

The Honors College Academic Survival Guide



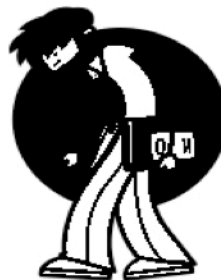
**Answers to questions frequently asked by
FRESHMEN and SOPHOMORES**

The HC Academic Survival Guide

Second Edition

Class Survival Skills

- What should I do if...
 - I'm not comfortable speaking in class?3
 - Everyone in my class knows more than I do?.....3
 - I've got 400 pages to read per week in one class?.....4
 - I don't do well on my midterms?.....4



Study Survival Skills

- Do study groups really work?5
- I can't study in my room. Where should I go?.....5
- How do I balance academics and everything else?.....5

Completion of GERs

- What requirements do I need to complete?.....6

The Writing Center

- How can the Writing Center help me?.....6

CR/NC and Repeating Courses

- When should I choose CR/NC for a class?.....7
- When should I repeat a course?7

Table of Contents . . .

Picking a Major

Whom should I talk to about picking a major?7
What if I have no idea what to major in?8
What if I want to major in “Y” and my parents want me to major in “Z”?8
How do I officially declare my major?9
What if I want to change my major?9

Summer Courses

When should I take a summer course?10

Whom Should I Talk to with College Problems?



Your Advisor

Why is it important to see my advisor?11
What if I disagree with my advisor?11

The Honors College Office and The Macaulay Building at 35 West 67th Street

Whom should I talk to about...?11

Class Survival Skills

What should I do if I'm not comfortable speaking up in class?



First of all, talk to your professor and, if there is one, your teaching assistant. Let them know that you are doing the reading and engaged with the concepts presented in the course, but that you find it hard to speak up in class. Doing this alerts your instructor to the fact that you are keeping up with the class, and perhaps he or she can make an effort to include you in the discussion, or work out a strategy to help you feel more comfortable speaking up.

If you think you know the stuff outside of class but you draw a blank when you're sitting around the table, you might also want to do the following: prior to class, think of three questions that the readings and/or lectures raised for you. The questions should be more thematic and less factual. In other words, not "What year was FDR first elected president?," but rather "Why was FDR elected president, and how did he form the New Deal Coalition?" Next, if you're having trouble speaking up in class, write out your thoughts to your questions in your notebook. It's always easier to talk when you have some pointers to help you along. Or, try posting a question to your class using Blackboard. People will look to you when you come into class for the discussion. Finally, think about the big picture. If you're having a discussion about a book you've read in English or an article you read in sociology, the details are, of course, helpful, but only in support of a larger question/theme/argument. In short, don't walk in cold to a class. Prepare, get energized about the stuff you're going to discuss, and pose a question right from the start!

Another resource is your classmates themselves. Form an informal study group that gives you a chance to talk about course material without the instructor around and with only a few friends. Or try your ideas out on your advisor, Jonathan, or Betsy. We love to hear what you're thinking!

Everyone in my class seems to know more than I do. Can this really be true?

It depends on how you're preparing for class, and whether you're speaking up. Before going to class you should review your notes from previous discussions and the readings. If the material as a whole is new to you, you may have to do some background reading on your own. Ask your instructor to recommend a couple of books to help you fill in the gaps.



*I've got 400 pages of reading per week in one class.
How can I do it all?*

The short answer is: you probably can't, but it actually depends on what kind of text you are reading. If you are reading a literary work, you need to read with two hands: take notes in the margins, keep track of pages where you notice an important thematic or formal event, and get a head start so you can read everything once and even go back to re-read significant passages. With 400 pages of critical reading, here are some strategies for getting control of the material even if you don't read every word:

- Read the book's table of contents to get a general idea about what will be covered.
- Read the introduction and conclusion first to gain an understanding of the author's overall argument.
- Read the first and last paragraph of each chapter to appreciate how the author constructs his or her argument and the concrete examples he or she calls into service.
- If you have time, determine which chapters are most pertinent to the class topic and read those in their entirety.

Need more guidance? Make an appointment with your advisor, Jonathan, or Betsy. They all had to tackle vast amounts of reading at any number of points in college or after, and each one has her or his own personal strategies.

What do I do if I don't do well on my midterms?

The first place to start is with your professor. Go to his or her office hours and bring your midterm with you. Have some questions in mind that you want answered. Your professor (and maybe the teaching assistant or lab instructor) created the exam, so it only makes sense to go to the source.

