

Effective Time Management Strategies to Enhance Academic Performance

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Abstract

According to the PMBOK® Guide (Project Management Body of Knowledge), a project is defined as a “temporary endeavor with a beginning and an end, and it must be used to create a unique product, service or result”. Based on this definition of project a college degree is a project also; just as in a project, we continuously cope with “triple constraint”, cost, time, and scope. Students, like project managers must also learn how to manage triple constraints and come up with the best combination to complete a degree in a timely manner. (*PMBOK® Guide, 2021*)

A project goes through lifecycle, starting from the initiation of a project to its closure. Similarly, earning a college degree has a beginning and an end. In most cases, earning a college degree take anywhere from four to five years. However, not all students complete their degree program within the five years limit. There are many students who drop school for various reasons including not being able to meet course requirements by failing to complete coursework in a timely fashion because of poor time management skills.

This article focuses on “Time Management”, and importance of introducing students to time management concept and skills. The authors believe that by including topics such as managing time effectively and balancing priorities in lower-level courses can enhance students’ academic success and increase their chance of achieving goal of getting a college degree, resulting in lower student dropout rates.

Key Words: Texas Core Curriculum, Time Management, Student Success

Introduction

Time management refers to the process of planning, organizing, and prioritizing tasks and activities to effectively utilize time. Efficient time management can help individuals and organizations increase productivity. (PMBOK® Guide, 2021)

Time management is planning how to efficiently use and deliberately control the time you spend to maximize productivity (Slack, 2021)

Time management is a critical skill for personal and professional success. The ability to effectively manage time allows individuals to accomplish tasks, meet deadlines, and achieve their goals efficiently. Below is a list of additional points about importance of time management is important:

- **Increased productivity:** When individuals manage their time effectively, they can accomplish more tasks in less time. This leads to increased productivity and a greater sense of accomplishment.
- **Improved work-life balance:** Effective time management can also help individuals strike a better balance between their work and personal lives. By prioritizing tasks and avoiding time-wasting activities, individuals can make more time for the things that matter most to them, such as spending time with family and pursuing hobbies.
- **Reduced stress:** Poor time management often leads to feelings of stress and anxiety, which can negatively impact both personal and professional well-being. By managing time effectively, individuals can reduce stress and maintain a healthier work-life balance.
- **Increased success:** Successful people are often those who can manage their time effectively. By setting clear goals, prioritizing tasks, and managing time wisely, individuals can increase chances of success in both personal and professional lives.

Overall, time management is an essential skill that can lead to increased productivity, improved work-life balance, reduced stress, and greater success. By developing effective time management strategies, individuals can take control of their time and achieve their goals more efficiently.

Effective Time Management Skills for Students

Time management is vital for students who need to balance academic demands with other commitments. Students should be able to master the following time management skills to enhance their academic success:

- **Set realistic study goals:** Set realistic goals that are achievable within the available timeframe. Break down larger tasks into smaller, manageable chunks, and assign deadlines to each of them.
- **Create a study schedule:** Create a schedule that outlines all your academic activities, such as classes, assignments, and exams. Allocate specific time slots for each task and ensure that you stick to the schedule.
- **Prioritize tasks:** Prioritize tasks based on their importance and urgency. Complete the most important and urgent tasks first, and then move on to the less important ones.
- **Avoid multitasking:** Multitasking can reduce productivity and increase the time it takes to complete tasks. Focus on one task at a time and avoid distractions.

- **Eliminate distractions:** Eliminate or minimize distractions such as social media, phone calls, and emails. Set aside specific times to check phone and email and avoid them during your study time.
- **Use technology to your advantage:** Use productivity apps such as time management tools, calendars, and task lists to help you stay organized and on track.
- **Get enough sleep:** Getting enough sleep is crucial for academic success. Aim for at least seven hours of sleep per night and ensure that a consistent sleep schedule is maintained.
- **Avoid procrastination:** Avoiding procrastination is a crucial aspect of effective time management for academic success. Here are a few tips to help overcome procrastination.
 - **Break tasks into smaller parts:** One of the reasons why people procrastinate is that they feel overwhelmed by the size of a task. Breaking tasks into smaller, manageable parts can make them seem less daunting.
 - **Use the Pomodoro Technique:** The Pomodoro Technique involves breaking your workday into 25-minute intervals, followed by a short break. This can help with staying focused and avoid distractions.
 - **Set deadlines:** Setting deadlines can help with staying on track and avoiding procrastination. Be sure to set realistic deadlines that can be met.
 - **Identify the root cause of procrastination:** Procrastination can be caused by a variety of factors, such as fear of failure or lack of motivation. Identifying the root cause can help with finding ways to overcome it.
 - **Eliminate distractions:** Distractions can derail efforts to stay on task and lead to procrastination. Turn off phone, close unnecessary tabs on computer, and find a quiet place to work.
 - **Reward yourself:** Give yourself a reward for completing a task or meeting a deadline. This can help motivate you to stay on track and avoid procrastination.
 - **Keep a calendar of important deadlines.**
 - **Meet deadlines.**

