The professor reserves the right to alter this syllabus in order to serve the goals of the course.

The online version of this syllabus is provided for your convenience. It is superseded by any changes announced in class, and may not be up to date.

Professor: Dr. Brian Treanor  
Office: University Hall 3639  
Office Hours: Tuesdays 9:45-10:45 and 1:30-2:30, or by mutually agreeable appointment.

Classroom: University Hall 1403

I. Course Description

Philosophy, unlike other disciplines in the university, does not concern itself with a specific subject matter as much as with issues related to what it means to be a thinking being. Philosophy is concerned with what it is to be human and, therefore, is something with which all persons should have some interest and ability.

This course will introduce you to philosophy and philosophical inquiry through a consideration of two related questions: (1) "What is the best life?" and (2) "Why, even when we know what is right or good, do we so frequently do what is wrong or evil?" Thus, we will be considering the best life and our ability to achieve it. Given the theme(s) of this class, the questions that we raise during the course of the semester should not be limited to the academic realm of our classroom. If we accomplish the goals of the course, you should leave this class with the ability to search out, recognize, and address philosophical issues in every human pursuit—and in your own everyday life.

This class will demand a significant amount of effort, requiring you to become familiar with some of the greatest thinkers of the tradition (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, Augustine) and also that you develop the ability to philosophize yourself (i.e., do some philosophical thinking of your own). If you put in the effort, I assure you that this class will be very rewarding; however, prepare to be seriously challenged. Consider yourself forewarned.

II. Learning Outcomes

The common learning outcomes for First Year Seminars indicate that students in this course should:

1. Understand and appreciate the intellectual rigor and academic excellence that define an LMU education. To my mind this is something you will come to know primarily through experience, so expect this course to be intellectually rigorous. Note that the excellence of an LMU education varies a great deal, and responsibility for this education lies primarily with you. It is entirely possible to unreflectively coast through LMU (with either good or poor grades), in which case your education will be mediocre at best. However, if you resolve to commit yourself to your education, challenge yourself, and strive to excel, I guarantee you that you can receive a superlative education at LMU, a claim supported by the students I have sent to graduate school at Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Boston College, Emory, and many other excellent institutions.

2. Engage critically and reflectively in scholarly discourse. To this point I’d add “respectfully” and “thoughtfully.” Successful students will develop the skill of thoughtful oral participation based on careful reading and preparation of the texts. This skill is an essential step toward one of the
ultimate goals of a liberal arts education: the ability to engage in informed and reasonable dialogue with others.

3. Learn to read critically and carefully. To this point I’d add “charitably” and “critically.” The successful student will develop the ability to read a philosophical text in a manner that penetrates beyond the surface meaning to grasp the subtleties and significance of a given reading. The goal is to read both charitably (the thinkers we are reading are all intelligent persons and if you find yourself thinking “that’s crazy,” chances are you have not understood the point) and critically (once you have understood the point by reading a philosopher charitably, it is time to ask yourself if the philosopher in question is in fact right).

4. Exercise critical thinking in oral discussion and writing. When your writing cannot clearly express what you think, it is often the case that what you think is not that clear. Certainly this will be the impression you give those who read your work. Successful students will be able to make a case for a substantial philosophical claim about the best life in a manner that is clear, grammatically correct, logically valid, and rhetorically persuasive.

5. Be able to evaluate sources for quality. The inability to distinguish between peer-reviewed research by experts and someone blogging from his mother’s basement is the source of a great deal of confusion and misery in public policy.

6. Acquire research skills including use of the library catalog and electronic databases to retrieve books or articles, whether in print or online. Google is not the only research tool available.

In addition, however, I intend for our class to accomplish a number of other things. In particular, I want you to:

7. Become familiar with several important philosophical problems, understand their significance as problems, grasp their contemporary applicability and address the validity of possible solutions in all three ways listed above. The thinkers we are reading in this class address important philosophical problems that have significant contemporary import. The successful student will become familiar with the questions these philosophers ask, and the answers they offer, concerning the nature of reality, what we can know about reality, what will bring us happiness, the relationship between the individual and society, and the nature of the best life.

8. Come to recognize and value philosophical inquiry as an essential part of a liberal education and a fully human life. Successful students will come to see philosophy as a way of life rather than as merely an academic discipline. Moreover, they will come to see how philosophy, as a way of life, can help them in shaping their own lives no matter what career path they choose.

