Module 2 Part 2 – Finding and Maintaining an Academic and Social Balance

This section corresponds with Module 2 Lesson 2 in the STEPP Classroom Transition resources.

Introduction

Objective: The student will develop a schedule that demonstrates an effective balance of academic and social life in the college setting, including class time, study time, and budgeted time for social, health/wellness, and daily living priorities.

This lesson is designed to help you maintain a focus on academic priorities. Academic work is a top priority for successful first-year college students. This module will ask how to consider 4 goal areas – academic, social, health/wellness, and daily living. Although each of these areas is important, not all “pieces of the pie” should receive equal amounts of time.

Estimated time needed: 30-45 minutes

Materials included:
- Sample day and night schedules
- Sample schedule for Annie
- Blank Schedule

Additional materials needed:
- Your goal-setting worksheet from Module 2, Lesson 1
- Optional – your daily planner/calendar

Introductory Video

*Please click on the text above to view the video*
Learn About It

Take out your goal setting sheets that you started in Module 2, Part 1. What goals did you set for yourself?

You have set goals in four different categories:
- Academics
- Daily Living
- Social
- Health/Wellness

- Do you have more goals in one category than in the others? Which one?
- Which category do you think will require more goals for college students?

You will probably have many more NON-academic goals than academic goals. The goal-setting worksheet places equal emphasis on each of the four types of goals so that you realize that you need to set goals in every area of your life, not just the academic area. However, in this lesson, you will be guided to understand that for successful college students, academics are generally the biggest “piece of the pie,” so to speak. You will learn to create a balanced schedule that includes time for all areas, but focuses on academic priorities.

Balancing Priorities

- Academics is the #1 priority of successful college students, but it’s not the only priority.
- Having a full college experience is great, but starting out *slowly* will lead to better results.
- The main priority for your first year **must** be establishing a solid academic foundation.

Research shows that students who are involved in more than academics do better in their classes, feel more connected to the college community, and are more likely to stay and graduate. Engaging in the college community is important to do during the 1st year. So, do get involved!

However, with all the opportunities available on a college campus, it will be easy for you to unintentionally shift priorities and lose focus on the fundamental reason for attending college, which is to get an education.
Thus, in the first year of college, especially during the first semester, it’s not necessary (and it’s generally not beneficial) to dive directly into the “full” college experience.

It is much more important for you to focus on establishing a solid academic foundation. The idea is to build a strong academic foundation the first year in order to be able to stay in college long enough to enjoy the full college experience. You’ll need to develop a clear understanding of how to navigate the academic expectations and supports of college. After establishing that solid academic foundation, you can branch out more and get involved in different ways in subsequent semesters.

Parents Chime In

- Think back to your own previous experiences with balancing priorities. Share some examples.
- Think purposefully about your observations of your child’s ability to use their time wisely. Discuss times that they have done a good job of balancing priorities during high school and times that they could have made improvements.
- Provide input and feedback on some of the issues your student will be exploring in this lesson.

Example: Rob’s Plan

- Rob is a first-year college student who is interested in music and dance. One of his goals in the social category is to connect with a campus organization.
- His college campus has a student organization in the fine arts department.
- Rob’s Plan:
  - Fall semester: Attend meetings and participate in 1–2 events
  - Spring semester: Officially join the organization and continue to participate in events
  - Sophomore year and beyond: Pursue a leadership position and/or volunteer to organize events

Let’s review Rob’s plan - He may want to attend the meetings of a student organization in the fine arts department, and maybe even join the organization. However, he would probably want to hold off on making commitments of involvement beyond what would be expected of the general membership, such as running for office or organizing a fundraiser, etc. Increased involvement, including possibly a leadership position, can come later, after he has established a solid academic foundation. After establishing that solid academic foundation, you can branch out more and get involved in different ways in subsequent semesters.
Academic Time Commitment

- How much time do you currently spend on academics outside of school?
- How much time do you think college students need to spend on academics outside of class?

For students with disabilities, this is particularly important. Have you found that often you must work harder and longer in order to achieve the same academic results as your peers? Just as in high school, this will be true in college. Even if you didn’t require extensive assistance in high school you will probably find that your college work requires a significant increase in focus and dedication in order to achieve your goals!