The authors observed that many sophomore-level students do not complete their coursework stating that they did not manage their time wisely, or they run out of time, or they did not use a planner, or they forgot due dates. Once it was apparent that some students lack effective time management skills, that authors added coverage of effective time management in their University of Houston Downtown (UHD) 2301 sophomore courses. This article describes how effective time management topic was incorporated into this sophomore course to familiarize students with effective time management concepts and tools.

Inclusion of Effective Time Management in the UHD 2301 Course

Background

The University of Houston Downtown (UHD) is a higher education institution supported by the State of Texas. The university offers 46 undergraduate and 10 master's degree programs. The average age of students is 27 and average class size is 27. At the time this writing, 15,077 students had enrolled in undergraduate and graduate courses at the university. In Fall 2022, 2,804 students

applied for admission to the university, 2,636 students were admitted, and 1,776 students enrolled as degree-seeking transfer students. (University of Houston Downtown, 2023)

Students in undergraduate degree programs at UHD must complete the Common Core that consists of 42 semester credit hours of Foundational Component Areas that was established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2023). The list of Foundational Component Areas include New Student Seminar courses including UHD 1301 - First-Year Seminar-Communication and UHD 2301 - University Seminar-Communication. Transfer students who have not completed the 6 hours of the Component Area option requirements at a Texas college of university, have the option to complete the UHD 2301 course to meet this Common Core requirement. (University of Houston Downtown, 2023)

The UHD 2301 University Seminar: Communication - Going Virtual: Communication in Cyberspace (3-3-0) course is a seminar course in the communication thread of the foundation course in the Core Curriculum at the University of Houston Downtown. This course is housed in the Finance & Management Information Systems Department of the Marilyn Davies College of Business at the University of Houston Downtown. (University of Houston Downtown, 2023)

Implementing Time Management Principles and Skills in UHD 2301

The purpose of the UHD 2301 course is to examine the culture of the virtual world and explores the tools and strategies that help enhance collaboration, communication and working relationships within that environment. One of the Course Learning Outcomes (CLO) is that by the end of semester, students will be able to develop learning strategies to support their academic success to achieve their academic and career goals. To address this CLO and to help students enhance their time management skills, Effective Time Management strategies were added to the course topics followed by an assignment that required students to complete a time log showing their daily activities during the first week of the semester, analyzing how they spent their time during that week, and then describing how they can apply time management strategies to manage their time more effectively.

To ensure that students are familiar with time management concepts and skills, during the first weeks of the semester, students were required to visit the following sites and study the posted materials.

- Dartmouth: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/success/time.html>
- Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/time-management>

During the second week of the semester, class time was spent on lectures and class discussions on the materials posted to the above websites. Next, students were required to complete a multi-part assignment on time management. The first objective of the assignment was for students to realize how they spend their time. To ensure students' self-awareness of their daily activities and how they spend their time, students were required to complete a simple time log to keep track of how they spend their time during the first week of the semester to help them realize how often, when and on which tasks they spend excessive time. The second objective of the assignment was for

students to examine their time log and identify tasks that they spent excessive time on. The third objective of the assignment was for students to determine how they can modify their daily activities to utilize their time more effectively. Students were provided a template of a weekly time log along with a completed time log sample.

Table 1: Time Log Template

Student Name:							
Weekly Time Log							
Time	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
6-7 a.m.							
7-8 a.m.							
8-9 a.m.							
9-10 a.m.							
10-11:30 a.m.							
11:30 -00:30 p.m.							
00:30 -1:00 p.m.							
12-1 p.m.							
1-2:30 p.m.							
2-3 p.m.							
3-4 p.m.							
4-5 p.m.							
5-6:30 p.m.							
6:30-7 p.m.							
7-8 p.m.							
8-9 p.m.							
9-10 p.m.							
10-11 p.m.							
11-12 p.m. midnight							
12 midnight -1 a.m.							
1-2 a.m.							
2-3 a.m.							
3-4 a.m.							
4-5 a.m.							
5-6 a.m.							