9. Come to understand, and begin to cultivate, the habits and behaviors that will make you successful in whatever endeavors your pursue. Although I hope that students come to LMU with a good study habits, self-discipline, organizational skills, the ability to prioritize activities, good manners, a sense of proper decorum, and the like, the reality is that many students lack the habits and skills necessary to reach their full potential while at LMU. Thus, our class expectations will be structured, in part, to help you establish these essential habits and skills.

III. First Assignment

1. Read the entire syllabus.
2. Read the following portions of my webpage: (a) Basic Expectations; (b) How to Behave, and Succeed, at University (note that while this document is listed as “recommended” when following the link above, it is mandatory for our First Year Seminar); (c) Grades; and (d) Writing for Our Class.
3. On the first day of class, exchange contact information with at least three other students. This will give you a number of people you can contact for information should you miss a class for some extraordinary reason. Moreover, you are a freshman and need to get to know some people.

IV. Texts

• Leo Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Illych [required]
• Plato, Five Dialogues [required]
V. Demonstrations of Competence

- Paper 60% divided as follows:
  - Stage 1 (5%)
  - Stage 2 (20%)
  - Stage 3 (35%)
- Seminar Contributions 15%
- Information Literacy Projects 10%
- Oral Final Examination 15%

(1) **The Paper:** The class paper will require students to make a philosophical argument for “the best life.” The paper will be written in multiple stages, some of which will undergo a process of peer review before being submitted to me. Each stage of the paper will be evaluated by both the professor and the writing tutor, Mr. Donald Boyce. The professor will focus primarily on the content, including the soundness and persuasiveness of the argument; the writing instructor will focus mainly on the mechanics of writing: grammar, usage, style, and the like. Both the professor and the writing tutor will be available for consultation during the preparation of the various stages of the paper.

The due dates for each stage of the paper are listed in red in the tentative schedule below. Make a note of them. The nature of each stage of the assignment will be discussed in detail in class; however, given that Stage 1 is due more or less immediately, a brief note regarding that aspect of the paper is in order.

Stage 1 of the paper will require you to write a brief two-page essay answering the question “What is the best life?” This first written assignment will be used largely to gauge your writing ability.

(2) **Seminar Contributions:** There is a reason I refer to the part of your grade related to class preparation and participation as your “seminar contribution” grade rather than your “participation” grade. This course is run as a seminar. This means I will not be lecturing to you as part of an academic monologue. Rather, I will be taking part in a dialogue with you: a dialogue between you, the other students, your professor, and the texts. I expect you to engage as a full participant in this discussion. This means that you will come to class prepared, having read and reflected on the text, armed with questions and arguments you consider significant. It means you will listen respectfully to other students, but also that you will respond to them in discussion, asking them to clarify their arguments, probing with questions, challenging with counter-examples, and supporting their points by helping them to refine their position. Thus, the students, along with the professor, are responsible for the quality of the class discussion. I will allow class discussion to founder if it is necessary to make space for your active engagement, and remember that 15% of your grade is associated with your contributions to the quality of the seminar. Yes, you can fail in seminar participation.

Clearly, achieving excellence (and, therefore, a good grade) in your seminar contributions will require you to speak up in class. However, not all contributions are equal. Any fool can sound off in class; and I’ve seen plenty of people who “participate” regularly in a manner that makes it abundantly clear that they have not done the reading or thought about the subject since the prior class meeting. While I do expect you to speak up in class, I expect much more as well. I expect you to read carefully in advance of the class meeting, to reflect on the reading, to develop interpretations and questions that will contribute to class discussion, to raise those questions and offer those interpretations in class, to listen open-mindedly and respectively to the interpretations of your classmates, to respond helpfully to the questions of your classmates, and, generally, to fully engage the intellectual enterprise of our seminar. In addition, your seminar contribution grade requires that you follow the various guidelines for classroom preparation and decorum on my website: bring the text under discussion to class, do not
engage in disrespectful or otherwise distracting behavior, and so forth.