It can be difficult for new college students to know how much time they should be spending on academics in order to create a balanced schedule. Because high school students spend more time in class than college students and many high school courses require minimal studying and preparation outside of the classroom, lots of students don’t have a feel for the time commitment required for successful college academics.

- In general, college academics require about 3 hours of work outside of class each week for every semester hour of classes.
- This includes all course-related tasks (e.g., reading, homework, studying, writing papers, etc.)
- This means:
  - One 3-hour class requires about 9 hours of outside work per week
  - A minimum full-time course load (12 hours) requires about 36 hours per week
  - A typical full-time course load (15 hours) requires about 45 hours per week

Time commitments will vary by student, college, major, etc., but the general “rule of thumb” is that you should be spending approximately 3 hours each week on coursework outside of class for every semester hour of your schedule. So a 3 semester hour class would require 9 hours of outside work each week (preparation, reading, studying, homework, etc.) in addition to the 3 hours spent in class!

If you’re taking a minimum course load of 12 semester hours you should be spending about 36 hours per week on schoolwork, in addition to the 12 hours you spend in class. It’s like a full time job! Keep in mind that most college students take more than 12 hours each semester, so the total time should increase accordingly.
Keep in mind:

- These totals do not include the hours you spend in class each week.
- Students with disabilities often need to spend more time on schoolwork than their peers, so your totals may be higher.
- Time commitments will vary by class.
  - Organic Chemistry: Increased commitment likely
  - Intro to Yoga: Decreased commitment possible

Parents Chime In

- Ask your student how much time he/she currently spends on academics outside of school. Discuss the differences in high school and college regarding time in class and time spent on coursework outside of class.

- Point out that these totals are in addition to the hours spent in class each week. Thus, the 12-hour course load with the 36 hours of studying actually adds up to a total of 48 hours per week spent on academics. These totals may be surprising to your child, as they quickly add up to a time commitment that is actually greater than a full-time job. That does leave time for some fun, but it’s important to keep that in perspective.

- Do the math with your child to figure out how many hours per week he/she will need to spend on academics (include time in class and time outside of class) for a 15 hour course load. Since the total time may seem overwhelming, help your child to put it in the perspective of breaking it down into amount of time spent per day.

Creating a Balanced Schedule

- Most of your time in college is unstructured. You must structure it yourself by creating a weekly schedule.

- Your schedule should provide you with time for each of your goal categories.

- More time should be devoted to your higher priorities (i.e., academics).

Because students spend less time in class, first year college students often feel like they have a great deal of “free time” on their hands; however all that “free time” passes very quickly, and without good time management skills, students often end up not having adequately prepared for class. In order to succeed, you must harness all that unstructured time by creating and sticking with a weekly/daily schedule.
When creating your schedule, you need to be sure that the way you spend your time reflects your goals and your priorities. In other words, you need to ensure that you create a balanced schedule that provides you with time for each of your goal areas, but that devotes more time to the areas that are a higher priority for you. (For college students, this area should generally be academics.)

Some students legitimately prefer to study at night but be careful about getting into the habit of sleeping too much during the day and counting too much on studying all evening. Dorms are not generally conducive to studying! Also, chances to take part in recreational and social activities will often come up in the evening. Therefore, using your daylight hours the 1st year to complete most study activities will leave you with “guilt-free” time because you will know you are on top of your coursework.

Another thing to consider is balancing your time to avoid overloading any one day of the week, especially with academic goals. It’s often tempting for students to plan “marathon” study sessions in order to free up larger blocks of time or even entire days for non-academic tasks. However, not only does this run the risk of backfiring if the student gets sick or otherwise has to cancel that “marathon” session, but it also often leads to less effective studying than spacing out academic tasks would.

**Parents Chime In**

- Relay some of your experiences with scheduling for a project or task at home or work. Share how you felt when you did not manage your time wisely.
- Ask them to share a time when they had to schedule their time in order to complete a school project on time. Talk about their successes and challenges.
Annie’s Unbalanced Schedule

Now let’s look at Annie’s schedule (click the link in the box to the right):

• Sophomore at “Eastern North Carolina College (ENCC)”
• 1.5 GPA and 24 semester hours earned
• Desired major: Exercise and Sport Science (Requires a 2.5 cumulative GPA to declare major)
• To declare her major at the end of this semester, Annie must earn a 3.6 GPA and 15 semester hours!
• Furthermore, ENCC requires a 2.0 cumulative GPA to remain in good academic standing.
• Therefore, Annie must earn at least a 3.0 and 12 semester hours in order to avoid academic probation and return to ENCC the following semester!
• Annie is now stressed out! Because she did poorly her freshman year, she is now under pressure to earn very high grades this semester.
• If she had raised her grade from a D to a C in one class each semester last year, she would only need to earn a 2.5 and 12 semester hours in order to stay at ENCC.