If you aren't satisfied with what your professor has told you, or if the problem wasn't a single midterm but multiple midterms, you may want to look at how you're studying. Are you, for example, trying to memorize dates and names for a history exam? If so, you probably need to revamp your study methods. The best place to start in this case is with your advisor, who can sit down with you and discuss how you're studying, what happens when you take exams, and how to ensure that you keep improving. Finally, don't hesitate to speak to a classmate, a peer mentor, or Betsy or Jonathan, all of whom can offer sound advice.

Study Survival Skills

Do study groups really work? How might I start one?



The answer is yes and no; study groups work if you like to work that way. If you are interested in organizing a study group, first ask your professor if it would be acceptable to him or her. Then talk to students in your class (via Blackboard?). It would be a good idea to establish at the beginning your goals as a group, and how the study group will be run. Some possibilities might include:

Meeting regularly (weekly? twice a week?) in the same place each time. Each participant is assigned a specific task (working on a problem, preparing notes on a chapter, etc.). Each meeting, everyone brings at least one discussion question.

I can't study in my room. Where should I study instead?

Be creative. You can go to the Hunter Library, plus alternatives such as the Brookdale Library, the Baruch Library, the Macaulay Center and even empty classrooms or nearby cafes, etc. Try a few different spaces and see where you feel most comfortable. Just remember: if your bed is too tempting and you end up napping more than studying, it's probably a good indication that your room is not the best place to get your work done.

I'm on a team/in a performance/have an internship/etc. How do I balance my class work with the fact that I have to practice/work four or five days a week, and I'm too tired to do my work after dinner?



As you probably already know, making a commitment to participate in athletics, in the performing arts, on a publication, or as an intern, etc., means that you need to optimize the use of your time. Moreover, you have to be realistic about what you're capable of—i.e., don't tell yourself you'll do that problem set after dinner if you know that you'll be too tired. Here are a few tips if practice tires you out so that studying at night is tough:

--Get up early and use the time when it is easiest for you to concentrate. Study between classes—if you have an hour between classes use it.

--Don't go to the lounge and socialize or feign sleep; find a place to read for 50 minutes. Do the same in the afternoon before leaving for your commitment. Form study groups to work at night; if you're conversing with people it's hard to fall asleep.



--Finally, use the weekends wisely. Saturday and Sunday afternoon might mean sitting in the library or your room if you need to get through assignments you were too tired to tackle during the weekdays.

Remember, committing yourself to something beyond your classes means sacrificing something else. Your first priority must be your classes; you can perform the activity poorly or take a semester off from it, but you can't do the same with your classes. And, as always, talk to your advisor, Jonathan, or Betsy for more advice.

Completion of GERs



By when do I have to complete the General Education Requirements (GERs)?

You should start chipping away at your GERs in your first year. BUT don't choose your classes, particularly early on, based on simply whether they will fulfill GER categories. What is most important is for you to figure out what you're interested in studying, what you're passionate about, and how you can use the resources of the Honors College, Hunter, and CUNY to get you where you want to be. You should meet with your advisor and sketch out a plan to fulfill your requirements, and we recommend that you complete them by sometime in your junior year. But don't stress about GERs!

The Writing Center

What kind of help can the Writing Center provide?

The Writing Center is located in room 416 of Thomas Hunter Hall. It offers one-on-one tutoring sessions led by experienced student writers trained to consult on assignments of any discipline. You can bring in a draft, rough notes, or a final version to discuss with a consultant. Writing tutors will not serve as proofreaders or editors, but they can help you learn these skills. You can get more information by visiting this website: <http://nwc.hunter.cuny.edu/>. The site also includes invaluable handouts on writing for specific disciplines (for example, for the health professions or business), for courses such as English 120, and many, many more.



CR/NC and Repeating Courses

When should I elect to take a class CR/NC? Are there times when it is better to have a letter grade than a CR?



The first thing to know about CR/NC is that most Honors College students don't use all four possible CR/NCs during their four years. This is not to say that you can't or shouldn't, but simply to let you know that you shouldn't worry about "saving" them. CR/NC should not be used for any class in a potential major or any pre-med requirement. No matter what, talk with an advisor if you're electing the CR/NC option, and make this decision well in advance of the final exam.

When should I repeat a course?