In the past I’ve experimented with daily reading quizzes or reading responses; however, the pedagogical goals of the First Year Seminar make that option less-than-ideal and I’d like to think that we can all be mature enough to prioritize and prepare for class. Let me make very clear that if your participation suggests to me that you have not been keeping up with the reading, I will focus in on you during the seminars. Moreover, such inadequate seminar preparation will be reflected in your grade no matter how often and how cleverly you happen to participate in discussion. If the majority of the class fails to follow through with proper preparation for seminar discussions, I reserve the right to institute reading quizzes during the semester to motivate you. However, as you and your classmates are no longer in Junior High, I trust that those quizzes will not be necessary.

(3) Information Literacy Projects: One of the goals of the First Year Seminar is to insure that students are prepared for work at the university level by insuring that they become careful consumers of information. To that end, you will complete a number of information literacy modules prepared by the University Library Staff during the semester. The completion of these modules and your scores on the quizzes that follow them will be incorporated into this part of your grade. In addition, at least one class meeting will take place in the library so that the staff can introduce you to the resources available.

(4) The Final Examination: The final examination will be oral rather than written. Students will sign up for one-on-one examinations with the professor during which they will be expected (a) to accurately answer specific questions related to the course material, (b) to demonstrate deeper understanding of subject matter through the ability creatively connect different aspects of the course material to each other and to life outside the class, and (c) the ability to defend challenges to their answers and interpretations. More details will be forthcoming in class and study questions will be provided in advance of the examination in order to help students prepare.

VI. Academic Honesty

The Loyola Marymount Undergraduate Bulletin clearly states that:

[T]he University expects all members of its community to act with honesty and integrity at all times, especially in their academic work… It is the student’s responsibility to make sure that his/her work meet the standards of academic honesty set forth in the Honor Code (59, emphasis mine).

Breaches of academic integrity will not be tolerated in our class. Cheating, plagiarism, and other related offenses are an insult to your classmates and a disservice to yourself. In any written assignment, you must clearly cite all outside sources that you use. This includes both direct quotes and borrowed ideas taken from any other source (author, speaker, etc.). Clear citation requires both that you cite all outside ideas and statements and that your citation enables me to locate your source. Please refer to a recognized manual for the writing of term papers for help with acceptable methods of citation (e.g., The Chicago Manual of Style), and please ask me before you turn in an assignment if you have any questions. To make things perfectly clear, any work that, in my estimation, attempts to represent work that is not your own as your own will result in a failing grade in the class and immediate notification of the appropriate dean(s).

VII. Behavioral Expectations

Although there other important guidelines and policies on my webpage—which, as indicated above, you are required to read as part of the first assignment for our class—the following are worth repeating here for either the frequency of the relevant offense or the degree to which the relevant offense irritates me.

1. If you actively text message or otherwise use a mobile device in class you will fail, fail, the entire participation grade (15%) for the semester. That is, the highest grade you will be able to earn in the class, if all other elements are perfect (and how likely is that?), is a “B” (85%). Any other deductions will begin from there. “Active” use is not the same as carelessly allowing your cell phone to ring (which will still impact participation in a less dramatic way). I am not joking; do not test me on this.
2. Activate and use your lion.lmu.edu email account. This is the only way I will contact you, and important information relevant to our class may be communicated to you via email. If you use another account, have your LMU email forwarded.

3. Keep and file all materials that I hand back to you. In fact, you should do this for every course you take. In the unlikely event that there is a disagreement about your work. For example, if my records show you earned a B on the first paper and you think you received a B+, you will need to produce evidence to back up any request to reevaluate your grade (in this case, the original paper—the paper with my corrections, not just a new printout of the “original” file).

VIII. Campus Resources

I am always available—by email, office hours or appointment—to help you with this class or with your experience here at LMU more generally. I hope you will feel free to come and speak with me if you have any problems. However, in addition, there are several specialized resources on campus to help you in a variety of ways and I encourage you to make use of them should you need assistance. The Office of First Year Programs (Malone Student Center, 338-5252), Learning Resource Center (Daum Hall, 2nd Floor, 338-2847), Disability Support Services (Daum Hall, 2nd Floor, 338-4535), Student Health Services (Burns Recreation Center, 338-2881) and the Student Psychological Services (Second Floor, North, Burns Recreation Center, 338-2868) are just a few of the many excellent on-campus resources.

IX. Schedule. Assignment due dates are indicated in red; changes in class schedule are indicated in green.

Under Construction: the following dates and assignments are still tentative.

