



Advice from real professors

We asked real university professors: If you could offer one piece of advice to a student entering his or her first year of university, what would it be? Here's what they had to say.

Answer: While our modern school system seems to be based on the idea that academic success at any level depends largely on intelligence, self-discipline and effort, it seems to me that the most basic factor in a student getting the most out of their university education is to know that they are not in it alone. We need the support and help of other people if we are to experience joy and success and hope in any area of life, including our time at university. Seek out good and thoughtful people who have your best interest at heart and you will flourish while at university.

- David Long, Ph.D. Professor of Sociology, King's University College

Answer: Be open to questioning your deeply held convictions about yourself and the world. First year university is a time when students are suddenly exposed to a broader range of perspectives and cultures. You may think you are a Liberal with certain views about religion, international relations and federalism and you may think you are interested in psychology and detest mathematics. Be open to listening to others in and outside of the classroom. Perhaps you will discover some new truths and a passion for trigonometry.

- Mai Yasué, PhD, Environmental Studies, Social Science Division, Quest University Canada

Answer: Move out of your comfort zone: Take an elective simply because it looks interesting; widen your circle of friends; sign up for a new activity or sport; explore what the campus and surrounding town/city has to offer. Think about the person and community member you would like to become.

- Dr. Rosemary Polegato, Ron Joyce Centre for Business Studies, Mount Allison University (Specializes in arts and culture sector)

Answer: Be honest in all your dealings. Do not cheat, plagiarize, copy from others, or claim credit for work that is not your own. You will be tempted, especially when you are tired and stressed. But don't do it; there is no real reward and the consequences if caught are severe and painful.

- Professor Paul Amyotte, Chemical Engineering, Dalhousie University

Answer: Do not panic: University is change, and it takes a while to get used to it. Learning is respect, and just like learning, respect is a two-way street. Professors will give you the means and the ingredients to cook, but it is you who bakes the cookies. If you like a subject, ask yourself why; the answer is a clue to your future. University life is bigger than courses; engage in it fully. Try different electives if you can. Plan for the long term, and adjust for the short term: thus you'll achieve your final goal and forget about the small bumps on the way to it. Interact, interact, interact. Help is never too far; learn when you need it.

- Luigi Benedicenti PhD, P.Eng. Associate Vice-President (Academic) University of Regina

Answer: When you attend university, you are not just receiving an education – you are given a chance to be a full participant in a learning community. So, be an active collaborator in your classes; more importantly, get engaged in the life of your university, and of the community around it, from local to global. The true value of an education is discovered only when it is used to make a change in the world. The sooner you are active in making changes – even seemingly tiny changes – the sooner you will see the power you are developing through learning. Join a student society, join a community group, talk to people around you about your passions and the things you are learning. The lessons of being engaged will last at least as long as the lessons of the classroom.

- Professor Steven Mannell, *Architecture; Director, College of Sustainability*
Dalhousie University

Answer: University education is not a “hoop” to jump through on your way to the rest of your life. It is one step towards achieving your goals in life. If your goals are worth pursuing, then you should be prepared to work hard and take advantage of the opportunities to learn. Don’t study because you are going to be tested on the material. Study because the process and knowledge will help you be successful in your life.

- Chamkaur Cheema, *Entrepreneurial Leadership Instructor, School of Business, Kwantlen Polytechnic University*

Answer: The best thinking is not done quickly, but rather slowly and carefully. Slowing yourself down to become attentive to the hidden textures of issues and problems is what real learning and growth is all about.

- Ryan Derby-Talbot, *PhD, Mathematics, Qwest University Canada*

Answer: Many first year students tell me that they are amazed by how much reading is required in their classes. Be prepared to dive into reading more than you’ve ever read before, and to take a whole new approach to judging what’s good on the web.

- Professor Shirley Tillotson, *History*
Dalhousie University

Answer: Be bold and explore your passions! By doing this in the company of great thinkers (living and dead) you will put your ideas in perspective in a way that passively taking in knowledge will not. Be a paintbrush, not a sponge.

- Professor Megan J Bulloch, *PhD, Psychology, Qwest University Canada*

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Answer: Be patient. Of all the commonly cited ingredients for academic success – including curiosity, discipline, generosity, a willingness to expose oneself to strange and difficult thoughts and the intellectual courage to challenge, and be challenged by, them – perhaps the least well appreciated is patience. I would urge students to be patient with themselves, to allow time for new ideas to take hold, and to allow still more time for the rearrangement of previously unquestioned assumptions and convictions. I would tell students to try very hard not to dismiss thinkers, concepts, or arguments because their efforts have met with some initial (or continued) resistance, and that this resistance is in fact the condition of all learning worth the name...

- Dr Daniel Brandes, *Director, Foundation Year Programme, Assistant Professor, University of King's College, Halifax, NS*

Answer: Get Organized! Most students will have the opportunity to create their own course schedules and be exposed to many interesting and new volunteer, sports, and student club activities. Because you have so much freedom and choice, it is very important that you learn how to manage yourself and your time to keep on track. It is very easy for first-year students to find themselves overwhelmed with school, part-time work, and social schedules to co-ordinate. Without parents or high school teachers to check in with regularly it is your job to manage all of the fun and not-so fun-commitments on your plate.

University studies are actually quite manageable if you stay on top of the work. If you decide it is OK to skip out on a few classes or push that week’s reading to another time, you will pay the price. I suggest students try treating their week as a standard 40-hour work week. With the exception of an odd night class, I recommend fitting in class preparation time, class attendance time, and assignment preparation time into the traditional working hours of nine to five. This schedule frees up the evenings for part-time work, social time, and well-deserved rest time.

If this system won’t work for you then figure out something that will. The effort and energy spent organizing yourself will pay off.

- Melissa Jean, *full-time teacher*
Bachelor of Organizational Studies and Management Program (BMOS), Brescia University College

