Advising Advice Column

How to Graduate on Time

Can you graduate from USM in four years? Yes! Many students here have accomplished this goal because they followed the suggestions below and so can you! Even if you are not a first year student, or need to go part time, these tips can help you be more efficient in your progress. Benefits are that you will feel a great sense of accomplishment and that your success will signal to employers that you are responsible, organized, focused, and smart. In addition, you will save yourself thousands of dollars and have more time to enjoy other aspects of your life, once you have completed your degree.

TIPS:

ADVISING: Make full use of advising available to you. Meet often with your Faculty Advisor and Academic Advisor to develop your four year plan for graduation, understand course requirements, and learn about department events. If you have concerns with school seek help early with your advisors, because they can help you explore options and offer suggestions.

CHOOSE A MAJOR EARLY: Decide on a major early and stick with it. Not sure what major to pursue? Work with your Academic Advisor who can help you with major and career exploration. In addition, use the Major to Career Sheets (found in all Advising offices on the 3 campuses). These resources provide succinct information about what careers you can do with a major. Also, talk with upper class students about their experiences.

DON’T SKIMP ON CREDITS: Try to complete a course load of 15 credits each semester, remembering that USM degrees are at least 120 credits. You may need to adjust this number based on other obligations so that you are successful, but keep school as a high priority.

GOOD STUDY HABITS: Avoid repeating courses. Work hard to get good grades and plan carefully to ensure that you meet all the requirements.

IMPROVE YOUR LEARNING STRATEGIES: Just like an athlete, sharpen your skills to perform your best. Use tools provided by the Learning Commons. The staff will help you connect with tutors, Reference Librarians, and others to help you tackle your challenging classes. Form study groups and manage your time wisely.

GET AHEAD: Enroll in summer and winter session classes to get ahead. If you have financial aid or veterans benefits, speak with staff from these offices to ask how it will work financially.

MANAGE YOUR SCHEDULE: Schedule your classes wisely. Having a three or four-day weekend is nice, but cramming all of your courses into a few days may make it difficult to get high grades.

BE EFFICIENT: If possible take courses that meet more than one requirement. For example, sometimes a core class can also meet a major requirement.
USE TOOLS TO HELP YOU NAVIGATE: Understand how to use your USM Student Portal which helps you navigate to your Student Center on MaineStreet. On your Student Center, know how to use your wish list and degree progress report, check grades, and find contact information for your advisors.

PRE-REGISTER ON TIME: Take advantage of your priority registration date and register on time. By waiting, you will have fewer classes to choose from, which may set you back a semester. Be proactive and schedule a meeting with your advisor before your registration date, so you can discuss your wish list and confirm your choices.

UNDERSTAND YOUR FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS: Learn how to use the financial information on your Student Center to understand your account balance and your financial aid package, if you have one. If questions, contact Student Financial Services or work closely with your Financial Aid Counselor. (Names listed here: usm.maine.edu/student-financial-services/people)

BALANCE SCHOOL/PERSONAL LIFE: Put your effort and hours into school. For many, the income from a part-time job is important for meeting tuition and living costs. But when work takes up too much time, it can interfere with studying. It may be more cost effective, in the long run, to take that student loan, work fewer hours, and finish your degree on time.

GET INVOLVED: Gain new experiences, such as through clubs and student government to improve your leadership and communication skills. Activities outside of class can also help you discover your passions and strengths.

CONNECT WITH OTHERS: Build a network of supportive people. Ask faculty, in your major, about their area of expertise. Explore research opportunities with them. Discover peers’ and staffs’ talents that you meet up with for inspiration.

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