Tuesday, August 27:
Topic(s): Overview of syllabus and class expectations, followed by class discussion.
Reading: Class syllabus and associated webpages.

Thursday, August 29:
Topic(s): What is a liberal education?
Reading: “Being Human” [ERes]

Tuesday, September 3:
Reading: The Death of Ivan Illych
Other: Stage 1 of Paper due

Thursday, September 5:
Reading: The Death of Ivan Illych
Other: Writing Instruction 1

Tuesday, September 10:
Reading: Apology

Thursday, September 12:
Reading: Apology
Other: Writing Instruction 2

Tuesday, September 17:
Reading: Crito

Thursday, September 19:
Reading: Phaedo
Other: Writing Instruction 3
Monday, September 23 through Friday, September 27:
Other: Schedule meetings with the Writing Instructor.

Tuesday, September 24:
Reading: Phaedo
Other: Complete Information Literacy Module #1

Thursday, September 26:
Reading: TBA
Other: Prof. Treanor speaking at the PACT. Class activity TBA. Complete Information Literacy Module #2.

Tuesday, October 1:
Reading: Republic (selections) [ERes]
Other: Stage 2 of Paper due

Thursday, October 3:
Reading: Nicomachean Ethics I
Other: Writing Instruction 4

Tuesday, October 8:
Reading: Nicomachean Ethics II

Thursday, October 10:
Reading: Nicomachean Ethics VII
Other: Writing Instruction 5

Tuesday, October 15:
Reading: Confessions (selections TBA)

Thursday, October 17:
Reading: Confessions (selections TBA)
Other: Writing Instruction 6

Monday, October 21 through Friday, October 25:
Other: Schedule meetings with the Writing Instructor

Tuesday, October 22:
Reading: On Stories
Other: Complete Information Literacy Module #3.

Thursday, October 24: Prof. Treanor speaking at SPEP Conference.
Other: Library Tour. Details TBA
Other: Complete Information Literacy Module #4.

Tuesday, October 29:
Reading: On Stories

Thursday, October 31:
Reading: On Stories
Other: Writing Instruction 7

Tuesday, November 5:
Reading: Life Without Principle

Thursday, November 7:
My Basic Expectations

Goethe once commented, “treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you help them to become what they are capable of being.” My own experience as both a teacher and a student suggests that he was on the mark with this observation.

Unfortunately, a number of students seem not to understand what is expected of them while at university, what constitutes acceptable behavior, and how to succeed in their studies. I know that many of the following points will seem painfully obvious to students with common sense and decent manners, but you would (and will) be surprised at how some people behave.

I maintain high standards for myself as well as others, not because I enjoy being pointlessly critical (I’m not), but because I believe it is the best way to help you to excel. However, so helping you should not require that I play the ‘bad cop’ for the entire semester. I’m neither a drill sergeant nor a wet nurse, but a professor. You are a student and, presumably, an adult, not a recruit or infant. Let’s all behave in a manner that corresponds to our respective roles here. Familiarizing yourself with the following ten points will go some way toward insuring that at we all start the semester with similar expectations.

1. **Students should be challenged.** Philosophy is not easy and it is not my goal to “make it easy.” A liberal arts education should help you to expand your horizons by challenging you to think clearly and critically about what you know and what you believe. I expect you to work hard, and to remain diligent and committed throughout the entire semester. If you adopt this attitude toward the study of philosophy, your efforts will be rewarded with something much more significant than a good GPA.
2. **Students are responsible for their own education.** Philosophy is not the kind of thing that I can “give” you; it is something one does and, therefore, it requires your active participation. Philosophy is not a monologue (i.e., I speak, you listen); it is a dialogue between you, your professor, your peers, and the philosophers we will be reading.

3. **Students should seek help when they need it.** I enjoy teaching and I want to help you succeed. I like speaking with students--about class or other things--and I appreciate your questions, thoughts, and examples even when you are not having difficulty. I’m happy to see you drop by during my office hours and hope that you do so. However, in addition to our regular interaction, students are strongly encouraged to seek advice and assistance from the instructor if they are having trouble. Do this as soon as possible. If you show up in my office for the first time during the week before the final exam to discuss why you “need” a B in my class after doing C- work all semester-in order to keep your scholarship, or maintain athletic eligibility, or appease your parents--there is really nothing I can do for you.

