ETCMA
Grad School
Survival
Guide

Inside:
- How to prepare for your first semester
- Time management tips and tricks
- Useful programs for citation management and document creation

Preparing for your first semester

This report comes straight at you from the trenches. This is my first semester in the ETCMA graduate program.

My track is a bit different than many other students. I graduated SPSU with my B.S. in Technical Communication in Fall 2012. I had been employed that last semester in the Instructional Design Unit, and maintained my position during the summer. My employer appreciated my work in the for the unit, but there was no money in the budget to maintain my position as full-time faculty.

She asked me if I had any interst in graduate school and I did. For a couple of months, I went on a job search anyway, but I couldn't find one. I decided that going ahead and getting my masters would help me get employment that was more on my own terms. I almost lost heart when I learned that first year students are not allowed to take a full semester, but fortunately, one thing you'll learn about the SPSU staff is that they pay attention to you and your unique concerns as a student, and they will make things work for you here.

In choosing SPSU, you have chosen to be among a nurturing and forward-thinking community. However, by granting me this exception, they also set me up for quite the rocky ride. Full time graduate school with an assistantship just starting out has been stressful, but I've learned a lot, and hopefully can offer some useful advice for new graduate students. So get ready for your first tip.

Go ahead and learn APA

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Your professors are going to expect you to be solid in APA style. Figure out a way to make sure you have a plan to implement this. I personally decided on an open source approach. I use LateX to compile my documents and JabRef to store my references. This suits me because I may potentially work for a non-profit one day and would want to save them the expense of supporting the use of commerical software. However, in this degree program, unless you only plan to work during library hours, you will need a copy of Microsoft Office. It turns out,

you can configure Microsoft office to use APA style. For citation managment, there are solutions such as Mendeley. Citation management is going to be important for tracking your readings, if anything else.

Prepare for discussions

Fully online is intense. Here is the image of what is soon going to be your recurring nightmare.
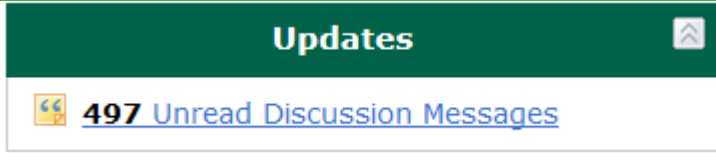
Your first course will be exceptionally bad because it has more students than typical classes (that is the course where I took the screenshot). There are a few ways you need to prepare yourself to face the hours that it is going to take to respond to your classmates in the way expected of you.

1. Be aware of the different settings in discussions. You can switch between "grid" and "message style and "threaded" and "unthreaded formats. You will find some of these settings easier to use than other. I personally use threaded grid style with the messages "popped out".

2. Make an easy to reference document with your professor's discussion expectations. Different classes have different rules, and getting them mixed up can cause you to underperform. In cases where you need to reply to a certain ratio of threads in the forum, keep track of your current ratio elsewhere. You'll likely get lost trying to determine through the forum itself who you have and have not replied to.

3. Remember that your starter threads are often starts of conversation. If you make it easy for people to reply to you, it will make it easier for you to make

> "Make an easy to reference document with your professor's discussion expectations."

your post count and participate effectively while boosting your reputation amongst your peers.

4. Make post and reply goals for yourself, and meet them before breaking to eat or play a game. The urge to procrastinate is intense, especially if you don't feel like people have given you any

content easy to reply to. Fight it with strong goals.

Get student-priced software

Software is an investment in your education like books. It's great if you have a library with access (if you are local to SPSU, the school library has all the software you could ever need), but if not, you should invest in Adobe and Microsoft office. The student price is decent at $19.99 a month for Adobe cloud and $79.95 for two years of Office 365.

Export your D2L Calendar

Would you like a reminder 2-3 days in advance of any due date your professor has put in the calendar to your personal email address? Unfortunately, security settings prevent D2L to send its reminders external to the system, but you can accomplish this by exporting the iCal file from the Calendar tool to your personal Google or Outlook calendar. Just click Calendar from your home navigation bar in Desire2Learn, then click the Subscribe button in the upper right menu.

Another heading

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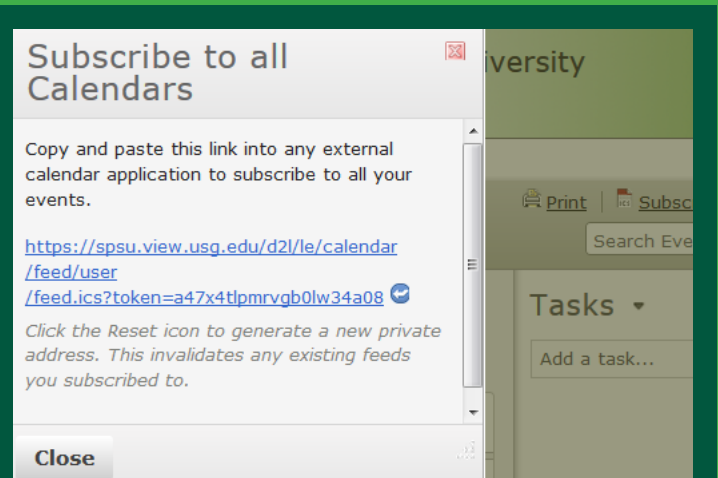
Screenshot of subscription to calendar in Desire2Learn

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Melanie Allen
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