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ENGWellness Undergraduate Newsletter

Produced by: the ENGWellness Ambassador

IN THIS ISSUE

Welcome

Academic Supports

Studying 101

Bad Habits

My Personal Method

What's Happening Around Campus?

Welcome to Campus!

We would like to send a big warm welcome out to everyone who is stepping foot on campus for the first time in the last two years! Hopefully this is the last time we have to say anything like this for a while. For those who have already been on campus we want to extend a warm welcome back to you as well! We hope that you all had a wonderful and successful work term or that you passed all your exams and get to relax a little during the spring. For those that are heading off to co-op we wish you good luck!

Exam Preparation

For those who will now be doing their exams and midterms in-person, you may want some help on how to successfully write an in-person exam. To start, you can check out our website or LEARN page for studying tips. The LEARN page consist of tips on how to write exams, how to take notes, and ways to maintain a high level of academic competency throughout the term. Also consult the massive document Engineering Student's Guide for Productivity and Studying. It is nearly 60 pages long and covers things from presidential productivity techniques to relationships and community and everything in between.

Around campus, you'll find a variety of sources to draw from regarding in-person classes and exams. First and foremost is the Student Success Office, where professionals are waiting to help you on your journey to a successful school term and are there to answer many of the questions you may have. Additionally, you could reach out to your academic advisor who would love to help you figure out your goals, plans, and what you may need to do to achieve them. Last but certainly not least are your peers and Profs! They are familiar with the specific challenges you may be facing, and could prove to be immensely helpful.

Although you have probably already heard of the resources listed above, they are not just a cliché; they are there to help you in your specific troubles and improve your university experience. So, if you find you need some help, please do not hesitate to use any of the resources listed above! Also note that the page below contains other helpful resources for you to access.

Academic Supports

Below is a list of academic supports and resources for you to use in your upcoming term. Further information on each is provided by clicking the hyperlink.

- Build strategies for a successful term with the Planning for Academic Success: Making the Most of Your Spring Term workshop, offered on May 10 from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. ET. Registration is live on Portal.
  - Online Learning Resources are also available for students looking to independently build strong study habits.
  - Students can use the Learning Skills Self-Assessment to determine their existing strengths and gain insight into which areas they should focus on developing.

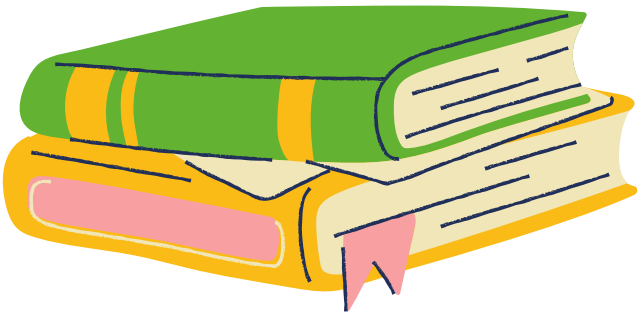
- Warrior Virtual Study Halls are weekly, virtual study sessions facilitated by a Peer Success Coach to introduce new academic skills and create study goals and answer questions.

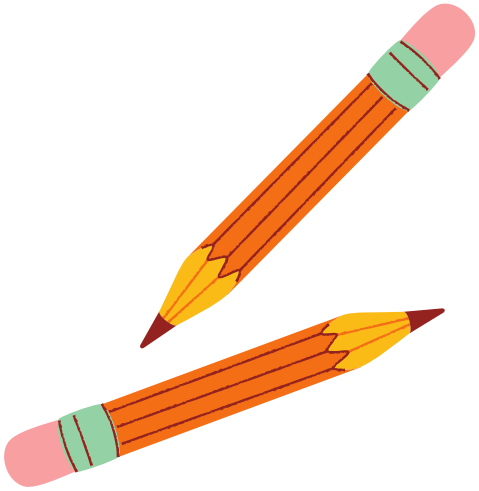
- Peer Success Coaches offer in-person or virtual one-on-one appointments for personalized support to address academic challenges and create a plan for success starting May 9. Our coaches are upper-year students with experience overcoming their own study roadblocks.

- Student Leadership Program provides opportunities for students to develop their leadership skills and apply their new knowledge in a campus leadership role. Learn from home, or at an in-person workshop.

- Foundational Training Program for Peer Leaders can help students develop core skills for working in a peer-to-peer program at the University of Waterloo, with workshops offered online and in-person.

- Mentor resources are available online to support students in mentor or peer leader roles.





Studying 101: Study Smarter not Harder

Overworking yourself is the cardinal sin of trying to study smart. Not only does overworking yourself make you hate whatever it is you're overworking yourself for, it is actually a very ineffective and non-productive way to study. People often mistake work quantity for quality, or overlook quality completely when they hear about study habits and such. Hearing about a student who works 60 hours a week on school may make you feel like you need to be doing the same, but chances are that that student isn't using their time as effectively or efficiently as they could be, and is in fact doing unnecessary amounts of work. This isn't to say that engineering students don't have a lot of work to do, and that massive amounts of work are sometimes necessary. The main point here is that, generally speaking, if you find that you are constantly over tired and all you do is work, you can probably change something for the better.