After students filled the time log, they were asked to provide total number of hours spend on a few major activities.

Table 2: Time Log Template 2

* Complete Next day	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Major Activities	Approximate Hours Spent						
Classes							
Library/Homework							
Entertainment - social media - texting - Tv							
Errands and shopping							
Family appointments							
Commute Time							
Exercise (Walking - Sports)							
Sleep							
Misc. - Phone interrupts - Texting							
Work							

Next, students were asked to study their completed time log and analyze how they had spent their time during that week. By completing the above tasks, students were able to identify the Black Holes of time management, recognize problems with their time management practices, learn to adjust ranking of their priorities, and utilize time management tools to better manage their time.

Finally, students were required to summarize three main time management practices they had learned from the assignment and describe how they can change their time management habits to use their time more efficiently to improve their performance in this and other courses.

Assignment Results

After completing the above assignment, students reported the following major activities that hinder their studies:

- Surfing the Web
- Social Media
- Looking for lost time
- Inability to say “no”
- Texting, Emails, Socializing, and Family Obligations

Below is an unedited student time log and a few unedited student reports.

Table 3: Completed Weekly-Time Log

Student Name: xxxx							
Weekly Time Log							
Time	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
6-7 a.m.	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep
7-8 a.m.	Wake up- Breakfast	Sleep	Sleep				
8-9 a.m.	Catch up on Assignments	Sleep	Sleep				
9-10 a.m.	Catch up on Assignments	Breakfast	Breakfast				
10-11:30 a.m.	School Assignments	Yoga & Workout	Schoolwork if needed				
11:30 -12:30 p.m.	Go to gym	Yoga & Workout	Schoolwork if needed				
12:30 -1:00 p.m.	Gym	Gym	Gym	Gym	Gym	Lunch	Lunch
12-1 p.m.	Gym	Gym	Gym	Gym	Gym	School Assignments	Sauna
1-2:30 p.m.	Shower-Errands	Shower-Errands	Shower-Errands	Shower-Errands	Shower-Errands	School Assignments	Sauna
2-3 p.m.	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Watch TV/social media	Go on a run
3-4 p.m.	Go to work	Watch TV/ Social Media	Go on a run				
4-5 p.m.	Work	Work	Work	Work	Work	Go to Work	TV/ Social Media
5-6:30 p.m.	Work	Work	Work	Work	Work	Work	TV/ Social Media
6:30-7 p.m.	Work	Work	Work	Work	Work	Work	TV/ Social Media
7-8 p.m.	Work	Work	Work	Work	Work	Work	Clean/Laundry
8-9 p.m.	Work-Dinner	Work-Dinner	Work-Dinner	Work-Dinner	Work-Dinner	Work-Dinner	Go to Restaurant
9-10 p.m.	Back to home	Hang with Friends	Hang with Friends				
10-11 p.m.	Social Media	Hang With Friends	Hang With Friends				
11-12 p.m. midnight	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Hang with Friends	Sleep
12 midnight -1 a.m.	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Hang with Friends	Sleep
1-2 a.m.	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep
2-3 a.m.	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep
3-4 a.m.	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep
4-5 a.m.	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep
5-6 a.m.	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep

Table 4: Completed Weekly-Time Log 2

* Complete Next day	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Major Activities	Approximate Hours Spent						
Classes	3-4	3-4	3-4	3-4	3-4	1-3	1-3
Library/Homework	3-4	3-4	3-4	3-4	3-4	1-3	1-3
Entertainment - social media - texting - Tv	1-2	1-2	1-2	1-2	1-2	3-5	3-5
Errands and shopping	1-2	1-2	1-2	1-2	1-2	2-3	2-3
Family appointments	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Commute Time	1	1	1	1	1	1-2	1-2
Exercise (Walking - Sports)	2	2	2	2	2	1-2	1-2
Sleep	9-10	9-10	9-10	9-10	9-10	5-8	8-9
Misc. - Phone interrupts - Texting	1-2	1-2	1-2	1-2	1-2	1-3	1-3
Work	5-6	5-6	5-6	5-6	5-6	4-5	0

“To improve my performance in my college courses this semester starts with an evaluation of my strengths and weaknesses. Working full time and taking a full-time course load will be challenging but I am determined, dedicated, and devoted to completing my classes with high marks. Having only taken one class last semester at HCCS prior to my enrollment in UHD, I would also benefit from practicing specific reading strategies. The amount of reading needed to be successful is paramount. Lastly, looking ahead in my months and anticipating due dates from the syllabus will keep me on schedule and prevent me from overlooking assignments.”

