

Advice for Academic Success in Historical Studies

This file is intended to help students in the Historical Studies program succeed and achieve a sense of personal satisfaction. The information in this file is based on interviews with top students in the program as well as insights offered by Historical Studies faculty and various offices and centers on campus. The information below is based on the belief that a student can do better and feel better if a wholistic approach is taken.

There are three components in this file:

- I. Succeeding in Your Courses
- II. Managing Outside Work Commitments
- III. General Tips on Managing Stress and Attaining a Good Life-Study Balance

I. Succeeding in Your Courses

1. Attend class regularly

The students who were interviewed noted that professors do not simply summarize textbook material and that professors have different teaching styles and approaches. This advice is reinforced by a brief survey of 49 students who were asked to give three pieces of advice to incoming students: for 55% of those 49 students, the top priority was to go to class.¹

Going to class regularly not only keeps you up-to-date on course announcements and gives you a venue for acquiring more advice on doing well, but also attending class will help you understand the material better. Professors have expertise in the subject matter being taught and can offer insights and examples that can be very enlightening. This will make the material easier for you to grasp and absorb. Often, tests and exams will ask you about material that is provided in the lectures but is not available in the textbook.

Also, by attending class regularly you will reinforce what you learn in your reading and absorb it slowly and more effectively through the course of the semester.

2. Take notes in class

You do not have to write down everything that the professor says, but try to leave a class with a good set of notes. Writing notes helps you engage with the material and absorb it better. Your class notes also will prove invaluable when it comes to exam term. Try not to come to class with a passive attitude: take notes, ask questions, raise points, engage with your fellow students. This will make learning more fun!

¹ See the guide by Sharron McIntyre and Michael McIntyre, *University Matters: Prepare for the Challenges, Realize your Potential* (Carp, ON: Creative Bound, 2005).

3. Start assignments early

As soon as you receive the syllabi for your courses at the beginning of the semester, draft a plan of how you will approach them. You will write much better assignments if you start them early: that way, your ideas will have time to develop and you will have enough time to edit and polish a given essay before submitting it.

At the beginning of each week, say Sunday evening, plan the entire week in terms of working on these assignments. When working on assignments, consider carefully what is being asked. Think of the key words in the assignment guidelines (e.g. “analyze,” which is different from “summarize”). Doing so will help you understand the purpose of the assignment.

4. Stay on top of the reading

It is always better to do the reading before class; that way, the lectures will reinforce what you have read. Professors often write lectures on the assumption that the students have done the assigned reading; thus, lectures do not summarize the readings but expand on them. Try to take notes while reading, because doing so will help the material in long-term memory (simply highlighting or underlining passages is far less effective).

At the same time, you may not be able to read everything with the same degree of detail and attention; some journal articles, for example, can be skimmed. You will need to develop a sense of what is important in the reading, without trying to memorize and take notes on every single detail. Sometimes, you cannot complete the reading for every course for every class; that is why sometimes you need to be strategic.

5. Go see your prof!

We are here to help students and we want them to do well. Sometimes being in first year can make you feel like you are fourteen again, but our professors are more than willing to help. Once you take the first courageous step to ask a question or to go see a professor during office hours, it will become much easier after that point.

6. Connect with your fellow students

Students learn from each other. Try to arrive a few extra minutes before class starts; that way, you can converse with students, share resources and ideas, and so on. Try not to bury yourself in your i-phone before the class begins; pretend it's 1982! Talk to your fellow students.

7. Consult the Resources page of the Historical Studies website (accessible as a hyperlink on the main program page)

You will find here a wealth of material on how to write history essays as well as a list of useful sites many of which contain online transcriptions of primary historical documents.

<https://www.grenfell.mun.ca/academics-and-research/Pages/school-of-arts-and-social-science/programs/historical-studies/resources.aspx>

8. Avail of the services offered at The Learning Centre

The Centre offers several programs to help students academically, including instructional assistance and peer tutoring:

<https://www.grenfell.mun.ca/current-students/Pages/learning.aspx>

This is all important because if you wish to apply for post-graduate programs, you will need not only good grades but also strong letters of reference from professors who taught you (it is best to ask a professor with whom you have taken several courses over the years, so that the professor can write about your academic development glowingly and in a more detailed way).