4. **Students should dedicate sufficient time to their classes.** Being a full-time college student is a full-time job; therefore, it is expected that students approach their studies with the seriousness of a profession. Expect to spend about two to three hours of study outside of class for every hour we are in class--that means six to nine hours studying outside of class each week for this class.

5. **Students should be conscientious in their work.** Assignments must be submitted to me by the indicated deadline. Late assignments will not be accepted. Unless you have made specific arrangements with me in advance, your work is considered turned in when it is in my possession, not slipped under my office door, given to a friend to turn in, or strapped to a carrier pigeon. Do not email me your assignment.

6. **Students should be evaluated on the same criteria as their peers.** Generally speaking, there will be no extra credit work. I’m not grading you on the quantity of your work, but on the quality of your work. Extra credit tends to be biased toward certain students, favoring for example students who do not have to work over those who are working their way through school. For this reason, in the rare instance when there is extra credit offered for some exceptional reason, I will provide alternative means of earning that credit to students with real conflicts. Generally, however, students should be graded on the quality of their work, not the quantity of their work. On the issue of fair evaluation I should also note that justice demands that I not give any student special consideration (extra time on exams or leniency in paper expectations, for example) for any condition that is not documented by LMU’s office of Disability Support Services. I understand that different people have different strengths and weaknesses, but finding The Critique of Pure Reason difficult, not writing particularly well, or having a hard time disciplining yourself to study are not really medically relevant conditions and do not justify lower standards on my part. I cannot offer any extra accommodation if your condition has not been officially documented. If you have a condition (as addressed by the Americans with Disabilities Act) for which you want accommodation, I will be happy to work with you to arrange reasonable modifications, special assistance, or accommodations in this course; however, you will have to direct your request through the Disability Support Services Office (Daum Hall 224, 310-338-4535). Do this at the beginning of the semester.

7. **Students should conduct themselves with integrity.** No violation of academic integrity, plagiarism or otherwise, will be tolerated. Any violation will result in a failing grade in the class and immediate notification of the appropriate Dean(s). Although there are other sorts of academic dishonesty, plagiarism merits special attention given the amount of writing done in philosophy classes. If you use the words, thoughts, ideas, or arguments of another person as if they were your own, you must acknowledge and cite the source. Failure to do so constitutes an act of plagiarism.

8. **Students should demonstrate a basic level of respect and courtesy to the professor and their peers.** Use your common sense. The activity that goes on in university classes--certainly in a philosophy class--is serious business and I expect your conduct to reflect this. I am not a “talking head” and our class is not a television program; it is not acceptable to “tune in and out,” especially willfully. Do not engage in distracting or inappropriate activity. Such activity includes, but is not limited to: arriving to class late; engaging in private conversations; looking at any material not related to what we are discussing in class (other coursework, newspapers, etc.); eating food; getting up without excusing yourself; and packing up to leave before the end of the class period.
Any of these distracting behaviors will negatively affect your participation grade, sometimes very dramatically. Two behaviors merit specific comment. (1) Turn your mobile phone off, not to vibrate, and, I can't believe I have to say this, never use any mobile device during class. If you actively use a mobile device to text message or otherwise communicate during class time, you will fail the entire participation component of the class. (2) If you get up to leave class be sure to take everything with you, because you are not coming back in (and you better have a good explanation next time I see you). To sum up, you will save us all—me, the rest of the class—a lot of grief if you keep the following principle in mind: if you are unable to focus on class, do not come to class and distract others.

9. Students should come to class well prepared. Do all assigned reading before class, think carefully about it, and be prepared to participate in a discussion on the topic. Always bring the text we will be discussing to class, as well as a way to take notes on our discussion. You may not use a laptop or other computer to take notes in our class. Unfortunately, the temptation to use the computer inappropriately—to check email or Facebook for example—is beyond the resistance of almost all people.

10. Class discussions should remain civil. One of the results of a liberal education should be the ability to engage in reasonable discourse with people with whom you disagree. Although we will be discussing topics about which you may feel strongly, language or other activity that does not maintain a proper level of respect and civility are not permissible. Ad hominem attacks will not be tolerated.

