Learn what kind of exam it will be.

Figure out what kind of exam you will be taking — whether it is a multiple-choice exam, a short-answer exam or even an essay exam. This makes a big difference in how the exam will work. This should be described in the course syllabus

If possible and allowed by the professor (see the Academic Integrity policy section of the professor's syllabus), get a copy of the instructor's old exams so that you can see the way the instructor writes their exams and have a practice exam to rehearse test-taking.

Start Early

Preparing for your exam should start day one— you'll remember more if you start studying early and focus on drilling yourself on information you already know than if you are cramming a lot of information just before the exam.

Set Study Goals Every Time

Determine what you are going to get done in each study session. Have a goal to meet. You'll be more productive if you decide to review a certain number of pages or a certain set of topics rather than looking only at the number of hours you study.

Gather Your Resources

Whenever you study, you should have everything you need available. That means that you should study with textbooks, writing utensils, note-taking materials and the like handy. Having a dictionary at hand will help you when you're reading, too, but it isn't necessary. Your most important tools, though will be your class notes — if you keep them organized and complete.

Put Together a Study Group

When you are learning, one of your best resources will be other classmates. Having a strong study group can make your studying more productive and will help keep you responsible to keep up to date on information.

Near the Exam

As your exam approaches, you need to study a bit more and be a bit more focused.

Review

You should not be doing all your study before the exam. Instead, your focus should be on reviewing material you have already been working on all quarter.

Drill

Take time to review material regularly. Drill to reinforce factual information — definitions, basic concepts, names, dates, formulas, etc. This kind of information is good to practice using flash cards or other memorization tools whenever you have free time — waiting for the shuttle, in line for lunch — and you'll find extra time for your other studying.

Practice

While drilling will help you remember concepts, facts, and dates, the only way to get better at solving problems and answering questions is to solve problems and answer

questions. That means doing all the homework problems, whether the professor requires or grades them or not; getting together with a study group to do problems on the board, and to debate and discuss topics as if you are writing essays for each other ahead of the actual paper you have to write.

If You End Up Cramming Anyway

Cramming is not the way to get a top grade or to really learn the material, but sometimes it's what you need to do to pass an exam.

Remember that:

- Cramming is about short-term memory.
- Cramming works best for factual information and basic knowledge.
- Study in 50-minute blocks with 10-minute breaks.
- Even if you cram, give yourself enough time to for a good night's sleep – if you are not getting enough REM sleep, your brain will not be able to retain any information from your marathon cramming session. (And no, you are not an exception to how the human brain works.)

Taking Exams

The Night Before : Be Rested and Ready

Your mind and your memory work better if you have a full night's rest. If you want to do your best, don't stay up all night before your exam cramming. Get at 6-7 hours of sleep, more like 8-9 to improve memory and cognitive function and resilience against stress.

The Day of the Exam: Get Psyched

If at all possible, get to the exam early. Give yourself a chance to give your notes a final once-over, then put everything away and give yourself a moment to get yourself mentally ready. Take a few deep breaths, relax, and start thinking about the course and the material you do know.

During the Exam

Stay Focused and Awake

Keep your mind on the exam. If you can pick your seat, pick one at the front of the room and away from windows where you are less likely to be distracted by the view, by classmates, or by shuffling papers.

Sit on the edge of your seat and stay present in the exam. Don't settle in and get to cozy. You need to keep your mind present.

Read the Exam , the Whole Exam

Before you start the exam, read through it once quickly to figure out what kind of questions will be asked, what problems you can easily solve and what problems may take more time.

Budget Your Time

You need to learn how to budget your time on the exam:

- Consider that different kinds of questions require different amounts of time:
 - ◇ For example, essay questions require more time than short-answer questions which require more time than multiple-choice questions which require more time than true-false questions.
 - ◇ Be sure to check time during the exam to make sure you aren't running later than expected.
 - ◇ Try to save at least a few minutes to double-check your answer.
- Answer questions you know the answers to first. These are guaranteed points on the exam. Do these as quickly but as thoroughly as possible.
- Focus next on questions you are *pretty sure* you know the answer to.
- Leave time to revisit questions you had trouble with.
- Unless you will lose points for wrong answers you should guess on true-false or multiple-choice questions, and attempt to answer short-answer or essay questions to get partial credit.
- On multiple-choice questions, narrow selections to 2 choices before you guess.

Test Anxiety

What are the Causes?

