

Life As a Biology Major—Using Your Resources

By Amaya Jones-Core

"Biology, yeah, I want to study that. All I have to do is study hard and ace all of my classes, how easy can that be? I was able to do that in high school." This is what I told myself when I was deciding what major to select on my college application.



African American woman in a lab pipetting DNA samples into a tube.

You may believe you know what you're getting yourself into when you apply to college as a biology major; however, trust me when I say you don't. I thought I knew what I was getting myself into when I started college as a biology major, but I didn't. I am a first-generation college student. I didn't watch any YouTube videos. I didn't do any research to see if this would be a great major for me. And unlike most students, I didn't have the opportunity to take AP Biology and AP Chemistry in high school. In spite of that, I did know that I needed to major in something in the STEM field because I had an interest in going to medical school. I had no choice but to go with the flow. But I do not recommend that you do what I did. Whether you are a transfer student or an incoming first-year student in the same position that I was in, here are some simple tips on how I survived college during my first year as a biology major.

TIME MANAGEMENT

High school is nothing like college. You have a lot of independence now that you're in college and you make all your own decisions. In high school, you often relied on your parents to wake you up in the morning and remind you of your responsibilities. Also, while in high school you had a set routine that you followed throughout the day; now, in college, you must create a routine for yourself. I know it can be difficult to transition from taking classes seven hours straight to only taking classes for a few hours a day, being left with unlimited free time. But you have to learn how to balance your responsibilities and set priorities. Do you ever wake up with so many things to do that it feels like you'll never get anything fulfilled? My planner and my whiteboard calendar were effective in helping me establish a consistent weekly schedule. I would look at the syllabus for each class I was taking at the start of each semester and

ARISTOTLE ONCE STATED

"WE ARE WHAT WE REPEATEDLY
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write down all the due dates for the entire semester in my planner. It's difficult to keep track of all you have to do in a day as a college student, whereas this may have been easy in high school. Ultimately, students who do have a routine get assignments accomplished promptly without procrastinating, reduce their stress levels and anxiety, have more time to relax, and sleep better (Concorde staff). Whereas people who don't have some sort of routine or habit often suffer from stress, poor sleep, poor eating, and ineffective use of time (Northwestern Medicine). Create a routine that fits you and it doesn't have to be



African American woman wearing an orange jacket studying with her computer open, a notebook, and cup of coffee.

boring! Grace Potter, a student of the class of 2023, a peer tutor, a desk assistant at the Language Learning Center (LLC), and a member of the chemistry club stated how she manages her time at the beginning of the semester by gauging how much work each class has and paces herself throughout the week by putting study blocks within her weekly schedule. I manage my time by using that my yearly planner and post-it notes with my to-do list for each day.

Flatlay of planner with a pen and candle.



LEARNING STYLE

As a student, studying any major it is important that you know what type of learner you are. You are a one-of-a-kind learner. Nobody else learns in the same way that you do. Everyone learns by using all of their senses, but different combinations work better for different individuals (Kazi). There are three different types of learning styles: visual learner, auditory learner, and kinesthetic learner. Visual learners generally use their fingers to follow along while reading, do well with maps and charts and usually look at figures or pictures more than text (Kazi). Auditory learners love to listen, read aloud/talk to themselves, typically can't use maps, and

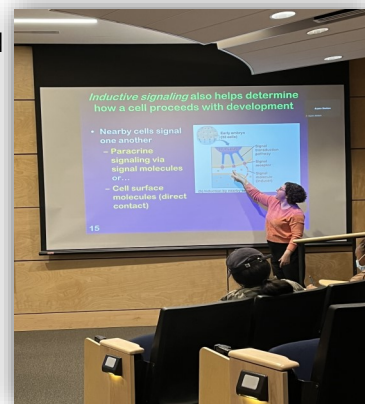
remember things heard (Kazi). Kinesthetic learners need to feel or touch things, fidget with writing instruments and enjoy taking things apart (Kazi). All in all, you'll gain insight into how your brain learns best by evaluating your learning style. You can also communicate more effectively with your professors if you understand how you study best. Finding out how you process information can help you come up with better study and learning tactics in the classroom.

My learning style is mostly determined by the content I am taught in class. One thing that I always do is make flashcards of the material that I learn. You can make flashcards digitally using Quizlet or standard paper flashcards. When it comes to learning graphs and charts, I believe I am a kinesthetic learner. However, because repetition is crucial, I may also be an auditory learner. Using the flashcards that I make or running the PowerPoint as a show will ensure that I will be able to describe the concept for an exam or quiz. My professor for BL 118 and BL 121, Dr. Lisa Scheifele, an Associate Professor of the Department of Biology, stated, "When you know what works best for you then you can study in ways that you understand the information and learn how to memorize information and bring it back to the exam. All students need a plan. You can't just take every day as it comes. You can use a planner or calendar. It is also important to put blocks in for study, not long blocks but smaller blocks. The longer you are here, the more you'll know when the social activities will happen therefore you can plan when it is a good time for studying."

