Planning: The Key to Final Exam Success

By Melanie Duda, Graduate Student Assistant, Academic Success Center, mjduda@wayne.edu

Finals are right around the corner, are you prepared? The key to doing well on final exams is to develop a plan early before your time becomes limited and stress builds. In order to make the most of the countdown to finals, keep the following points in mind.

1) Get organized. It is impossible to focus on the task of studying if your living space, study area, or backpack are disorganized. Clutter is distracting, as it draws your attention away from the task at hand. Also, clutter is a big time waster. Just think of all of those minutes you waste in the morning searching for your keys, OneCard, or biology textbook! An hour spent organizing can save you a lot of annoyance and time in the future.

2) It is important to develop a time management system. Remember, the average college class requires at least two hours of study time for each credit hour, every week. If your planner is sitting in the corner gathering dust, find it and start using it! Record your test dates, reading assignments, job hours, and other important tasks. To-do lists are also very important. Record your daily tasks on your to-do list every day. When you finish a task, check it off. Remember to reward yourself for a job well done.

3) Determine what material will appear on the exam. For example, is your test cumulative, or does it just cover a portion of the semester? If you are behind in the reading, now is the time to catch up. Also, if you have missed class or are missing notes find a study buddy and get these materials.

...Continued on page 2

Supplemental Instruction at WSU: A Testament to the Dedication of Our Students

By Jessica Kendall, Graduate Student Assistant, Academic Success Center, jessicakendall@wayne.edu

Supplemental Instruction (SI), by its very nature, requires dedication. Dedication to one’s own learning, to one’s academic success, and to one’s study time are all required by the students who attend SI sessions. The very name, Supplemental, implies that it is something in addition to the lecture, the labs, and the quiz sections students are already required to attend. SI is voluntary. No one forces you to go. No one tattles to the professor if you choose not to attend. And yet, the influx of students attending sessions at WSU is phenomenal. What follows is an excerpt of one SI leader’s account of the extraordinary dedication displayed by her students.

Nicole Zeigler, the SI Leader for the course, BIO 2600 this term, shared her experience with the SI program coordinator:

This was my first review session so I didn’t know what to expect. I was not sure how many students I would get, or how long the session would go. I ended up with 70 students accounted for on the attendance sheet. I have never seen a more dedicated group of students.... Continued on page 3
Planning: The Key to Final Exam Success...
Continued from Page 1

4) Finally, your plan should include enough strategies so that you learn the material in many different formats. Flashcards, mind maps, practice problems, and practice tests are some active ways to study. These give you a solid grasp of the material and can help beat test anxiety. They can even be used in your study group! Just remember that these methods take time, and you learn better in short sessions spaced over many days.

Final exams are difficult, but using the above strategies will help you excel. Good luck with your exams, and have a great summer!

Thinking like the Instructor

By Eric James Stokan, Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Political Science, Eric.Stokan@wayne.edu

“I suppose Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Political Science would be great. If you wanted to include my e-mail for anyone with questions that would be fine as well, Eric.Stokan@wayne.edu The pressure of finals can often be daunting for many students. However, looking at a final from the instructor/professor’s perspective can be the key to the difference between a failing grade and graduating with honors. As Robin Williams stood on the desk in The Dead Poets Society merely to see life from a different perspective, a student should stand in the professor’s shoes and acknowledge his or her pedagogical style.

Although this is not possible if it is the first test, by finals this can be a winning strategy. Spending an extra hour or two looking over previous tests and realizing common themes, types of questions, or where the content is coming from can save laborious and tedious hours of answering problem sets or re-reading and deciphering Plato’s allegory of the cave for the fifth time.

Speaking from both personal experience and as an instructor, a student should dissect past tests, papers and notes to determine what your professor is looking for. Often students feel stressed and believe it is necessary to read every note, chapter and outline to pass a final examination; however, this is often a flaw in the student’s reasoning. Granted figuring out an idiosyncratic professor may be more difficult than remembering the specifics of Marbury v. Madison or determining whether one should use passé compose or imperfect, it doesn’t necessarily need to be this way.

A simple way to figure how you should prepare for your final exam is by looking at what you have already been asked and how it was presented. “

Come to our workshop:
Finals: Plan Your Way to an A
Tuesday, April 18 10 - noon and Wednesday, April 19 3 - 5 p.m.
At the Academic Success Center.
Email laurawoodward@wayne.edu to register.