- Normal fear: Hey, tests are scary!
- Do I have strong test-taking skills?
- Do I understand the material?
- Do I have negative associations with tests?
- Do I have negative associations with tests?
- Do I have trouble with confidence?

Before the Test

- Be prepared: (make sure you know the time and place of the exam and what you need to
- Don't talk to others about the exam if it raises
- Arrive early and avoid feeling rushed!
- Think positive thoughts
- Visualize yourself doing well

During the Test

- Read all directions and plan your approach
- Ask the professor or TA for clarification if you have questions about directions or procedures
- Take your time
- Pay attention to the test, not to others
- When you are working, you are less prone to anxiety
- Don't second guess yourself — often your first answer is correct. Don't let panic lead you to changing answers at the last minute!
- Breathe deeply
- Relax your muscles

A Relaxation Exercise

- Sit upright with your feet flat on the floor, your back straight, and your hands on your lap or on the desk.
- Relax your shoulders, pushing them down and away from your neck.
- Take a deep breath through your nose, expanding your stomach as you count to 3. Breathe out through your mouth, counting to 3.
- Close your eyes and repeat this three more times.
- If your body feels tense, repeat while visualizing your muscles relaxing with each breath, starting with your head and continuing to your feet.
- One you have reached your feet, open your eyes and return to your exam.

Making a Decision

Decision I need to make: _____

Importance: Trivial Moderately important Important Life-changing

The best I can hope for...

The worst I am afraid of...



Brain + Heart



Pros	Cons

Gut Feelings

Rational Conclusion

Intuitive Conclusion

Decision: _____

Next Steps: _____

Identify Your Strengths

3 things that I am good at....

- _____
- _____

3 things that I enjoy....

- _____
- _____

My top 3 values....

- _____
- _____

1 thing I have done that I am proud of is.... _____

I feel most confident when: _____

Some examples of strengths...

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adaptable | <input type="checkbox"/> Enthusiastic | <input type="checkbox"/> Methodical | <input type="checkbox"/> Resourceful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ambitious | <input type="checkbox"/> Experienced | <input type="checkbox"/> Meticulous | <input type="checkbox"/> Respectful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Articulate | <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible | <input type="checkbox"/> Motivated | <input type="checkbox"/> Responsible |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Calm | <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible | <input type="checkbox"/> Natural leader | <input type="checkbox"/> Responsive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Candid | <input type="checkbox"/> Focused | <input type="checkbox"/> Neat | <input type="checkbox"/> Seasoned |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Capable | <input type="checkbox"/> Forthright | <input type="checkbox"/> Objective | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-confident |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Charismatic | <input type="checkbox"/> Frank | <input type="checkbox"/> Open minded | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-directed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clear headed | <input type="checkbox"/> Hard working | <input type="checkbox"/> Organized | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-disciplined |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communicative | <input type="checkbox"/> Helpful | <input type="checkbox"/> Outspoken | <input type="checkbox"/> Sensible |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Competitive | <input type="checkbox"/> Honest | <input type="checkbox"/> Painstaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Sincere |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Considerate | <input type="checkbox"/> Humble | <input type="checkbox"/> Passionate | <input type="checkbox"/> Sociable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperative | <input type="checkbox"/> Imaginative | <input type="checkbox"/> Patient | <input type="checkbox"/> Systematic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creative | <input type="checkbox"/> Independent | <input type="checkbox"/> Perceptive | <input type="checkbox"/> Systematic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Curious | <input type="checkbox"/> Independent | <input type="checkbox"/> Persuasive | <input type="checkbox"/> Team player |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decisive | <input type="checkbox"/> Innovative | <input type="checkbox"/> Polite | <input type="checkbox"/> Thorough |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Determined | <input type="checkbox"/> Insightful | <input type="checkbox"/> Practical | <input type="checkbox"/> Thoughtful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Devoted | <input type="checkbox"/> Intuitive | <input type="checkbox"/> Proactive | <input type="checkbox"/> Versatile |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diligent | <input type="checkbox"/> Inventive | <input type="checkbox"/> Prudent | <input type="checkbox"/> Well rounded |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Efficient | <input type="checkbox"/> Involved | <input type="checkbox"/> Punctual | <input type="checkbox"/> Willing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Empathetic | <input type="checkbox"/> Kind | <input type="checkbox"/> Realistic | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Energetic | <input type="checkbox"/> Mature | <input type="checkbox"/> Reliable | |

