

Advice from DU Professors to First-Year DU Students

What You Should Know To Be A Successful Student

You Have Already Graduated from High School

The university operates by a very different philosophy than high school. High school is very democratic: everyone in our society is offered the opportunity to receive a public high school education. The university, and a private university like DU, is an intrinsically elitist institution. You are here because you met a set of admission criteria, and you will only remain here if you work hard and continue to meet academic standards.

You're Not a Kid Anymore

Universities presume that students are self-starting, competent adults who take higher education seriously and can be counted on to do a large amount of intellectual and creative work on their own. Professors are not surrogate parents, and it is not their job to ensure you wake up on time, attend class, complete assignments, and prepare for exams. Professors simply assume that you will do all these things. If you encounter difficulties with course material, professors will be happy to help, but they will not do your work for you.

Higher Education is Not an Entitlement; You Must Work for Your Education to Earn Your Degree

Students are not "entitled" to a certain grade in a course because of the amount of work they do. Many students generalize this idea from their high school experience. The university is like the real world in that what matters is not just effort but results. If it takes you 20 hours to perform a certain task, and someone else does the same task with the same results in 5 hours, you will both receive the same grade. Plan on spending at least 2-3 hours preparing for every 1 credit hour of class per week or more for each of your classes. (It may take you less time than this, but you should prepare now how to manage your time!)

Choose a Major...

If you have any idea of what you might like to major in, start with that major. If you find that major to be just what you want, that's great. If you find you don't like it, that's great too – because you will have made that discovery early in your college career and will have plenty of time to explore a different major.

. . . but CHOOSE YOUR MAJOR WELL.

Be certain that the major you have chosen is really what YOU want to study! Don't choose a major because it's what you think your parents want you to do – remember, it is your life, after all. Make sure you do a "reality check" as you begin taking classes for your major. If you are not passionate about the subject matter and don't enjoy it, and/or you're not doing well, think seriously about doing something else. If you don't enjoy your major now, you probably won't like employment in that field for the next 40 years either!

University Undergraduate Requirements Are Extremely Important

No matter what your major, never forget that your "general education" courses are an indispensable part of your education. No matter how good your high school teachers were, they only had time to give you a very superficial introduction to the basic notions of science, history, literature, and art that are essential to becoming an educated member of society. If you fail to become educated in all of these subjects, you will not be worthy of a university degree. Don't try to "get the required undergraduate courses out of the way" during your first year – spread them out and balance these courses with courses in your major, minor and with electives. Not only will you have variety in your studies, in the end, you will be a better person because you will be more knowledgeable about a wider range of topics.

Help is Always Available and You Should Take Advantage of It

There are many people on campus who are genuinely interested in and available to help you as the need arises. A very important form of individual assistance that students frequently fail to take advantage of is their professors' office hours. Make an appointment with a professor during office hours because this is a chance to interact one-on-one with a person who genuinely cares about being around college students and who may also be a leading expert in a subject you are passionate about. The teaching assistant assigned to your class is another valuable resource for help. If you begin to struggle, seek out either your professor or teaching assistant early in the quarter. If you wait until late in the quarter to receive help – in the belief that you'll be able to catch up with what you missed earlier on – you are seriously fooling yourself. But if you find yourself depending excessively on the teaching assistant, this may be a sign that you're probably in the wrong major. Even if you need help in areas other than academics, your professors are a good resource because they know other sources of assistance available to you on campus.



You Should Try to Hit the Ground Running Your First Year Because Every Academic Year Matters

The academic quarters at DU are 10 weeks long, and this time goes by very quickly. In many of your courses you will take two midterm exams, a final exam, and you will complete a paper or project, which means that your first exams may be in the third or fourth week of the class. If you allow yourself to fall behind in your studies, you simply may never be able to catch up. Effective time management is one of the most important skills to master if you want to be successful at DU. Don't fall into the trap of thinking "my first (or last or study abroad) year in college really doesn't matter, so I'll have a good time and blow off my classes." The grades you earn each academic term contribute to your major and cumulative grade point averages (GPA). You don't want to be the student, who in the junior year, begins to think of applying to graduate/professional schools only to be told that a 2.8 GPA will not be competitive.

Get Involved by Taking Advantage of University Events and Participating in Organizations

Universities are fueled by intellectual stimulation, the quest to create new knowledge, the mastery of new knowledge, and the intense examination of existing theories, ideas, local and world events. Intellectually stimulating events occur across campus all the time – whether an individual department, school or division is hosting a speaker series, there is a public debate at the Law School, a recital at the Performing Arts Center, or a new exhibit just opened at the Art Gallery – it would be foolish for any member of the DU Community to miss out on these opportunities, and almost all of these wonderful events have no cost for admission. At the same time, there are meetings and events sponsored by student groups that range from common interests on particular topics, political concerns, sports, promoting cultural awareness, and so on. Make it a point to attend at least one of these events each quarter; you might just be surprised by how much you will enjoy the opportunity to learn something new and the chance to meet new people who share your interests!

See Your Academic Adviser Regularly, Or Lose Big Bucks and Waste Valuable Time

Just as it's important not to fall behind during the quarter, it's important not to fall behind in taking the courses required for your major, minor, and overall degree requirements. Many courses at DU are part of a sequence that must be taken in order, and each class in the sequence may be offered only once a year; this means that if you fail to take a sequenced course when it is offered, you're automatically a year behind. Similarly, some classes required for the major may only be offered once a year, and you might miss a class that is required in order to take another course required for the major. It would be a shame if not meeting regularly with an adviser to learn about when sequenced or required courses are offered results in your having to remain in college another year just to complete a major or degree. To avoid this, make sure you have an adviser in your major department, and check with him or her every quarter before signing up for the next quarter's courses. If you don't have a major yet, talk to an adviser in one of the departments that you think you might be interested in selecting as a major, or see one of the advisers in The Center for Academic and Career Development. Failure to consult regularly with an academic adviser could cost you the price of additional tuition – which can add up to many thousands of dollars – and could delay your post-college plans!

Take Time to Learn How to Write Well

The ability to express yourself in writing in a clear, concise, and well-organized manner is a talent that will help you throughout all aspects of your personal and professional life in more ways than you can possibly imagine. Throughout your college career you should approach each written assignment as an opportunity to become skilled at writing. Write a first draft, put it aside, think about your paper, and then revise it. Ask someone who is a better writer than you to read your draft and provide feedback. When professors return your papers and they make grammatical, logical, and editorial comments, take the time to review the valuable feedback they are giving you. Just don't look for the grade and toss your paper aside. When you complete the required First-Year Inquiry and Writing sequence you will have acquired the basic foundations for becoming skilled at writing, but that's not enough. You should view every written assignment in every class throughout your college career as an opportunity to become a better writer. The process of becoming a good writer requires effort and a willingness on your part to always seek a better way to express yourself, and when you do, you will become a better thinker, too.

Avoid Completing Your Educational Career at DU With Regrets

Imagine yourself during your senior year, when you will be completing final requirements and scholarly projects, and anticipating what the future holds for you and reflecting on how you spent your time at DU. Make sure that in your reflections, you won't feel that you missed out on a special opportunity or that you failed to aspire to your highest academic achievements. You will most likely be an undergraduate only once in your life, and it would be a shame for you to leave here having regrets about what you didn't do during your days as a DU undergraduate student.