The first step is acknowledging that there is improvement to be made. If you feel like you need to continue to overwork yourself in pursuit of your goals, then there is little chance these words will aid you. A common misconception about "success" is that you just need to outwork your competition. Don't get me wrong, working hard is highly important, but being smart with how you work is more important. Academic success is not just about how hard you work, and treating it like that will frame success as a simple game of hard work. Newsflash: this game isn't simple, and the sooner you discover that there is more to your degree than academic perfection the sooner you can acknowledge that there are more things to do than just work hard.

Next, it is important to realize what you want to do instead of working. People will vary in the amount they want to work; some may like to work 10-12 hours each day in pursuit of a goal, and find that they can maintain that level of work. For others, and probably most people, their natural inclination to be productive and do "work" is much less. Either way, all of us need things outside of work that provide meaning and happiness. Do you like sports? Are you seeking a relationship? It is important for you to find out what you really enjoy, outside of school, and then to integrate this into your life to balance academics and school.

The above paragraphs were meant to place school into perspective, so that you are able to properly recognize its function in your life *as a whole.* Once this is realized, a more balanced and therefore sustainable treatment of academic work takes place, which is the foundation of studying smarter. Building on this foundation, there are a ton of strategies that can go into "smart studying", so I'll provide an introduction to a seminal piece of further "smart studying" habits. This starts with managing not only your time, but also your energy. Energy management is done by delegating different tasks to your varying degrees of energy. Many people forget that the body has naturally changing energy levels throughout the day, and forget to build their schedule around it. These varying degrees of energy come from something called an ultradian rhythm. Much like a circadian rhythm, it is your body's naturally occurring cycle, though it happens throughout a day, as opposed to your circadian rhythm which recurs once per 24 hours. For example, you may recognize that you are super focused during the morning, and become more tired in the early afternoon. To maximize your time, you can work on more cognitively taxing tasks in the morning, and do more basic tasks in the early afternoon. Simple as it is, this is an tried and true method of jumping up in your productivity, while working the same amount.

Three Bad Study Habits and How to Change

A caveat

Engineering is exceptionally difficult, and at some points in time you have no choice but to lose sleep. This section is meant as a guide for when you don't need to be cramming.

Not paying attention to energy levels

The first in this list is highly related to what was discussed above. In short, people tend to ignore their natural energy levels when studying, and work on whatever work they need to without an attempt to coordinate naturally varying focus abilities with the cognitive demand of the task at hand. As indicated above, your body goes through what's called ultradian rhythms, and to ignore these is to lose out on a lot of effective use of your energy. If you decide to do basic tasks like setting up a study schedule or taking notes during the morning in which your most focused, leaving the hard stuff like studying and finishing assignments to later in the day when you're more tired, your day is going to be a lot less effective and efficient as it could've been. The solution to this is quite simple; do hard tasks when you have high levels of mental energy and basic tasks when you don't.

Pushing through

Yes, hard work is important, but how much of it is actually necessary? You will often hear people telling you to "push through" the tiredness, and "work harder" because things like sleep aren't as necessary as you might think. Truth is, needing to push through your body's way of telling you to stop is probably only necessary a minority of the time. Apart from the odd time when there is an alternative, taking a break when you think you need it is not being weak or being a quitter, its studying smarter. Of course, knowing when you *need* a break versus just *wanting* a break is another problem, but acknowledging the difference and trying to give yourself some leisure is a good start in the right direction.

Active versus passive studying

Although it may make you feel better about yourself, sitting in front of your computer and reading through notes is (almost always) not an effective way of studying. In fact, most forms of "passive" studying won't be helpful to yourself whatsoever, and you might as well have not been studying in the first place. Effort takes energy, and unless good study habits have been formed, using energy is painful. Your body wants to avoid pain, so you'll start doing an easy, low-effort task to make yourself feel like you're studying, even though the studying your doing isn't useful. Doing effortful tasks like practice questions, making questions for yourself, and trying to figure out and explain where you went wrong on quizzes or tests is much more effective and task less time to get much better results. Passively studying, like reading notes, is where you aren't really engaging with the content and will end up requiring much more time to learn the same content as if you were actively studying. Putting in 1 good hour of active work will probably be equivalent to several hours of passive work, so make sure to include active work into your study routines to cut down on necessary study time.

My Personal Method

A bit about me

For some background, I'm not an Engineering student, so read through this with that grain of salt. However, I am still in Science so I do have an idea of the difficulty of maintaining labs, difficult classes, CO-OPs and the rest of the fun things that go with a STEM degree. In first year, I had a bit of a rough intro to University (grades wise) but I think I've figured some things out that may be of use to the rest of you, and have tried to summarize the discovery below.

