Achieving Success in Higher Education

There are no secrets to achieving success at college. In fact, the factors that lead to college success are very well known. Students who adhere to the following advice will, in all likelihood, successfully complete their academic journey.

BEFORE CLASS
1. Read over previous class notes and notes taken from readings.
2. Check to see that the homework was done correctly.
3. Pack books, materials, assignments, notes, etc. and bring them to class!

DURING CLASS
1. Sit where there is the least distraction.
2. Focus attention and listen to the professor. Take notes.
3. Ask a question when something is unclear.

AFTER CLASS
1. Review class notes. Highlight important points. Fill in gaps from text or from the notes taken by a classmate.
2. Speak to classmate if unclear about something. If still unclear seek help from professor.
3. Think about what was taught. Make it logical. Ensure that the material makes sense. Try to explain it to someone else.

MANAGING TIME
1. Use calendar or daytimer to schedule “everything”. Schedule time for school, homework, assignments, tests, social life, rest, and relaxation.
2. Prioritize tasks that need to be completed within a day, a week, or month.
3. Break apart difficult or complicated assignments into smaller tasks. Work on difficult tasks first.

READING TEXT BOOKS
1. Skim over reading assignment and then read.
2. Use highlighter to indicate important points. Use sticky notes to indicate important pages.
3. Take notes. Try to summarize the reading in your own words.

TAKING NOTES IN CLASS
1. Keep a notebook for each class. Always take notes during class even when the professor says that it is not necessary. Be sure to date all notes.
2. Write down the outline for the class. Write down all notes from the board, overheads, and PowerPoint presentations. Devise shorthand to increase note-taking speed. Pay particular attention to what the professor stresses from the assigned reading.
3. Use highlighter to indicate important headings, points, and information.

PREPARING FOR TESTS
1. Study throughout the module. Constant review reduces the study time needed before tests.
2. Plan to study 3 days to 1 week before the test. Break up study time to reduce fatigue.
3. Type out notes. Good for review and helps to improve typing speed.
4. Ask the professor questions about any unclear material as soon as possible.
5. Don’t try to study the night before the test. Rest and get a good night’s sleep.
6. Keep calm and be confident.

Steve Fishman
Toronto, Canada
Managing Stress
1. Problem-solve any and all issues on a timely basis.
2. Practice stress management techniques (such as exercise, eating healthy, positive self-talk, and communicating with others) on a regular basis.
3. Persevere through challenging times and stay focused on your academic goals.

Seeking College Resources
1. Make use of appropriate college resources (such as The Learning Centre, Student Services, or Counselling Services) when needed.
2. Meet with your program instructors, advisors, and coordinator for program information, clarification, and advice.
3. Get involved with the campus community (activities, clubs, recreation, student government).

There is no doubt that consistent and constructive use of the above strategies will produce academic and personal success.

There are hundreds, perhaps thousands of tip sheets, handouts, web sites, articles, and advice giving gurus who communicate this valuable guidance and instruction (or variations thereof) to students each and every day. Most colleges and universities deliver first rate instruction, learning environments, technologies, facilities, student services, and resources. Yet, many continue to experience high attrition rates. Although many wonderful initiatives are in place, there are still far too many students who drop, stop or fail out of post secondary studies.

So, if it’s that simple, why aren’t all students embracing success strategies?

In order to achieve the aforementioned ‘success strategies’, one must develop and embrace those personal characteristics and behaviours that lead to success.

What are the characteristics and behaviours of those students who achieve success?

In my experience, students who are successful have a Pro-Active and Responsible approach to life. They are individuals who take responsibility for things that happen in their lives. They realize that they are responsible for their own academic successes and failures, understand the connection between grades and the effort put into earning those grades, take charge and find ways to deal with challenging situations, and have an inner drive that keeps them focused on their goals. Successful students are motivated, self-disciplined, self-accountable, goal-oriented, and professional. They take initiative, communicate well with others, have a positive and realistic outlook, and persevere. These are the students who seek out and make constructive use of helpful advice, strategies, services and resources. They have developed habits and attitudes that lead to personal growth, happiness and success.

Steve Fishman
Toronto, Canada
So, how does a Pro-Active and Responsible student develop those personal characteristics and behaviours that lead to success?

♪ Life in the Key of C ♫: Connection – Contribution – Competence

There are three specific principles that guide students toward responsibility, confidence, and self-reliance:

- **CONNECTION**
  Probably one of the most important influences on today’s student is the need to belong, to fit in and to be accepted by others. Students want to develop secure relationships, to connect with others and to be accepted by fitting in.

- **CONTRIBUTION**
  Students need to feel significant. They need to feel valuable to others, themselves and society but in their own unique and special way. Students want to feel that they can make a difference and that their existence matters. Students can make a contribution to the people around them, their classroom, college, and their community.

- **COMPETENCE**
  Students need to feel that they are competent, capable individuals. They need to feel that they are in charge of their lives, that they are capable of creating their own ideas, and that they can make and carry out responsible decisions in their own individual way.

These principles are premised on the theory that students, like everyone else, function best in an atmosphere of mutual respect, acceptance and consideration. It is also based on the knowledge that students need many opportunities to develop those skills that lead to a Pro-Active and Responsible learner. Being responsible and pro-active does not necessarily come with age. Students learn to be responsible by making their own decisions and accepting the consequences for those decisions.

As parents and educators, we have the unique opportunity to provide guidance and positive leadership. Through regular and consistent contact with the student, we will be in a position of influence – taking an active role in facilitating positive change, growth and success.

Steve Fishman
Toronto, Canada