As I noted, most of these points will be very obvious to good students, and taken together they really represent only a bare minimum standard of acceptable behavior. It’s no heroic act to conduct yourself with a basic level of decency. However, I provide this list because a great many people seem to fall short of even these criteria, and because I believe it is part of my job to help every student to become a good student. If these standards seem unrealistic or excessively draconian to you, perhaps you should consider what it is that you want out of your university education. You are not required to take this class. Even if you are required to take a certain course to satisfy a core curriculum requirement, you are not required to take my class. If you want low standards that will insure your “success,” if you are unwilling to work hard with difficult material, or if you want to avoid being challenged, you may be in the wrong place. If, however, you want a class that will be challenging and rewarding, a class that will demand good work on your part, and a community (formed by your fellow students and myself) that will, hopefully, inspire you to your very best work, then stay in this class.

Writing in Our Class

A man may take to drink because he feels himself to be a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks. It is rather the same thing that is happening to the English language. It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.

--George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language”

You will be evaluated with respect to both the philosophical content of your paper and the quality of your writing, that is to say both your ideas and arguments and the clarity with which you communicate these ideas and arguments. Most students find that writing papers at the university level is significantly more challenging than writing papers in high school. Furthermore, philosophical writing is different from other kinds of writing with which you may be familiar. This should not be surprising; different writing styles serve different goals and are appropriate in different situations. If you have any concerns about your writing, please come speak to me and I will direct you to resources that will help you improve your writing. The following criteria are used to evaluate your written work in our class:

1. Style and clarity. Good style includes a mastery of English grammar (syntax, punctuation, and spelling) and a habit of choosing the words that express exactly what you mean. A writer with a good style is able to compose sentences that sit well together, saying what she wants to say in a manner that is clear and readable. Elegance and brilliance are also attributes of a superior style, but clarity comes first. Unfortunately, the American educational system has failed a great many students by neglecting to teach them the basic grammar and usage of the English language. If you are one of the people our educational
system has failed, you must take it upon yourself to address this lacuna. Although it is not perfect, *The Elements of Style* remains an excellent short introduction to style and composition. Make sure that your paper clearly expresses the thoughts that you want to express. It is foolish and risky to hope that your reader will be able to read between the lines and “know what you meant to say.” Rather than hoping that I will know what you meant to say, simply say what you mean to say.

2. **Soundness of reasoning.** Muddled writing and muddled thinking go hand in hand. You will find that there is often a strong correlation between sloppy writing and sloppy thinking. If your writing cannot clearly express what you think, it may well be the case that what you think is not that clear. It is very easy to commit logical fallacies without realizing it, especially if your patterns of reasoning are derived from internet forums, television pundits, AM talk radio, the editorial pages, or increasingly (and distressingly) our politicians and public servants. The antidote is to be clear and self-critical. Make sure that your conclusions really do follow from your premises. Sometimes it is hard to be objective about the quality of your own reasoning. Show your work to a friend, asking him or her to see whether you've made any logical howlers. Thoroughness is important. Like any good advocate, you should acknowledge contrary evidence and explain how your position still stands. You don't want to be open to the charge that you've “stacked the deck” by considering only places from the text that work in your favor or that your characterization of the opposing position is really a caricature.

3. **Originality and insight.** It is very difficult—and not necessarily desirable—to be completely original. Your aim is not novelty for its own sake. It is true, however, that the texts we are reading are extraordinarily rich. If you approach them with enough passion and openness, you may discover within yourself an aptitude for saying things that go well beyond what is apparent on the surface. This is not to denigrate surface understanding; without a command of surface meaning, nothing else is possible. However, if you can penetrate beyond the surface of the texts we will be reading you will considerably enrich yourself.

### Some Relatively Common Errors to Avoid

1. **Do not set up a 'strawman' as an opponent to your argument.** The best papers will assume that dissenting opinions are held by reasonable and intelligent persons, even if you suspect this is not the case. You should accustom yourself to engaging in a charitable reading of your opponent’s objection—real or hypothetical—before your respond to and, hopefully, refute those objections.

