

## CONTROLLING THE CHAOS

Many times, college can feel like this constant act of juggling multiple balls in the air. When balancing competing needs for your time and energy, consider the following steps.

- **Be optimistic.** Optimism is expecting good things to happen. This creates problem-solving and improved expectations about the future. How do you view the world? Remember, we can change our reactions when we change the beliefs attached to them.
- **Keep it in perspective.** Our reaction to stress is cumulative. When we are juggling multiple projects or concepts, it is very reasonable to get overwhelmed and even lose our motivation. Take the time to engage in self-care and be realistic about what you can and can't complete.
- **Get enough sleep.** While it is tempting to stay up late or get up early to complete overdue tasks, the problem can be trying to burn a candle at both ends. On average, we should all be getting close to eight hours of sleep to be functional and at our best.
- **Know when to stop.** There are times when everything gets so overwhelming, the only option is to step away and take a break. Forcing yourself to work through the need for sleep or a break will eventually lead to a spiral that will shut down all your productive energy.
- **Don't let things pile up.** As much as you can, be aware of those tasks that you have put off, as they have a nasty way of sneaking back up on you all at once. One useful approach is keeping a list of tasks to look at when you must see what remains to be completed.
- **Limit distractions.** When you are working on a project or smaller assignment, work more productively by prioritizing the goal in front of you and limiting distractions such as having text and DM alerts interrupting your work or music or television on in the background that is distracting.
- **Stay focused and keep your eyes on the prize.** While taking a break from a larger task can be revitalizing, be careful to avoid the problem of completing multiple small tasks that have more flexible due dates than a larger task that has a more inflexible delivery date

If you are at a place where you need to develop some goals and a plan to move forward, think about building your plan for success around these SMART<sup>1</sup> goals.

- **Specific.** When we think of our goals, we must make sure we are thinking of clear and specific goals. This will enable us to focus and stay truly motivated until we achieve them. Think about what you need to achieve these goals, why they are important, and who will be involved in completing these tasks.
- **Measurable.** When we have measurable goals, we can keep track of our progress and understand how close or far we are and how much time, work, or money we need to complete our mission.
- **Achievable.** Setting realistic goals will keep you from losing motivation and feeling you've failed. This will allow you to stretch your abilities without pushing yourself too much. Before starting a new endeavor, ask yourself what you will need to achieve your goal and how realistic that goal really is.
- **Relevant.** Even when it might sound a bit obvious, we should always set goals that matter to us. Consider if our timing is right and whether it matches your other efforts and needs.
- **Time-bound.** When we start a new project, the best way to make sure we achieve our goals is by having a deadline (whether it is six months from now, six weeks, or six days) to help us stay focused.

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1 Doran, G. T. (1981). "There's a S.M.A.R.T. way to write management's goals and objectives." *Management Review*. 70 (11): 35–36.