You can repeat a course when you receive a D or a failing grade. If you repeat a course in which you received a D, both the D and the new grade will remain on your transcript and both will be calculated into your GPA. If you repeat a course that you failed and receive an A, B, C, or CR, the initial failing grade will remain on your transcript but it will not be calculated into your GPA. On the face of it, then, it makes a lot of sense to retake any course that you fail. You should, however, meet with your advisor to make sure you are pursuing the best strategy for what you want to achieve. And finally, there are additional rules that apply to repeating classes, so make sure to look at the most recent Undergraduate Catalog.

Picking a Major

Whom should I talk to about choosing a major?

Many different people. Definitely talk to your HC advisor, departmental advisor, juniors and seniors, and your peer mentor. You should also feel free to talk with Jonathan and Betsy. But the real place to start is with your Honors College advisor, who will sit down with you and help you think about which major will help you focus on your passions. Be sure to keep an open mind, and remember that majoring in a small department will mean that you aren't just another face in the crowd; in a small department, professors will have more time to devote to you and more resources to help you do what you want. Ask yourself questions such as, "Can I see myself writing an Honors thesis in this major?" Or, "Will I take classes in this department which both interest me and prepare me for one or more possible careers?"

What should I do if I have no idea what I want to major in, and I have only one semester left before I have to make a decision?

This is the kind of question that is perfect to talk over with your advisor, Jonathan, or Betsy. But before you do that, take some time to think about how you'd answer the following questions:

- Make a list of all the classes you've taken so far. Which have you liked the most? Why? Which have you liked the least? Why? Which classes haven't seemed like work? Which were onerous burdens that you avoided like the plague?
- When you think about doing work on an Honors thesis, what can you imagine researching, thinking about, and writing about? Think more about this than where this major might lead you later in life.
- Make a list of topics/readings that you've encountered in your other classes that you've really enjoyed. See any patterns?

What if I want to major in "Y" and my parents want me to major in "Z"?

There's no easy answer to this question. It can be especially hard if your parents want you to major in something "practical," but your passion is in something that seems, on the face of it, completely impractical. For example, what if you enter thinking you'll be a Biology major, but by sophomore year you're spending all of your time on that Creative Writing elective? You soon begin an internship at an off-campus publication, and before you know it you're editing a literary magazine. How will you break the news?

First

and foremost, open a meaningful dialogue with your parents.

One strategy might be to explain to your parents that a major often has little correlation with what one does after college. Good grades and great recommendations are better predictors of success than a given major. You'll meet plenty of English major doctors, Economics major writers, and philosophy major bankers. At the same time, remember that this is **your** education. College is a time to be a bit selfish, to study what you're really passionate about. If you choose to go to some sort of graduate school, you'll find that it's much more about being trained in certain skills. Tell them that you're not giving up on what you (they) originally planned, but maybe broadening your outlook and options. Finally, you never know how you will apply skills learned in college. What's most important is learning how to think analytically, analyze data, ask the right questions, and express yourself through writing and speaking.





What is involved with officially declaring my major?

You must declare your major no later than the semester, when finished, which will leave you with 61 or more credits. If you don't, you will risk losing your TAP money (yes, we know this doesn't come directly to you, but if you are eligible it helps pay your tuition). To declare your major pick up a form at OASIS (217 North) and meet with a departmental advisor. That person will approve your departmental plans. The Honors College cannot and does not determine or try to in any way affect departmental/major requirements. Thus, you *must* meet with a departmental advisor. This does not mean, however, that you should not talk to your Honors College advisor about what you're doing in the department. On the contrary, make sure both advisors are in the loop. For more information see the Undergraduate Catalog and talk with your departmental and Honors College advisors.

What if I want to change my major after I've declared it?

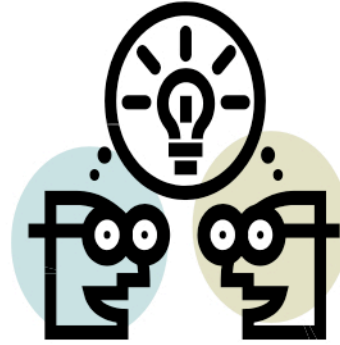
The first thing to do is to talk with your Honors College and departmental advisors. It might be best to change your major, but you want to make sure that you discuss why you want to change before actually doing so. If, for example, you're simply not interested in the material that you're currently studying and not looking forward to what lies ahead, it probably makes sense to consider switching. But maybe you're having a semester where you have a few rigorous other classes, you can't devote the time you'd like to your major, and, on top of all of that, the professor for that major class isn't, well, your favorite. What then? Is it worth switching majors? Before taking that step make sure that you meet with both advisors. Finally, switching majors means investigating what other major you'll be able to complete in the time you have remaining at Hunter.