II. Managing Outside Work Commitments

Most students these days have part-time jobs and it can be quite a challenge to balance work with academic life.

With a five-course load, it is generally unwise and probably logistically very difficult to work more than 10-15 hours per week at a part-time job. Financial pressures could be mitigated somewhat by keeping a weekly budget; apparently, there are apps for this (Money Manager: Budget and Expense; Goodbudget Budget Planner).

Also, it might be important to reduce the number of part-time job hours around busy crunch times such as late November and during the exam periods. Be sure to communicate your needs with your employer well in advance; hopefully, your employer will be accommodating in that respect.

There are on-campus positions offered through the MUCEP program; being employed through such a program will mean less time lost traveling to and from a work place off-campus.

III. General Tips on Managing Stress and Attaining a Good Life-Study Balance

1. Manage your time

There are several apps that can help you in this regard (Pocket Schedule Planner; 24me Smart Personal Assistant; Planner Pro-Daily Calendar). Or, you can simply buy a daily planner at Staples. Keeping track of deadlines and preparing a “to-do” list each morning will help you feel more in control of your courses. You can check off the items on the list as you complete them and that will give you a feeling of accomplishment! Try to plan out your week Sunday evening. While studying, take a ten-minute break for every fifty minutes of studying.

2. Take time off to clear your mind

It is important to take some time off every day for a while in order to give oneself a break. A bit of physical activity or other type of activity is an excellent idea, something that you are passionate about. Such activities also will pump lots of endorphins into your system! Walking in nature also helps immensely.

3. Take charge of stress!

The University of Toronto at Scarborough website on time management and stress reduction:

<https://www.utoronto.ca/ccds/time-management-and-stress>

For stress management and breathing techniques, see the British Columbia Health Link site:

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/uz2255>

You can book an appointment with Health Services on campus, located on the second floor of the Bennett Wing (709-637-7919). You also can sign up for the Student Health 101 monthly magazine:

<https://www.grenfell.mun.ca/current-students/Pages/health/student-health.aspx>

Health Services on Campus also offers some basic tips:

<https://www.grenfell.mun.ca/current-students/Pages/health/wellbeing.aspx>

If these websites do not work for you, there are counselors on campus who would be happy to help (Dr. Veronica Hutchings, Registered Psychologist, Counselling and Psychological Services, 709-637-7919).

4. Try to maintain a good healthy diet

In this regard, consult Canada's Food Guide for information and for excellent, easy-to-make recipes:

<https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>

5. Get enough sleep

You thus will be able to think more clearly, and you will feel more in charge of your life. For advice, contact Ms. Janice Galliot, Wellness Educator in Student Services. See the website by Dr. Michael Breus:

<https://thesleepdoctor.com/how-to-sleep-better/>

6. Indigenous knowledge has a number of unique guides and methods for controlling stress (e.g. smudging).

See the Indigenous Resource Centre for information on Kullik-lighting and smudging.

7. Keep Social Media on a tight leash.

It is a good to stay connected with friends, e.g. through Facebook or Instagram, but when we spend too much time on these sites we lose our concentration and focus and thus contribute to our stress. This is especially important when writing an essay or studying for an exam, when mental concentration is of paramount importance.

8. Work and connect with your fellow students.

Try to form a study group or become part of one.

9. Where do you work the best? Do you like to have people around you or do you work more effectively in a very quiet space?

Try to develop a sense of what type of study space works best for you. Sometimes it can be a good idea to change locations from time to time (say, from moving from the library to the airport lounge in the Arts and Science extension).

10. If when writing an essay, you experience “writer’s block,” go for a walk outside or work on something else for a few hours.

It will help clear your mind.

11. Get involved in your campus!

You will meet really interesting people and feel less isolated on campus. Participating in campus events is also a good way to “change gears” and do something for a few hours. You will return to your studies reinvigorated and refreshed.

The student Historical Society offers an excellent choice in this regard; they meet and plan events such as film nights, trivia nights at the Backlot, and field trips. Getting involved will make you feel more a part of the campus and you will be able to connect with students.

12. Get involved in your community

This is a very good tip to follow if you are not from the area. Joining a group such as the Western Environment Centre will instill in you a sense that you are giving back to the community and doing something for the good of humanity and the world. You also will meet interesting people and feel part of the Corner Brook community!