

Recommendations for a Successful Academic Experience

Embrace the possibilities

Realize that you are advocating for your future by taking the steps required to further your education. You are opening doors and creating opportunities that will allow you to excel at the profession you love.

There are so many people who are reluctant to do what it takes to progress to the next level or who may not have the option to progress in their careers. You are one of the lucky ones who have embraced the possibilities afforded by earning a higher degree!

Dedication, hard work and sacrifice are required

The old saying, "Nothing worthwhile is easy," is certainly true when it comes to baccalaureate and graduate nursing education. A successful academic career will require years of hard work, sacrifice and perseverance. Those who understand this will succeed when education is viewed as a top priority.

Understand that as you sacrifice, so must your family sacrifice. On the flip side, your rewards are their rewards! Your "family" means extended as well as immediate family members. Enlist their help and support by sharing with them the demands that pursuing a higher degree will impose on you and how it will affect them. Ask them to take on some of your responsibilities for a while until you graduate. You will be surprised at how willing they are to help!

The ultimate reward is not only the potential for greater financial gain, but the pride and sense of accomplishment you will all share. The satisfaction you will gain by fulfilling your dream will inspire your entire family, especially your children.

Overcome the obstacles

It is entirely normal to reach moments during your undergraduate/graduate career when you feel like you can't do it. At those times you doubt your abilities and feel like you just can't understand or get it right. Be your own best friend, not your worst enemy. Face challenges with a "can do" attitude and gather in all of the resources available to you. Know that your instructors and advisors, along with all of the University support services, are there to help you succeed.

Everyone has a different set of strengths. Through teamwork and study groups, capitalize on the strengths of your classmates when you are having difficulty.

If you are feeling defeated, pull even harder to give yourself a fair chance to succeed. Don't work against yourself and let your doubts overcome you!

Maintain reasonable expectations

An expectation of perfection defines a nurse. As you move through your nursing curriculum, be sure to readjust your expectation levels to meet the realities of your strengths/weaknesses, and the resources available to you.

One of the biggest areas of unreasonable expectations students have when returning to school is how much time it will take. Sometimes students will tell their instructor that they could not complete an assignment because they had to work or take care of their children. Ouch! Your instructor knows that everyone has other responsibilities!

You should expect to spend a weekly MINIMUM of two hours studying outside of the classroom for every one credit of undergraduate work. The weekly MINIMUM number of study hours for each graduate credit is 3 hours. An added academic load takes a lot of time, probably more than 35 hours a week. Everyone can understand that working two full-time jobs would be very difficult; it is not different when you are working full-time and handling a full load of college courses. To think otherwise is unreasonable and could compromise success.

When you are faced with tough challenges or doubts, utilize the familiar steps in the nursing process to help you put it into perspective:

- **Assess**
 - Analyze the situation, being as objective as possible.
 - Write the problem down viewing it from many perspectives.
 - Find out what resources are available to you (it may be your advisor, instructor, classmates, study group, academic services, friends/family, etc.).
 - Define the limits for a positive outcome (minimum requirements).
 - Assess the possible alternatives and options.
- **Diagnose**
 - Refine the definition of your problem after a complete assessment.
- **Plan**
 - Develop a plan of action that will lead to optimal success. It helps to write it out, make lists, etc. Be detailed and consider all options and resources.
- **Implement**
 - While maintaining professional conduct, proceed with your outlined plan.
- **Evaluate**
 - Remember to take the time to evaluate how the situation was resolved. What went well? How would you improve upon the plan? How would you change your responses? What suggestions could you make for future improvement of the program?

Classroom advice

Work with your instructor:

- **Good excuses/bad excuses** – Think about the excuse you are providing for not meeting a requirement, such as missing class. Which would be a “good excuse” “I was vacationing in sunny Cancun”, or “I had to take my child to the emergency room.”? If your excuse is really not an excuse at all, it is best not to share it with your instructor.
- **Did I miss anything?** – If you are absent from class, do not ask your instructor “Did I miss anything?” If you missed class, you missed something. By asking the question, you imply that unimportant things happen during class!
- **Course workload** – An instructor has a certain amount of material that needs to be covered in each course and students have a certain amount of work they must do. It is the student’s responsibility to fit the course work into their busy lives, not the instructor’s responsibility to change the course work to fit the schedules of the students. Remember that hundreds of students before you were able to fit the work into their schedules, even when they worked full-time, took care of their families and carried a full-time academic schedule.
- **Special exceptions** – Course policy is meant to apply to all students taking the class. Do not interpret your instructor as being “unfair” if they do not make special exceptions for you. Course policies would be unfair if they applied only to some students and not to others.

Classroom etiquette

- Turn your cell phones off while in class. If you must read and send text messages while in class, ask yourself if college is right for you.
- Arrive early enough to get settled and prepared to start class on time. If you must be late, inform the instructor in advance.
- Complete assignments on schedule. Bring papers ready to be submitted and do not wait to print your assignment when you get to class.
- Treat others with respect. Do not dominate, but do participate in discussions. Do not interrupt or conduct side conversations. Actively listen to others.
- Do not bully or intimidate others.
- Do not make annoying noises when in class such as snapping gum, rustling papers, crunching on food, tapping or cracking your fingers....especially when taking a test!
- Be patient and courteous to others at all times.