Ready for Fall?

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Now that summer is in full swing, I’ve been asking myself whether I’ve made the best of my time off so far. And I have. That is, if lounging on my deck in a zero gravity chair (only $45 from Amazon!), book in hand, for two months would be considered “doing it right.” After having attended consecutive full-time semesters since the beginning of last summer, I finished this spring semester feeling extremely burned out, so I was totally ready for that relaxation. Sadly, now it’s time to focus on academics again. “But there’s still another month before classes start!” you might say. True, classes won’t begin for at least three weeks, but we responsible, high-achieving Metropolitan State University students don’t wait until the last minute, do we? No! We must start planning now! Whether you want them or not, here are a few tips to help you gear up for the fall semester:

1. Read your books. If you’re already registered for courses, visit Metro’s bookstore website and see what textbooks are listed for each of your classes. If the book is listed as “required,” then chances are your professor is actually going to “require” you to read it, so why not go ahead and either rent or buy the necessary books now (or look for used copies at Amazon or local used bookstores) so that you don’t find yourself struggling to find a decent, affordable copy at the last minute? Okay, maybe you won’t read every page this summer, but you can at least skim through the table of contents and find some chapters that interest you, right? Some classes even assign books of fiction (or nonfiction) as textbooks, so why not throw them into your summer reading mix and get them out of the way? This always gives me a good head start for the fall semester, as getting some of that dreadful weekly reading out of the way is much easier to do when I have no other looming academic obligations.

2. Get your syllabi. Knowing in advance what your professors have up their sleeves can sometimes be crucial to the success of your semester. So why not send a brief email asking for a copy of the syllabus? If they say “no” or tell you it’s not ready, just reply with the basic questions you need answered to begin with: “How many heavy writing assignments are there?” “Are there any presentations required?” “Will there be any tests?” When you know how much coursework will be involved in a single class, you’ll have an easier time planning those assignments—and the work for other classes (not to mention your life)—without the usual frustration. I’ve encountered a couple of teachers who have seemed irritated by my request, but most professors have been thrilled to share their plan for the semester. Some might even commend you for trying to plan responsibly.

3. Use your friends. If there’s one thing I’ve learned as a Metro student, it’s that networking with other Metro students comes with many rewards, including honesty about faculty and staff. So why not use this tool to gain information about your upcoming classes? For example, if you weren’t able to find any reviews of a particular professor at ratemyprofessors.com, now would be a good time to reach out to other Metro students to get the lowdown on that professor’s attitude and level of helpfulness, clarity, and easiness. One of your contacts (or perhaps one of their contacts) is bound to have had experience with the professor in question. If you receive a positive review, then great; however, if the consensus is that a certain teacher is an asshole, well, then I suppose you’ll know that it’s time to leave your rebellion at home and start kissing some ass this fall if you want a good grade. Either way this turns out, obviously your friends can help.

4. Mark your calendars. You already know when midterms and finals usually happen; and if you’ve had an opportunity to either review your syllabi early or at least get some feedback from your professors, then you should have a good idea of when big assignments will be due. Now it’s time to create an easy-to-follow calendaring system that reflects those timeframes. This will come in handy when you’re planning things like holiday events, family gatherings, and vacations. We all know that professors don’t enjoy handing out extensions to their coursework deadlines, and the last thing you’d want is to plan your child’s birthday party during the same weekend that you’ll need to study for your organic chemistry midterm. Feel free to use your digital schedules if you want, but I prefer printing monthly calendars, hanging them on the wall near my desk at home, and using pens and highlighters to write in all the important deadlines. Without needing to sync, swipe, or scroll, printed calendars just feel safer and never let me lose sight of what’s ahead.

I know what you’re thinking: who wants to spend their academic break doing . . . academics. Wouldn’t that be an oxymoron? Call me a nerd if you want, but earning good grades is important to me, so I like to stay ahead of the academic game whenever possible. As some of you may know, taking 12 credit hours per semester, while also caring for children, managing a house, and working a job—in addition to attending multiple meetings and events, planning holidays and parties, and trying to have a social life—is a LOT of work. So, if spending a few hours near the end of your summer break might help ease up the load of the upcoming semester, then why hesitate?