“My first week of school was a bit rocky learning the best route to get to school and keeping up with the reading demands of each course. Learning to have confidence in myself and my judgement of my priorities will play a large role in my success. Sticking to what is working early will get me a good start to maintain. Every day is about setting deadlines to complete assignments and not fall behind. Not becoming too overwhelmed and concentrating on one thing at a time will serve me well for getting tasks completed. The first week was about getting the materials and accessing them with ease. The next few weeks will be like riding a bicycle and finding that steady rhythm to class work, homework and test preparation. My time management will improve for all courses as I stick to my schedule and get comfortable in my rhythm.”

“Below are three-time management practices. Knowing your strengths and weaknesses. one must identify their strengths to ensure one manages time well. By knowing your strengths, you maximize your power and identify your weaknesses. This will help manage your time well as one can set deadlines for them if one finds that they have a problem setting deadlines. Setting a prior deadline is a good time management practice; also, it is good to reward yourself when things follow as you had intended. Second, it is good to learn the technique of avoiding procrastination

as this skill ensures maximum time management. to avoid procrastination, it is important to set long-term and short-term goals. The goals will guide concentrating on what is important without pushing important things to be tackled later. Adapting the skill of not procrastinating is a good time management practice as one deal with issues and tasks as they arise. Thirdly another time management practice is being able to balance between work life and personal life. Knowing how to balance the two will help me enhance my performance as being able to give concentration to studies when it comes to studies and personal life when it is time personal life. Concentrating on one thing at a time will aid in time management as the focus will not be distracted.”

“Most of the time was spent in classes and work less time was spent on leisure. I plan to change my time management habits by organizing my schedule and being organized. I plan to organize my whole day, and prioritizing will make me avoid distractions. I plan to determine my priorities to achieve a work-life balance. During the first week of the semester, I attended classes, studied, and familiarized myself with the syllabus. Also, less time was spent with friends and family at work as studies and results took up most of the week. However, from tasks 1 and 3, I have learned three main time management practices. They are prioritizing what is important. I made a to-do list and stuck to the list as my prioritizing strategy. Setting goals for myself as it aids in handling tasks that are important and urgent. Tasks 1 and 3 also helped me learn how to practice stress management. Work, study, and life can give one a real headache; however, I have learned to manage stress.”

“The best way to improve on time management to become more productive is to figure out how you spend your time. By learning how you spend your time, you can create a daily schedule and stick to it. As you make the schedule, it is important to prioritize wisely. It is essential to create time for distractions, avoid multi-tasking and set reasonable time limits; this will aid in improving my time management and increases my performance in this and another course. I also intend to curb distraction like texting and getting carried away by social media by switching off my phone during classes and library sessions.”

“Three main time management practices to enhance performance in courses are: 1) setting clear and realistic goals, 2) prioritizing tasks and activities based on their importance and urgency, and 3) using a calendar or schedule to organize and track your time. Setting goals helps to focus efforts and stay motivated, prioritizing tasks helps allocate limited time to the most important tasks, and using a calendar/schedule ensures proper allocation of time and helps avoid double-booking or missing deadlines.”

“During the first week of the semester, I have spent my time primarily on orientation activities and getting familiar with the course material and expectations. In addition, I have also been organizing my schedule and setting goals for the semester. From task 1, I have learned the importance of setting priorities, breaking tasks into smaller ones, and using a schedule to stay on track. To improve my time management practices, I can allocate specific blocks of time for different tasks and stick to a routine, use productivity tools such as a to-do list, and reduce distractions by limiting social media usage. These practices can help me be more efficient and effective in completing tasks, both in this course and others.”

After the assignments were graded, the following prevalent time management tools were further discussed in class.

- **Google Calendar:** It is a free, online tool that is accessible on computers and mobile devices and allows for scheduling and managing daily events, set reminders, and share calendar with others. (Google, 2023)
- **Toggl:** It is a time tracking tool that helps with keeping track of how much time is spent on various tasks. It allows for categorizing time by project or client and generate reports to analyze productivity. (Toggl, 2023)
- **RescueTime:** It is a productivity tool that is accessible on computers and mobile devices and tracks how time is spent. It provides a detailed report of how much time is spent on each application or website and helps identify areas where one can improve productivity. (RescueTime, 2023)
- **Evernote:** It is a note-taking app that is accessible on computer and on mobile devices and allows for organizing notes, set reminders, and create to-do lists. (Evernote, 2023)
- **Trello:** It is a project management tool that enable users to create boards, lists, and cards to organize tasks and projects. In addition, it allows for collaboration with others and track the progress made on various tasks. (Trello, 2023)

In addition, the following tips and references for effective time management were discussed in class.

