Which of the following new college students has the best shot at success?

"I read ahead in all my books and told my friends I couldn’t go out," says Tanika, a college freshman. "It’s only been a week, and I’m already tired, but this is college—isn’t that what it’s supposed to be like? After all, I have to keep my GPA up if I’m going to get into the education program."

"I’d heard the profs take it easy the first week," says her friend Jodi. "So I’m not that bummed that I slept through most of my early-morning classes. And who knew books cost so much? I haven’t even bought half of them yet."

If you guessed that Tanika has the best shot at success, you’re right... but only to a point.

Let’s face it: Adjusting to college classes can be difficult. You’ll have to get used to different workloads and teaching styles from the ones you remember from high school. If you’re like Tanika, you’ll probably start off working extra hard right away—and risk burning out. Or, if you’re like Jodi, you may start college a little too laid back—and risk falling far behind. The truth is, you’ll need to find a balance between these two approaches to do well and still have free time for friends. Here are a few tips to help you find a good balance.

**Start off right**

Jodi’s right about something: College classes start slow. The first week is usually light on course content. Your profs won’t ask you to explain the secrets of the DNA double helix or to analyze *Paradise Lost.*

Tanika doesn’t need to read ahead in all her textbooks at this point. She’s working too hard, too soon. At crunch time—when exams are given or large projects are due—she may be too exhausted to make the extra effort that will lead to the grades she wants.

But it’s still crucial that you buy your books, do the required work, and attend class even during the first week, because you’ll learn how the course is structured and what type of work you’ll need to do.

**Plan to succeed**

One huge difference between high school and college is time management. College professors rarely coordinate testing and due dates to balance out your workload, so it’s likely that many of your major assignments will hit within the same couple of weeks. Certain periods—the weeks before breaks, midterms and right before finals—are sure to hold some all-nighters.

Your best defense is to be prepared. Each instructor will pass out a syllabus detailing due dates for tests and papers. Listen to the expanded descriptions given in class and note all the deadlines in your new planner. That will give you a visual view of when you really need to tell your friends you can’t go out, or the best times to schedule a trip home.

Often, you’ll have choices about when to sign up for presentations or complete special projects. If you’ve written your exams and other due dates into your planner, you can see which weeks you’ll have time to do extra assignments. (continued)
Meet the profs
Make a point to meet your professors during the first week of class. Ask for more details about an assignment or a topic you’re covering in a course. Show your individuality. Doing so demonstrates initiative, and professors like that. It also shows that you care about your work. In a sea of students, the ones who make an effort to speak up always stand out.

If you’ve spoken to your instructor a few times, and you know when office hours are, it’ll be a lot easier to come for help if you have a problem in the course. If you need to ask your professor for special help later in the semester, he or she will know that you’re a serious student—not just someone looking for an easy grade. And be sure to make a note of your instructor’s contact information. This way you can easily contact your prof when you have to miss class. This is both professional and courteous. And since you’re studying to one day be a professional in the workplace, now is a great time to get in the habit of practicing these kinds of professional courtesies.

Find a study buddy
Most college classes involve some kind of group work, so you’ll want to get to know your classmates right away. Often you’re allowed some say in which students you want to work with, so start identifying like-minded friends. You wouldn’t, for example, want to work in a group with a student who misses a lot of classes or doesn’t seem that interested in the course topic.

Exchange phone numbers and e-mail addresses so that if you do miss class, you can find out what assignments you missed and get copies of the notes.

Take time to relax
Finally, pack plenty of rest, relaxation and fun into your schedule. Make sure you’re eating well and making time for exercise, downtime with your new friends, and time with God. Although classroom success is an important part of the college experience, it’s not the only part! With careful planning and a balanced lifestyle, you can make the most of this great new experience.

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