

Anticipating and Planning for Courses

During your first week of college, each professor will present you with a **syllabus** or course outline. As you have probably heard, professors expect you to keep up with assignments independently, without being reminded in class. A syllabus is not just a list of assignments and due dates, however. It is also a source of information on policies, test types, and final grade calculation. Whether one page or ten, the syllabus is a plan to follow, a road map of the professor's expectations; file each in a safe place for frequent future reference. You can predict much about a course from the syllabus, and it can help you design your response to the demands of the course. On the reverse side of this page, you will find a blank chart for organizing course information. **After your first day in each course**, use your syllabus to complete your chart. Long-range planning needs to begin on the first day of class; the chart gives you a tool to reduce confusion and anxiety by defining more exactly the demands you face in each course. By anticipating and planning your approach to each class, you can plan your coping strategies. Follow these steps:

1. Collect all of your **SYLLABI**. Sit down with your chart and pull needed information from each syllabus, transferring it to the chart.
2. Under **COURSE**, list each course title, beginning with your most difficult course at the top, to indicate its high priority, and ending with the least difficult at the bottom. Under each course title, set a goal by writing the **FINAL GRADE** you want to earn in the course.
3. Under **PROFESSOR**, record name, office hours (ex. 2-3 pm, MW), office location, e-mail address, and phone number. *Learn your professor's name at the first class!* Plan to visit each professor's office hours during the first two weeks of classes to introduce yourself and to ask any questions you may have. Get acquainted with each professor early, especially in your most difficult course, and you'll be more likely to seek help regularly, before problems with grades can arise. Seeing this entry on your chart will remind you to take this crucial step.
4. Under **EXAMS**, list the type and date of each exam and how much each counts toward your final grade (ex. midterm Oct. 2, 3 essays, 40%). Do the same under **PROJECTS/PAPERS** and also under **OTHER**, for courses in which homework, quizzes, or critiques contribute to your final grade. Leave blanks for any courses in which these do not apply. These three spaces show you, at a glance, exactly what you have to do – and when – to earn the final grade you desire.
5. Below **ATTENDANCE POLICY** and **LATE/MAKEUP POLICY**, note any special requirements of individual professors. There will be wide variation on these; you need to know that four absences in one course will cause that professor to drop you from the class, while in another case you have more leeway. Some professors dramatically lower grades for late work, while others are less stringent. Your chart will make it easier to meet individual expectations that will affect your grade.
6. **POST** your completed chart prominently, where you will see it every day. Viewing all your course demands condensed onto one sheet of paper, rather than spread over five multi-page syllabi, is the first step in organizing your approach to the semester.
7. Immediately transfer all those key dates you have listed for tests, papers, and projects to your semester **CALENDAR**, tying this essential information into your long-range time management system.

These suggestions should help you get off to a strong start. If you need some assistance in getting started or staying on track, the **Altshuler Learning Enhancement Center** is ready to help. For the most thorough approach, enroll in EDU 1110: ORACLE (Optimum Reading, Attention, Comprehension, and Learning Efficiency), a one-credit course in advanced reading and study skills. Each week the A-LEC also offers free drop-in study skills workshops with instruction and guided practice to help you develop efficient learning strategies; call **(214) 768-3648** or check our website at <http://www.smu.edu/alec/> for a schedule and detailed descriptions. You can also schedule an individual appointment with one of our learning skills specialists by calling (214) 768-3648.

The time you invest now in becoming a strategic, effective learner will pay off in every course you take, present and future.

COURSE & FINAL GRADE GOAL	PROFESSOR Name Office hours Location E-mail, Phone	EXAMS Types Dates % of Final Grade	PROJECTS & PAPERS Due dates Description % of Final Grade	OTHER Homework Quizzes Extra Credit % of Final Grade	ATTENDANCE POLICY	LATE & MAKEUP ASSIGNMENT POLICY