- Set SMART goals: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound goals can help with staying focused and motivated.
- Create a to-do list: Prioritize tasks based on their importance and urgency and allocate time for each task accordingly.
- Use a planner or calendar: Keep track of deadlines, meetings, appointments, and other commitments in a planner or calendar.
- Minimize distractions: Eliminate or reduce distractions such as social media, emails, phone calls, or unnecessary meetings during study and/or work hours.
- Take breaks: Take short breaks between tasks to recharge energy and stay productive.
- Delegate tasks: Assign tasks to other team members or outsource tasks to free up time for more important tasks.
- Learn to say "no": Prioritize commitments and learn to say "no" to requests that are not aligned with goals or priorities.
- Read "The Pomodoro Technique: The Acclaimed Time-Management System That Has Transformed How We Work" by Francesco Cirillo. (Cirillo, 2018).
- Read "Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones" by James Clear. (Clear, 2018).
- Read "Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World" by Cal Newport. (Newport, 2016).

Conclusion

After studying students' completed time logs and compiling their reports, the authors developed a survey to further understand which major activities that most impede students' learning (see Appendix). The survey was distributed to students in four courses, and 120 students completed the survey. The survey responses were tabulated and analyzed. The initial result does not show a conclusive correlation between students' time management skills and their performance in the course. Currently, the authors are examining the survey and its results for further investigation and reporting in future articles.

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Appendix 1 – Time Management Survey

The purpose of this anonymous survey is to provide information on how the course is going so far and to realize how well you manage your time. The survey responses are anonymous, and your responses will NOT be graded and will NOT count towards your semester grade; all I see is a check mark by your name indicating that you have completed the survey. Completing the survey will earn you 10 bonus points that will be added to your semester total grade.

Please be as accurate and candid as possible. Thank-you!

1. I am Options: Freshman; Sophomore; Junior; Senior; Other
2. I am Options: Male; Female; Other
3. I am currently enrolled in _____ course(s). Options: 1; 2; 3; 4 or more
4. I believe I am in control of my daily tasks. Options: Never; Seldom; Often; Always
5. I am currently working _____ hour(s) a week. Options: 0, 1-10; 11-20; 21-30; more than 30 hours
6. I spend approximately _____ hour(s) studying or doing coursework on an average day. Options: 0-1; 2-4; 5-6; 7-8; more than 8
7. I engage approximately _____ hour(s) in leisure activities or hobbies such as participating in social-media, texting, Web Surfing, and/or watching TV on an average day. Options: 0-1; 2-4; 5-6; 7-8; more than 8
8. I spend approximately _____ hour(s) on household tasks and/or ran errands on an average day. Options: 0-1; 2-4; 5-6; 7-8; more than 8
9. I spend approximately _____ hour(s) resting/sleeping on an average day. Options: 0-1; 2-4; 5-6; 7-8; more than 8
10. I can say “NO” to time-wasters activities. Options: Never; Almost never; Occasionally; Almost always; Always
11. I prioritize my daily tasks. Options: Never; Almost never; Occasionally; Almost always; Always
12. I am aware of the amount of time each daily task demands. Options: Never; Almost never; Occasionally; Almost always; Always
13. I can focus on the task at hand. Options: Never; Almost never; Occasionally; Almost always; Always
14. I use a planning tool such as a time log or calendar to efficiently manage my time. Options: Never; Almost never; Occasionally; Almost always; Always
15. I seek help and delegate tasks that someone else can do when I am in time crunch to meet deadlines. Options: Never; Almost never; Occasionally; Almost always; Always

16. I know how to manage my time effectively. Options: True; False
17. This class is meeting my expectations. Options: Yes; No
18. This course is moving _____. Options: Too slowly; Too quickly; Just right
19. This course is _____. Options: Very well organized; Well organized; Not too organized; Not organized at all
20. My performance in this class is _____. Options: Satisfactory; Unsatisfactory
21. I have missed _____ coursework including quizzes, tests, and assignments in this class. Options: 0, 1; 2; 3 or more
22. If you have missed any coursework, please use the below text area to explain why you missed coursework and how you can avoid a similar situation.

Thank you for completing this survey.