Sample Balanced Schedule

Click the link for the sample schedule to the right. Notice that:

• All goal categories are represented (all goal colors are represented).
• No one area completely consumes the others.
• Academics are the biggest commitment. They take up the majority of the weekdays.
• The student treats school like a full-time job.

Before you leave for college if you start out with this expectation (that academics are going to take up the largest chunk of your time, and that other pursuits are generally going to be lower priorities than schoolwork) and commit to maintaining that balance, this will go a long way toward having the necessary self-discipline to manage your time effectively once you’re actually on campus.
• When students don’t establish a solid academic foundation at the very beginning of their college career, they are going to spend the rest of their time playing catch-up and worrying about whether they can make grades high enough to keep progressing through their curriculum.

• In contrast, a student who starts out on the right foot academically will have a great deal less pressure on them. College is difficult enough without having to spend time worrying about whether you will be kicked out of school next semester due to low grades. With a strong GPA “cushion” the student can explore more time intensive non-academic activities (i.e. work, leadership, fun, etc.).

• Note that in order to declare her major, Annie will have to earn a 3.6 while taking 15 semester hours. If Annie only takes 12 hours per semester (which is what she did freshman year), she will not be able to earn a high enough GPA to declare the major at the end of this semester. (It would have to be a 4.5 with 12 hours...not going to happen on a 4.0 scale.)

• In addition to worrying about whether she can declare her major, Annie needs to consider whether she will be put on academic probation if she doesn’t improve her grades. All universities have minimum GPA requirements – if a student’s grades fall below the minimum requirement, the student takes a “mandatory vacation” from school for at least one semester. This is probably a new concept for you, as most high schools do not suspend students due to low grades.

• Because Annie’s grades are so low, she won’t even be allowed to stay in school unless she earns a 3.0 in 12 semester hours. (If she takes 15 hours this semester, she only needs to make a 2.8.)

• If Annie had established even a slightly more solid academic foundation last year (raising 2 grades from D’s to C’s) then she would not need to work quite as hard this semester. But because she earned a 1.5, she now has to work harder this semester in order to achieve the same results.
Save this Student!

- *Rewind* Annie’s freshman year.
- Use the blank schedule at the end of this lesson to develop a balanced schedule for her first semester of college that is more likely to produce better long-term results.
- Remember, your final product should clearly reflect that academic success is Annie’s priority.

Parents Chime In

- Work with your child and brainstorm ways that Annie could have made her first year more successful. Working together, rearrange her schedule to reflect a balanced schedule showing academics as a clear priority.
- Share examples of daily planners or calendars that you have used and some of your own previous experiences with making a schedule.
- Have your child make a schedule for the upcoming week that reflects time spent on academics, social activities, health/wellness, and daily living activities. Review the schedule with your child and decide if it is a realistic schedule and if the focus is on academics. Revise it as necessary.
- As your child prepares to start college, periodically review the key ideas from this lesson: (1) 3 s.h. rule for out-of-class work time; (2) Purpose for being in college is primarily academic (to earn a degree); (3) Social and extracurricular activities are important, but a balance is necessary.

Have you accomplished today’s objective?

**Objective:** The student will develop a schedule that demonstrates an effective balance of his/her academic and social life in the college setting, including class time, study time, and budgeted time for social, health/wellness, and daily living priorities.

*If so, congratulations!*

*If not, review the sample balanced schedule and revise the schedule for Annie to reflect a balance of activities. Have your parent review this with you. Also work on revising your schedule for the upcoming week to reflect a balance of activities.*
For more information...Digging Deeper:

- Visit [http://www.mappingyourfuture.org/successincollege/time.cfm](http://www.mappingyourfuture.org/successincollege/time.cfm) for more information on managing your time and balancing your life.
- Check out this site for some great activities on time management - [http://www.going-to-college.org/docs/timemanagementforcollegesuccess.doc](http://www.going-to-college.org/docs/timemanagementforcollegesuccess.doc)