

Preparing an Academic Plan

A. Why an Academic Plan?

An academic plan is a carefully crafted set of goals that comprises three key elements: the focus of your studies, your expectations or intentions with respect to work load and, your strategies for success.

Building an academic plan is an essential step in preparing for a successful return to studies after an unsuccessful academic year. If you are appealing to have an academic regulation waived, you must provide compelling evidence to the Associate Dean (Studies) that you are now in a position to achieve good academic results. If you are returning to studies after being placed on academic probation or required to withdraw, you will want to avoid the barriers to academic success that you faced previously.

Self reflection is an excellent starting point, but you will also need to supplement this with the “reality check” afforded through consultation with others. You are encouraged to get whatever advice is relevant: speak with professionals; consult with support services on campus; gain input from your family or friends; and read about various solutions. Developing an academic plan will require you to make a significant effort. Remember, however, that the “true” payoff for you will be a successful return to studies in the Faculty of Arts and Science.

B. The Components of the Plan

1. Course of Study

The academic plan should describe your proposed Degree Plan and courses in which you intend to register in the upcoming academic session. It may be appropriate to refer to types of courses or options, rather than specifics, when talking about future years of study. Access to undergraduate Degree Plans in Arts and Science is competitive, subject to both minimum academic performance criteria and enrolment pressures. Obtain written confirmation from the Undergraduate Chair or Assistant that you are eligible for the degree program, concentration, and courses you are including in your academic plan.

2. Full time versus Part Time Status

Consider your ability to be a full time student who would normally attend 15 to 20 hours per week of classes and spend another 20 or more hours studying outside of class time. A lighter course load may be more appropriate given your individual circumstances. Take into account any incomplete coursework from previous academic sessions that you have permission to submit late when considering the number of courses you will take. Also consider whether you need to carry a part-time job while you are going to school. Under no circumstances should a student returning after a difficult year plan to carry more than a normal load of 5 courses (15.0 units) per term.

3. Strategies for Success

Students too often fall into the false belief that if they just try harder they will succeed. Identify what problem(s) stood in the way of your academic success in the past and explain

how you expect to avoid or mitigate the problem(s) in the future. Sometimes these influences are obvious; other times it's difficult to identify the reasons behind low grades so follow up with an academic advisor or other professionals to ensure that you are addressing the relevant performance issues. . Document the resources you have marshaled in support of your proposed return to studies.

C. Key Questions to Guide You in Preparing your Academic Plan

1. Academic Preparation

- Did you have difficulty with the course content?

If yes, then you should consider appropriate academic remedies such as:

- retaking courses, especially prerequisite courses;
- planning regular consultations with the course professor and/or Teaching Assistants
- seeking assistance from a campus resource like The Learning Commons, Writing Centre or the Learning Strategies Counsellors (Stauffer Library);
- joining a study group;
- connecting with a tutor or peer mentor;

- Do you think your choice of Degree Plan is the problem?

If yes, you should consider:

- switching to a Plan more suited to your academic background and strengths.
- seeking advice from the Undergraduate Office in the relevant departments, and/or the Arts and Science Faculty Office, Main Floor Dunning Hall or 613 533 2470 on how to develop the level of academic preparedness needed.
- gaining insight into your skills, abilities and strengths by working with a Learning Strategist in Student Academic Success Services (sass.queensu.ca)

- Have you acquired the learning strategies that will allow you to be an effective student, for example, time management, study skills, exam mastery techniques, writing competency, presentation skills, etc.?

If not, you should consider:

- consulting with Student Academic Success Services, located in the Stauffer Library for advice or access to a peer mentor or arrange for a Writing Centre tutorial
- taking an on-campus workshop, for example, "Presentations Skills" or "Exam Study Tips" through the Learning Commons.
- accessing resources to support effective learning from outside the University.

2. Motivation

- Was the material sufficiently interesting, so that working on your academic subjects was generally rewarding? Did you make sufficient effort at your academics relative to your nonacademic activities? Or did you tend to miss classes, avoid your readings and fail to complete the coursework?

If motivation is your problem, you might consider:

- consulting with a career counselor.
- switching to another Degree Program that you believe might be more appealing.
- assessing whether another educational institution might be more appropriate.
- assessing if the very real problem of procrastination or perfectionism is an issue. The Writing Centre tutors may be able to help.
- taking a break from post-secondary study.
- being evaluated by a physician or counsellor for physical or mental health related issues.
- Being tested for a possibly learning disability through the Regional Assessment and Resource Centre (RARC)

3. Personal and Financial Resources.

- Do you have the physical and mental health needed to be a successful student? Do you have the life skills needed to cope with everyday interpersonal and practical demands?

If lack of personal resources is your problem, seek assistance by contacting:

- Student Wellness Services Centre
 - Professionals outside the University who you consider best-suited to address your difficulties.
- Do you have the financial resources you need to support yourself at university? Do your hours at work interfere with your ability to focus and complete your academic work?

If money is your key problem, you should obtain information on:

- budget planning from the Student Awards Office of the University Registrar or a financial advisor.
- bursaries and other sources of financial assistance from the Student Awards Office of the University Registrar.
- reducing your academic load if you must supplement your finances with a part-time job.

4. Situational Demands

- Were you subject to extraordinary situational demands that prevented you from succeeding?

If life events have placed you in an exceptional situation, such as the death of someone close, accident, legal battle, family emergencies, etc., you should:

- be realistic about any long term effects you may experience from these extenuating circumstances.
- be able to explain convincingly how you have/intend to overcome any situational demands that prevented you from succeeding and describe the resources you have accessed. This is an essential component of any appeal to the Associate Dean (Studies) to have a regulation to be waived.

D. Evaluating Success of the Academic Plan

You should use your academic plan both as a guide to success and as a tool to measure your progress toward meeting your academic goals. As you learn more about yourself and about your areas of interest and strength, you may need to make adjustments to your academic plan.

We encourage you to re-visit your plan periodically with an advisor or counsellor as a way to keep on track and also to acknowledge your progress.

All academic plans submitted with an appeal to have a regulation waived will be reviewed by the Associate Dean (Studies) at the end of the academic year, or probationary period, following your return. You are expected to demonstrate accountability by following through on the particulars in your academic plan.

Ultimately, however, we hope to see the academic success that your carefully crafted academic plan has set out.