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15 actions to take this fall for a successful school year

15 actions to take this fall for a successful school year

August 12, 2015 | [By Maryalene LaPonsie](#)

It's about that time. New college students are getting ready to pack up and head to the dorm. Or they may be returning to school after a long hiatus, juggling the demands of working and family while getting prepared to log into their first online class of fall 2015.

Regardless of whether you are heading to college for the first time or the last time, you'll want to make the most of your semester.

"Showing up for class and taking notes is only half a loaf of [the college] experience," says Patrick Burkhart, provost of Mesa Community College in Mesa, Arizona.

For the full loaf, try doing these 15 things during your fall semester 2015:

1.1 What can I help you with today?

Not everyone needs to go to orientation, but if you're a freshman or on a new campus, you don't want to miss your opportunity to get acquainted with your new surroundings.

"It takes a lot of time to get use to this new environment," says Meghan Cisar, assistant director of Student Success Programs at **Kent State University**. To help its new students acclimate, Kent State holds a welcome weekend and offers a first-year experience course as well, which other universities may do as well.

2. Fine tune your study habits well before finals and that tougher spring semester

Even college pros can use fall 2015 as a time to fine tune study habits. Try one of these techniques which research shows might increase how much you can recall at test time.

- Space out your study sessions rather than cramming.
- Try studying in different locations each week.
- Include several subjects in the study session rather than focusing on only one.

3. Hurry to get an on-campus job... they're snatched up quickly

On-campus jobs offer several benefits including close proximity to your workplace and employers who understand student schedules. Plus, getting a job could help you stay on course to earn your degree.



"Students who work on campus have a much higher retention rate than those who don't," says Les Baltimore, senior associate provost of the Office of Academic Services and Retention at **Adelphi University**.

4. Take 15 credits if you can handle it — it can pay off

Another way to increase your chances of success at college is to take a full load of courses. Kent State conducted a retention study and found students who took at least 15 credits a semester were more likely to graduate on time.

5. Attend a career fair, even if you're a nontraditional student

Fall 2015 may also be prime time for career fairs hosted by colleges and universities. Even if you won't be graduating and looking for a job in the next year or even if you think it'll be geared toward a younger audience, you should still attend to get a feel for the job market and which employers are hiring in your field.

Plus, attending one might even help you find out more info on the [best way to change careers](#), if that's why you're back in college.

6. Think about doing an internship before your classmates beat you to it

Too many students wait until later in the year to start explore internship opportunities. "Think about internships from day one," Baltimore advises.

By starting early during the fall semester 2015, you can avoid having all the best positions snatched up while you're still polishing your resume. Whether your goal is a [business career](#), [legal profession](#), [health care position](#), or anything in between, there's likely an internship opportunity for you.

7. Give yourself a leg up on your classmates and stop by your professor's office hours

It's never too early to create meaningful relationships with your instructors.

"Get to know your professors," **Mesa Community College's** Burkhart says. "Those relationships generally result in other opportunities such as lab work or internships."

8. Improve your marketability by joining a club or other activity

If you're trying to increase your odds of staying in school and graduating on time, get involved in a club or, even better, look for a student leadership position.

"We have outstanding student leaders here on campus," Cisar says. "By sheer engagement at the university, you have higher success — even commuters benefit."

9. Find a good alarm clock and planner

Freshman heading to campus this fall may experience something of a culture shock, with no parent nearby to nudge them awake or nag them to do their homework. Returning students might not remember how tough it can be to get enough sleep when balancing a job and full courseload. To stay on top of their schedules, students both new and returning need to have a good alarm clock (or app) and a planner system that will help them track assignments, tests and other activities.

10. Take advantage of campus resources early and often

Experts say one of the biggest mistakes students make is waiting too long to seek out assistance. Colleges and universities often have a variety of resources from tutoring to writing workshops to an academic support office.

"Use what's available, and it doesn't have to be when you're in trouble," Baltimore says. "Take a good paper and make it better."

11. Hang out with the right people

If your friends are more interested in hitting the club than hitting the books, fall 2015 could be a disaster for you.

"Look for people who have similar goals," Cisar says. "Surround yourself with students who are committed." We don't mean to say isolate — as older students often do. Make a friend or two, just be sure they're good ones.

12. Detail a budget for each semester

College is expensive. If you want to walk away with a degree and [as little debt as possible](#), you need to learn how to budget your money wisely. What's more, say no to any credit card offers that come your way. Burkhart explains he's seen students rack up significant credit card bills and then drop out of school to work and pay them off.

13. Skip new textbooks when you can

Your money will stretch a little farther if you forget about buying outrageously expensive new books. Instead, explore savings strategies such as buying used, sharing a book with a friend or opting for an older edition, if you've checked in with your professor about what you're missing by not getting the latest. You may even be able to borrow some books from the library. Plus, there are plenty of online options for finding deals.

14. Plan your spring semester before registration even starts

When finalizing your fall schedule, don't forget to think about what you plan to take in the spring, as well.

"You don't want to be out of sequence," Burkhart says. "It may be a course that's only offered [one semester] is a prerequisite for a future class."

Double check and make sure you don't need to be taking a specific class now to enroll in a certain class during the spring semester.

15. Take ownership of your own success or failure

The final, and perhaps most important, thing to do during fall semester 2015 is to realize you alone are responsible for the outcome of your college years.

"Start strong and you will finish strong," advises Burkhart.

When thinking of how to make the most of fall semester, consider how online education can be of use and check out our [directory of online colleges](#).

Sources:

1. Interview with Les Baltimore, senior associate provost, Office of Academic Services and Retention, Adelphi University
2. Interview with Patrick Burkhart, provost, Mesa Community College
3. Interview with Meghan Cisar, assistant director, Student Success Programs, Kent State University
4. Study Smart, American Psychological Association, <http://www.apa.org/gradpsych/2011/11/study-smart.aspx>

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