

5 Common Academic Pitfalls and Traps

On road to this growth, students new to a four year college can experience some academic growing pains. It is critical that students and their families be aware of, and take preventive measures to avoid, common pitfalls that can seriously affect their academic status. We have found that students in their transitional year are more susceptible to at least five types of "traps:"

1. SOCIAL & RECREATIONAL

Faced with new freedoms, some new students spend a preponderance of their "free" time engaged in social or recreational activities, much to the sacrifice of their studies. We put "free" time in quotes because most of that time isn't really free. Just because an assignment isn't "due" the next day, doesn't mean there isn't anything to be done. Composition instructors encourage the submission of rough drafts, history instructors tend to have extensive reading to be done to keep pace, science and math classes often assign online problems, speeches require research and outlines, etc.

Having 24/7 access to socializing with a new diversity of friends is a perk associated with college, but your student must develop resistance strategies to the constant requests for hanging out or going out, engaging in social time only when their work is done. Trust us: there is plenty of time for both! Failing to balance the social elements of college with their primary academic responsibilities can lead to dire consequences that new students tend to deny.

2. BASIC LIFESTYLE

Many high school students had help getting up in the morning, making breakfast, keeping their academic and social calendar, and even reminding them to go to bed at a decent hour! In college, the student must discipline himself or herself to sleep, eat, and manage time in a way that permits focus and attention in classes, whatever hour they take place and regardless of the attendance policy.

Starting off the semester by sleeping in and missing classes makes it easier for the student to continue missing that class - and it will show very quickly in their grades. The student must also use between-class time wisely. Sleeping in until noon for a 1pm class, then wasting time before the 6pm class, only to stay up half the night cramming is not a lifestyle conducive to academic success. Making a "to-do" list the night before helps to structure the day ahead.

3. DIGITAL

Rapid technological advances have, no doubt, enhanced our lives in a great many ways. Whether for entertainment, information, or keeping in contact, students take great pride in their digital bounty - which is a mixed blessing indeed. Access to technology has ushered in a new set of student behaviors that are counter-productive, both to their academic success and the ways they communicate with faculty and staff.

Beginning work time with some Facebook, YouTube, cell phone apps, and Playstation games can quickly melt away hours of prime study time. Having both a computer and cell phone on provide constant AIM and text message interruptions that woo the student away from concentrated work. Studying in their rooms when others are playing videogames creates too great a temptation. Students must have the discipline to remove themselves from these digital traps for at least a couple hours per day by retiring to a quiet environment for studies.

4. PERSONAL ISSUES

Occasionally, a student experiences medical, psychological, financial, family, relationship, or other personal issues with which he or she might not be equipped to cope. In these instances, the dramatic elements of the issue - however big or small it might seem - can swamp the student's ability to function academically. Sometimes students wait far too long to get help with personal issues, when it is already too late to repair academic deficiencies.

Especially if your student comes to college already knowing she or he is contending with personal issues (e.g, grief, depression, anxiety), it is important that she or he obtain assistance early on in order to avoid negative consequences on their academic performance.

5. ACADEMIC IMMORTALITY

Most students have always had a safety net to catch them. In high school, missed assignments might have been forgiven or could be made up. Teachers were sometimes lenient, as long as the student showed eventual proficiency in a subject, and students could advance to the next level of a subject.

In college, instructors are incredibly desirous of student success in their classes, but the student must put in the time, do the work, and take initiative to seek help where needed. Students who believe there's no way they can fail may have lulled themselves in a false sense of security.

Adapted from SUNY Plattsburgh