Likewise, if a professor gives a study guide, don’t just answer the specific questions, try to think about the implications of your answers or look for common themes implicit in the question. If your instructor is technologically advanced, then realize that the slides he or she posted on blackboard at the beginning of the semester may serve as a useful study tool. However, if your professor brings 1984 by George Orwell to class and tells you to beware of “Big Brother” then stick to his notes or the book. The point is, predicting both what your professor will ask and how he/she will ask will save a great deal of time and reduce your stress. Finally, keeping a positive mindset both before and during the test is probably the second biggest factor, next to studying, to doing well on the final.
The Mind-Body Connection

By Melanie Duda, Graduate Student Assistant, mjduda@wayne.edu

At this time of year, it is easy to neglect your body for the sake of exams and papers. It seems tempting to pull all-nighters fueled by caffeine and skip your workout to squeeze in an extra few hours of study, but do not fall into this trap! Your brain and body are connected, and failure to care for your body can have consequences for your mind (and your grades)! Thus, it is important to maintain a nutritious diet plan, exercise regularly, and get plenty of sleep.

In order to support yourself through long hours of work, it is necessary to eat healthy food. Experts recommend a diet that balances whole grains, protein, fruits, and vegetables. Foods such as lean meats such as turkey or salmon, beans and other legumes, fresh fruits, and vegetables can help boost brain power. These can sustain your energy for much longer than junk food. It is also important to drink a lot of water, and avoid caffeinated beverages.

Exercise is another key to good brain health. You should exercise for a half hour each day. This can include swimming, jogging on the treadmill, or walking the dog in the evening. Exercise can help you beat the stress of finals and boost energy levels. Thus, a half hour of exercise each day can increase your ability to study and succeed.

While it might seem like you have to stay up late each night to stay on track, insufficient amounts of sleep can be harmful. Develop a schedule that allows you to sleep for seven to eight hours each night, and avoid afternoon naps that can make you more tired. Try to study before bed, then review in the morning. You’ll find you retain a lot more information when you sleep on it!

The end of the semester can be very stressful for students. If you take care of your body, you will be less likely to become anxious. You will also have more energy for studying, and your brain will work much more efficiently. Using these strategies will help you feel better and, along with good study techniques, will help improve your grades!

Dedication of Our Students... continued from page 1

When the room filled up before the session was even supposed to start, I had to think fast. By the time the session was to start, we moved to a new room. The session moved smoothly for about an hour. Then, a student from the hall informed us that the room we were using had a class in it. So, all 70+ students and I packed up our stuff and went on a search for another room. The room we went to was larger, but the problem now was that it was too big! It is meant to have a microphone and a projector, but the students and I managed with a small chalkboard and my loud voice carrying in the room.

Around 7:00 p.m., an alarm that sounded a little like a fire alarm went off. No one was outside the building, so we continued the session. As the session continued, so did the alarm. Finally, a police officer made everyone leave the building. So, we all packed up and went outside. I still had a faithful following of 50+ students. We trekked outside in search of another room when one of the students on the phone heard from a friend that they were letting people back into the building. So, the 50 students and I trekked back for another hour. We finally covered the last chapter that would be on their exam.

Their dedication and my willingness to stay and cover all the material led to possibly one of the greatest learning experiences I have ever had.

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While this lighthearted tale finds humor in a frustrating situation, it also exemplifies the dedication these students have to learning and succeeding. It also exemplifies the dedication it takes to be a successful SI leader. Not only do our leaders hold scheduled sessions, they often hold review sessions prior to exams. These sessions, as demonstrated here, are highly attended - sometimes 5 fold what is expected of a scheduled session!

This SI leader chose to continue her session after not one interruption, but 3! Her dedication and willingness to stay and help these students is admirable. There are, I am sure, many more stories from many of our dedicated SI leaders. It is the continual hard work and perseverance of our leaders combined with the dedication and commitment of their students that makes our program continue to be so successful.

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A Newsletter of the Academic Success Center

Leading the way in evidence-based academic support and excellence.

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Mission Statement

The mission of the Academic Success Center is to help students become independent and motivated learners. To support students’ success in the University environment, the Academic Success Center aims to provide individualized services and the tools to develop effective learning skills.

Services that the office offers include:

- Tutoring
- Supplemental Instruction
- Individual Support by a Learning Specialist
- Study Skill Enhancing Workshops
- Accessibility Services such as Alternative Testing

Thank you to our editorial board:

Naida Simon, Ph.D.; Angela Hardwick, graduate assistant; and Laura Woodward, learning specialist.

Supplemental Instruction Helps Students

By Jessica Kendall, Graduate Student Assistant, Academic Success Center, jessicakendall@wayne.edu

Supplemental Instruction (SI) is a group study program offered to assist students in traditionally difficult courses. A traditionally difficult course is any course that has a drop-out/fail rate of 30% or higher, or is considered a “gate-keeping” course to higher level courses in that subject area. SI also targets courses that are of high enrollment and are lecture-based, or offer little opportunity for questions or discussions during class.

SI sessions are led by the SI leader, a highly trained student who has taken the course previously and received a high grade. The SI leader works to integrate study techniques with course content and leads the students in collaborative learning during the sessions.

Final Grades for Students Taking Classes in Which SI Was Offered (N=3068)

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<th>Percentage of students who received a C or better</th>
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<td>Did not attend SI</td>
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<td>Attended SI</td>
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Fall 2002-Winter 2003