Grace also stated, "Learn your learning style as soon as you can because it will either help or break your education. If you notice when you are struggling in class, looking at how you learn things should be your first step. Learning your learning style will amplify how you are doing in a class."



African American woman writing on a whiteboard with a pink marker.



Dr. Lisa Scheifele teaching her BL 121 (Organismal Biology) class

USE THESE RESOURCES!

One phrase you will constantly hear from your professors and when receiving advice from upperclassmen is, "use your resources" or "we highly recommend you go to office hours." Loyola has a plethora of resources to assist first students in their classes. All of these resources are free and accessible to all students. Don't be afraid to use your resources, after all, you are paying for it in your tuition. Here are the resources that I strongly encourage students to explore, and these are the main resources that I used to succeed in biology and chemistry:

1. Peer Tutoring at The Study
2. Tri-Beta Tutoring
3. Group Reviews with your professor
4. Office Hours

And that's not all; let's take a look at everything.

The number one resource that helped me stay afloat in biology and chemistry was peer tutoring at [The Study](#). The Study is on the third floor inside of Jenkins Hall. Jenkins Hall is located next to the Fernandez Center and adjacent to the Humanities build-



The stone building is Jenkins Hall and The Study is on the third floor. You can see the Humanities building to the left and the all-glass building to the right is the Fernandez building.

ing. Peer tutoring, coaching services for time management, organization, and academic achievement courses are available via The Study. Because I had no prior experience with college-level biology or chemistry, being able to get tutored was a lifesaver for me. Every tutor I've encountered has assisted me in honing my study abilities, learning tactics, and confidence in the content I was studying. Peer tutors also share the difficulties and experiences that they have faced in class and were able to help me avoid the mistakes that they made. Last, at The Study, you can request tutors through a system called "[TutorTrac](#)" for any of your classes. You also can schedule reoccurring appointments throughout the semester with a particular tutor that you like.

Marty and I at The Study. Marty was tutoring me for my biology class.



A tutor from The Study and an Evergreen Marty MacStudy agrees that tutoring can be beneficial. He comments, "everybody learns differently, and they may need additional support. Tutoring can be that additional support. It is different to receive information from professors who are experts in the field whereas students/tutors who have taken the classes can closely relate to incoming students and their feelings when taking preliminary Biology courses. Tutors are also able to give advice on the mistakes they've made in that last class."

Next, we have [Tri-Beta](#) tutoring. Tri-Beta is a little like peer tutoring at The Study, but this is only for biology courses. Members of the Tri-Beta Honor Society tutor "biology introductory sequence at Loyola (Cellular and Molecular Biology, Organismal Biology, and Ecology, Evolution, and Biodiversity)" (Department of Biology). Just like peer tutors at The Study, you can always ask Tri-Beta tutors questions regarding how to effectively study for quizzes and exams. If

you can't go to your professor's office hours, this is a great opportunity to ask questions on Tuesday from 6:00 pm-8:00 pm.

Last, we have office hours and group review sessions. Almost every professor in the courses that you take will tell you to go to office hours. Professors love when students take the initiative to come to office hours, whether you are asking a question about the information you are learning or taking the opportunity to learn more about them. Here are a few reasons why you should consider attending office hours:

1. You can clarify and ask questions about class content (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).
2. Figure out your learning style and what type of learner you are.
3. You can discuss any errors you made on an assignment and how you can correct them in the future.
4. You can talk about your grades and figure out what you can do in the future to do better in the course (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).
5. Work through concepts that you are struggling with and practice problems.

And these are just a few reasons why you should consider going to office hours. Don't be afraid to talk to your professor one-on-one. It isn't intimidating at all. Just be yourself and try not to have expectations for the meeting.

Other advantages of office hours may include the possibility to obtain letters of recommendation, job/research references, vast networking opportunities, and a relationship with your professor.



A woman in an orange top pointing to the whiteboard with another woman wearing a blue top standing in front of it.

HOW MY SEMESTER ENDED

After listening to my professors and mentors, I finished the first half of the semester better than I expected. I had a rocky start in biology and chemistry, and I just remember calling home almost every day to tell my parents that I must switch my major and how this major wasn't for me. My dad always told me that I would be a doctor whether I get an "A," "B," or "C" in my classes. What doctor do you know who is an "A" doctor or "B" doctor? I don't know any because at the end of the day they never let their grades define who they are as a student. Although I didn't ace all of my classes during the first half of the semester, I was still proud of myself. I never gave up and I don't want you all to give up either. Whatever grade you get there is always room for improvement, so you strive to become better, and better becomes best. The grade that you get is based on the work you can comprehend; master the material, not the exam. Your grades do not show the amount of effort you've put in.

"SUCCESS ISN'T ABOUT
THE END RESULT; IT'S
ABOUT WHAT YOU
LEARN ALONG THE
WAY" ~VERA WANG

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