**[The many regrets of a fourth-year student](http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/2012/01/27/the-many-regrets-of-a-fourth-year-student/" \o "The many regrets of a fourth-year student)**

By [Scott Dobson-Mitchell](http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/author/scott-dobson-mitchell/) | January 27th, 2012 | 5:23 pm http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/

**What Scott Dobson-Mitchell would tell his Freshman Self**

Assuming I couldn’t accidentally cause some sort of butterfly effect that would prevent me being born, I wish I could travel back in time and tell my Freshman Self a few things about university. Considering I’ve already forgotten the answers to every exam, this is what I’d tell the younger me.

1) Plan ahead. WAY ahead.

It happens to every semester. Searching through the course calendar, I find the perfect class. It sounds interesting, it fits perfectly into my schedule and it fulfills my upper-year science requirement. The prof has checks out on [RateMyProfessors](http://www.ratemyprofessors.com/" \t "_blank) and the course has a high score on [Bird Courses.](http://birdcourses.com/) But I don’t have one of the prerequisites! If I’d been smart enough to plan, I would have that first year zoology credit that’s mandatory for nearly everything. Instead, I’m stuck with Phytochemical Biosystems.

2) You’re richer than you think.

Or at least, you’re less broke than you think. There are plenty of ways to get money beyond student loans—scholarships, bursaries, and work study programs that not only get you some cash, but also valuable work experience. The [Ontario Work Study Program](https://osap.gov.on.ca/OSAPPortal/en/A-ZListofAid/TCONT003615.html) is one example. If you’re receiving student loans, then you’re probably eligible. Also be sure to check out the [Maclean’s Scholarship finder.](http://tools.macleans.ca/scholarships/2008/default.aspx)

3) It’s going to get easier.

The first year is the worst year. It’s sort of like the first 20 minutes of the movie Inception, when you have no idea what the hell is going on. But if you hang in there, things will start making sense. You’ll realize that university isn’t impossibly more difficult than high school. In fact, once you’ve acclimatized, it’s easier in some ways. And it’s only gets better. Once some of those nasty prerequisites are out of the way, you can take courses that truly interest you. My interests happen to coincide with those listed on [Bird Courses.](http://birdcourses.com/)

4) It’s easier to keep up than to catch up.

As a seasoned procrastinator, I can say with experience and authority that procrastination is not a good idea. Especially when you leave multiple things to the last minute. Here’s what I finally realized: there comes a point where writing an essay is less difficult than NOT writing an essay. After you’ve checked your email, looked at your Facebook notifications, watched a bunch of mindless videos on YouTube and then read some random Wikipedia articles, procrastinating actually becomes more difficult than finishing your work. A better option? Keep those pages closed.

**14 Responses to “The many regrets of a fourth-year student”**

1. http://0.gravatar.com/avatar/a52b28ec7f22f7d363092510233ad7ad?s=32&d=http%3A%2F%2F0.gravatar.com%2Favatar%2Fad516503a11cd5ca435acc9bb6523536%3Fs%3D32&r=G*mat* says:

[January 28, 2012 at 11:38 am](http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/2012/01/27/the-many-regrets-of-a-fourth-year-student/comment-page-1/#comment-45893)

5) If you choose courses based on their “bird rating” you completely missed the entire point of university.

* + http://1.gravatar.com/avatar/19fe13ed31f8286347660d141b4938b3?s=32&d=http%3A%2F%2F0.gravatar.com%2Favatar%2Fad516503a11cd5ca435acc9bb6523536%3Fs%3D32&r=G*joe63* says:

[February 2, 2012 at 8:30 am](http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/2012/01/27/the-many-regrets-of-a-fourth-year-student/comment-page-1/#comment-45976)

I agree! I teach what is perceived to be a “bird course” in the social sciences and I have studenst from computer sciences taking it thinking it will be a walk in the park… They usually don’t do weel because they don’t take it seriously while other students in the class do…

* + - http://0.gravatar.com/avatar/8498c0f30557b09fc2ebf8301d71793c?s=32&d=http%3A%2F%2F0.gravatar.com%2Favatar%2Fad516503a11cd5ca435acc9bb6523536%3Fs%3D32&r=G*Md* says:

[February 3, 2012 at 10:04 am](http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/2012/01/27/the-many-regrets-of-a-fourth-year-student/comment-page-1/#comment-45986)

Is it a spelling class?

1. http://0.gravatar.com/avatar/c3498a1aaa3881636e9284155014271e?s=32&d=http%3A%2F%2F0.gravatar.com%2Favatar%2Fad516503a11cd5ca435acc9bb6523536%3Fs%3D32&r=G[*Scott Dobson-Mitchell*](http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/category/blogs/scott-dobson-mitchell/) says:

[January 29, 2012 at 8:21 pm](http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/2012/01/27/the-many-regrets-of-a-fourth-year-student/comment-page-1/#comment-45907)

6) You shouldn’t assume that your goals in university are the same as everybody else’s, or that yours are the ‘default.’ It’s great that some people can go to university to expand their horizons and ride unicorns, but some people are working towards a job. That job often involves grad school or professional school, which requires top marks, which requires Bird Courses- especially if your GPA is being lowered by histology and organic chemistry marks.