Balance

If I had to sum up my method of keeping up grades in one word it'd be balance. Balance is just a simple way of saying I found the right amount of studying, exercising, and whatever in my life is important other than school. It took a while of testing, but once I figured it out, I got it. I know I found this balance because a) I'm not absolutely burned out at the end of each term, b) I don't feel overwhelmed with work every other day, c) I enjoy the process of learning and doing work more than I did before, and d) I feel like I can continue to do this and keep up the pace at which I'm doing it for at least as long as my undergrad. Having other pieces of my life that are as important and more important than school, and making a habit of attending to those things, is what allows me to put school into perspective and continue to work with the same level of motivation, dedication, and enjoyment as I did when I first entered into my undergrad. I think a lot of people lose sight of the purpose of school because their grades begin to mean literally everything to them, and that sucks the purpose and therefore enjoyment out of it. If you can find a way to study as much as you need to while also doing other things that you enjoy, you're on your way to the being best student you can be. I should add that these enjoyable things to do on top of school are not things like video games and social media. I'm sure you already procrastinate with these things enough to fill your "everything's ok in moderation" quota five times over. Spending all your time on social media or playing video games is not a balanced lifestyle; you're simply trading one obsession with another. Rather, you should find things that fulfill you, and *really* make you feel better, not just bring you short-term pleasure. I always found that if I need to be fighting with myself on every little thing throughout the day, my term will not turn out very well, and finding time to do all the things that bring joy allows for you to start to enjoy school more too. Sometimes you just need to be able to take the risk of hanging out with friends, family, playing sports, going to a concert etc. and trust that the long game will pay out over trying to control every little outcome on every test and quiz. The truth is, the difference in marks that I saw when I tried to control every piece of my life to optimize for school ended up hurting my grades because I became so resentful towards school that the motivation I had to study was nearly depleted at exam time. I couldn't finish as strong as I could have if I was more balanced throughout the term.

Remember to enjoy the process, and not just trying to get to the end result. 99% of your life will be made up of working towards different things, and very very little of it is actually made up of "the result". Your degree is just a part of the process of growing and learning, so make sure you count these years as part of the life you want to live, not the sacrifice to get to the life you want.

What's Happening Around Campus?

Sexual Violence Awareness Month

Pornography and Sexual Violence Culture – 101 on Wednesday, May 11th from 6-7:30pm

Social Media and Gender-based Violence – 101 on Wednesday, May 18th from 3-4:30pm

Sexting and Socials on May 24th from 2:00-4:00pm

Male Allyship on May 31st, from 2:00-4:00pm

The Future of Sustainable Transportation

Interested in sustainable transportation in the Region of Waterloo? You're invited to participate in a discovery lab hosted by GreenHouse, the Geographies of Health in Place lab, and the Faculty of Environment. Join us to exchange ideas, identify unique challenges and opportunities in the Waterloo Region, and explore future opportunities for innovation.
Register at https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/the-future-of-sustainable-transportation-registration-311961153207 by May 20th.

Additional Resources

The following mental health supports are available to you
Counselling Services: 519-888-4567 ext. 42655

The following crisis supports are available to you as well
Crisis Services Canada: 1-833-456-4566 or text 45645
UW Police: 519-888-4567 ext. 22222

Academic Support

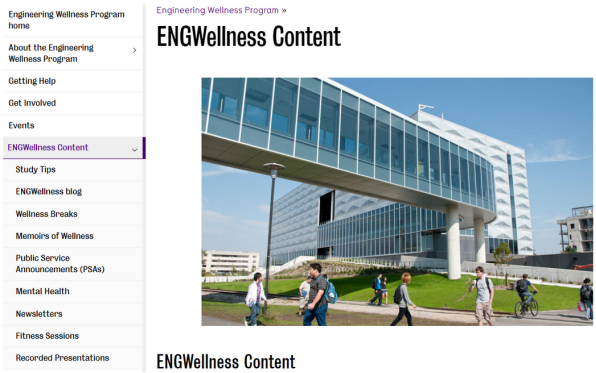
- Student Success Office: Compilation of learning and life skills resources.

Contacts to book a one-on-one coaching session:

Sam Vandekerckhove (MME) - srvandek@uwaterloo.ca / ENGWellness@uwaterloo.ca
Leah Foster (ECE) – ljsims@uwaterloo.ca / ENGWellness@uwaterloo.ca

ENGWellness Content

Check out our ENGWellness resources including mental health pages and PSAs. All resources as well as previous newsletters can be accessed under the ENGWellness Content section of our website.



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LEARN 'Course'

Get news and access to our content modules through our ENGWellness Learn 'course'! Students can enroll using the Self-Registration function within Learn.