HINT: Check DIG to see which majors might work out for you if you are considering switching. You can also check DIG to see your progress on departmental requirements and GERS.

What else should I be doing?

It's never too early to start thinking about...

- Pre-major requirements
- Studying abroad
- Internships
- Building relationships with professor(s)
- Honors thesis topics (through your major department)
- Postgraduate fellowships (Rhodes, Marshall, Gates, etc.)
- Fulfilling your community service requirement
- What you're doing next summer!



Summer Courses

When should I take a summer course or two?

You might take a summer course for credit in order to get ahead with your General Education Requirements, to lighten the load of a particularly tough semester approaching, or to compensate for a semester in which you took only 12 credits, or to be able to concentrate on a course that is important to your future (e.g., Physics if you are a pre-med). Remember: you can take two courses with a total of eight (8) credits during the summer and have the Honors College pick up the tab. Any more than that and you'll pay the difference. Make an appointment to talk to your Honors College advisor if you're thinking about a summer course. Also, take into account what will be your living situation, either in the dorm or at home, etc., during summer session(s).

Whom should I talk to with Questions/Problems?

Your HC Advisor

Why is it important to see my Honors College Advisor?

We know that you've been successful in high school—that's one of the reasons you're at the Honors College! But college involves many transitions, including setting your own schedule, receiving feedback less frequently in your classes, investigating and choosing internships and possibly study abroad programs, and, for many of you, living on your own for the first time. If you run into rough spots—and you inevitably will—you should seek out your advisor. You might think this is counterintuitive (i.e., why should I tell someone that I'm having a hard time? Won't this make it harder for me to stay in the Honors College?), but actually it's the best move you can make. DO NOT DISAPPEAR!! Make an appointment to see your advisor and let her help to separate the different strands that make up the challenge you're facing.

What do I do if I disagree with my Honors College or departmental advisor?

First, think about exactly what it is that you're disagreeing about. Is the topic how to bring peace to the Middle East, or is it whether you should take Organic Chemistry? If it's the former, you should feel lucky that you've found someone with whom you can talk about such controversial subjects. If it's the latter, make sure that you push your advisor to explain why she thinks you should or should not take a specific course. Remember, ultimately the choice will be yours. Your advisor will try to help you steer clear of pitfalls and will try to make sure that you stay on track to complete requirements, prerequisites, etc.

But college is about choice, and you should make choices throughout. As we all know, some decisions are small, while others are big. Choosing one class instead of another can seem like a small decision, but it'll become much bigger if you choose a class that, say, is not a prerequisite in that department, thus delaying your progress in a potential major.

The Honors College Office and 35 West 67th Street

Whom should I talk to about...

Courses, requirements, internships, study abroad, choosing a major, finding a career, grad school, study skills, making friends, relationships, life in general, global politics, Central Park, live music in New York City, science fiction, Harry Potter, the latest movies, etc..... Academic advisors and your peer mentor

Honors College policies, courses, problems, programs, initiatives, grad school, life with three little kids, etc.....Jonathan

Financial aid, registration, signing up for events, FAFSA/TAP, the publishing industry, life in rural Massachusetts, and everything else.....Betsy

Macaulay Building, 35 West 67th Street

Appeals, ideas, big picture stuff...**University Dean, Ann Kirschner**, 729-2925;
ann.kirschner@mhc.cuny.edu

Financial aid, study grants, \$\$-related stuff...**Veronica Feliciano, Scholarship Coordinator**, 729-2949; veronica.feliciano@mhc.cuny.edu

Internship opportunities, NYC as an educational resource...**Solita Alexander, Associate Director of Student Development**; 212 729-2900;
solita.alexander@mhc.cuny.edu

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Academic requirements, Common Events, etc....**Sylvia Tomasch, Assoc University Dean of Academic Affairs**, 729-2918; sylvia.tomasch@mhc.cuny.edu

Goldsmith, Kenan, and all other Fellowships....**Michael Lamb, Grad Fellowship Advisor & James Airotto, Asst Fellowship Advisor**, 729-2907;
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