Your “point of university” is a luxury that not all people can afford.

1. http://1.gravatar.com/avatar/1f6953e19e880cbd27d67cb3c1519918?s=32&d=http%3A%2F%2F0.gravatar.com%2Favatar%2Fad516503a11cd5ca435acc9bb6523536%3Fs%3D32&r=G*joe* says:

[January 29, 2012 at 9:23 pm](http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/2012/01/27/the-many-regrets-of-a-fourth-year-student/comment-page-1/#comment-45908)

7) If you intend to go to grad school, your undergraduate years are a good time to learn how to cope with doing lots of work. Bird courses just make you weak. If you can’t hack it as an undergrad, you won’t make it in grad school.

1. http://1.gravatar.com/avatar/d1656498bc801c9f4321e715963d0c2c?s=32&d=http%3A%2F%2F0.gravatar.com%2Favatar%2Fad516503a11cd5ca435acc9bb6523536%3Fs%3D32&r=G*Dr. Ramsey* says:

[January 31, 2012 at 1:54 am](http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/2012/01/27/the-many-regrets-of-a-fourth-year-student/comment-page-1/#comment-45930)

Scott, let’s hope your future employer, or grad/professional school (I teach at one), doesn’t bother to google your name. We aren’t impressed by a high GPA to someone who isn’t interested in learning for its own sake and just played this kind of game. Exactly who we are trying to weed out of the pile in fact. And be assured, if you didn’t actually push yourself and learn very much in undergrad, you will be woefully unprepared for grad school if you do get in.

* + http://1.gravatar.com/avatar/3e7faf2f990e7b2ca4b54f95a442e27d?s=32&d=http%3A%2F%2F0.gravatar.com%2Favatar%2Fad516503a11cd5ca435acc9bb6523536%3Fs%3D32&r=G*Rosa* says:

[February 4, 2012 at 6:56 pm](http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/2012/01/27/the-many-regrets-of-a-fourth-year-student/comment-page-1/#comment-46003)

It pains me to say it, but Scott is correct. I am a firm believer in learning for the sake of knowledge, but in this world and from my experience the world does not work in this way. There IS game to play, especially with professional schools like medicine, pharmacy and law where they do not consider individual courses or how hard they were. They take your transcript, run it through a computer and spit out a GPA. if that gpa is low then they throw away your application. Students who take sciences and pour themselves into it and understand the human body must take difficult courses and their marks will be lower than those who take nonsense courses and a ‘nonsense’ major and do very well. Chances are the latter will get into a medical program

1. http://1.gravatar.com/avatar/b956141f3b61e1d3644494b4b78dda5c?s=32&d=http%3A%2F%2F0.gravatar.com%2Favatar%2Fad516503a11cd5ca435acc9bb6523536%3Fs%3D32&r=G*ABarlow* says:

[January 31, 2012 at 4:06 pm](http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/2012/01/27/the-many-regrets-of-a-fourth-year-student/comment-page-1/#comment-45934)

Here’s the list I’d give:

1) Don’t take six courses. Take another semester, if you really need to. You just won’t learn the material well enough. And writing six exams in seven days will give you nightmares.

2) Don’t worry about your grades, worry about your understanding. Pretty much as soon as you get out of university, nobody cares about your marks. And if you understand the material well, you’ll get good grades, anyway.

3) Go to office hours. It’s such a great resource, and it’s so underused.

4) Put in an honest effort. If you are skipping/sleeping/daydreaming through class, and open your textbook the first time right before your final, you’re wasting your time and your money.

5) If you don’t understand what you did in class on Monday, you aren’t going to understand what you will do in class on Tuesday. Refer to rules 3 and 4 for the proper steps to fix the problem.

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[February 2, 2012 at 8:25 am](http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/2012/01/27/the-many-regrets-of-a-fourth-year-student/comment-page-1/#comment-45975)

You got it right!

* + http://0.gravatar.com/avatar/afeee6ff91ef2cb24b78f5e4b8c8ec39?s=32&d=http%3A%2F%2F0.gravatar.com%2Favatar%2Fad516503a11cd5ca435acc9bb6523536%3Fs%3D32&r=G*Emilie* says:

[February 4, 2012 at 6:46 pm](http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/2012/01/27/the-many-regrets-of-a-fourth-year-student/comment-page-1/#comment-46002)

Aside from your first point, you’ve got some good advice there. I disagree with your first one, since in my experience, it’s totally doable. Last semester I had 6.5 classes and I also work. I got As in all but one class (no amount of time in the world would have helped me out with that one). Personally, I find that the less amount of time I have, the more I get done.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:**

**This week, you’ve been provided with the actual Article of the Week (from macleans.ca), then some of the online comments that followed it. Do you think that the comment section of this (or any) online article is a helpful forum, or just more Internet noise? Explain your answer clearly by using as many examples from your own experience as possible. (Evaluating level)**