2. **Exercise appropriate intellectual humility.** It’s fine to criticize the philosophers we read, and it’s fine to criticize my own philosophical positions (assuming you are able to accurately distinguish them from my pedagogical advocacy for the philosophers I’ve assigned). However, you owe it to your interlocutors and to yourself not to engage in such criticism in a ham-fisted manner. If you find yourself asserting that a well-regarded thinker is “laughable,” “ridiculous,” “stupid,” or “insane,” you should reevaluate your claims. It may well be the case that certain well-regarded philosophers in the canon are wrong; it may well be the case that they are uncharitable to others; it may well be the case that they argue from unfounded or false premises; it may well be the case that they are blinded in some way by their historical context. However, any author whose work I assign in class is worth reading and, therefore, worth reading well. The cheek of an undergraduate (whose familiarity with philosophy is likely to be narrow and fragmentary at best) dismissing offhand thinkers like Plato, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, et al. is staggering, and I can assure you that it will help neither your argument nor your grade to engage in such glib and shambolic criticism.

3. **Beware the temptation to tie every philosophical point or issue to your idiosyncratic interests, pursuits, and hobbies.** It is true that philosophy is broad enough that it touches, in some way, on every human endeavor. It is also true that philosophy is often at its most meaningful and moving when we can relate the issues under discussion to our own lives. Nevertheless, writing your metaphysics paper on pop-music’s flavor of the month, or a paper on mysticism on the social intricacies of cosplay or pickup basketball, is likely to force you into an abusive distortion or frivolous treatment of a serious subject. There are no doubt philosophical issues at stake in the diverse interests and hobbies of undergraduates, and sometimes you can (and should) write your philosophy paper on topics related to your non-academic life; but you can’t relate just *any* academic paper to your fascination with philately.

*Other Details*
1. Unless directed otherwise, all written work for our class should be typed, single-spaced (if you are uncertain regarding the page requirements for specific assignments, ask whether they assume single- or double-spacing), and clearly printed. Use a Times New Roman font in 12-point size.

2. I strongly encourage you to use recycled paper for all assignments in my classes.

3. While I do appreciate the gesture, folders and title pages remind me of dead trees. I would prefer that you simply provide your name, class information, and the word count of the paper in the header.

4. You may not use any web-based sources as references in your papers without clearing them with me (a) in advance, (b) in person, (c) in my office hours. This is not because of plagiarism, which is often so inept as to be easily identifiable. Nor is it because the Internet is inherently unreliable—there are reputable, peer-reviewed journals online, some of which I’ve cited in the course of my own work. Rather, the problem is that 99% of undergraduates seem incapable of distinguishing trustworthy sources from untrustworthy ones, and peer-reviewed sources from mere opinion pieces.

5. Your written work should be presented appropriately: clearly formatted and printed, neatly stapled, and on time (or early). Anything less suggests that you do not care about the outcome of your submission (that is, your grade), which will be evaluated with that in mind.

Resources

I urge you to purchase and consult a reference for English grammar and usage. Here are a few resources that are worth checking out:

- John R. Trimble, Writing with Style: Conversations on the Art of Writing
- William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White, The Elements of Style
- Bryan A. Garner, Garner's Modern American Usage
- George Orwell, Politics and the English Language
- Sir Ernest Gowers et al., The Complete Plain Words

Those of you engaged in studies where the Chicago Manual of Style is the norm for citation (such as philosophy) should also purchase: Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Terms Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, 6th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1996. If you frequent used bookstores, you can sometimes find old editions of the more comprehensive Chicago Manual of Style (in its 15th addition as of August 2003) for a decent price.

Grades

I. Your Education and Your Grades

The following comments are, for the most part, about grades and grading. That might seem obvious given the link you followed to get here, but it bears repeating. Why? Because grades have very little to do with education, and both your grades and your education will benefit if you can keep this distinction clear. As I see it, my vocation has to do with education. However, my job requires that I engage in grading, which, while of secondary importance, can and does serve a useful purpose when it is kept in the proper perspective and does not interfere with the primary goal of education. Ideally, these two goals (education and good grades) are not in conflict; one should be able to focus on one’s education and, in addition, maintain an excellent GPA. Practically speaking, however, these goals can often work at cross-purposes. I encourage you to remember this and to insure that your pursuit of high marks does not get in the way of your education.

When I speak or write about your education, I am thinking of that term as it is used in the tradition of ‘liberal education’. The primary goal of a liberal education is not to help you to get a better job, or to earn more money, or to accumulate vast amounts of factual knowledge, or to train you to do a specific task very well. A liberal education is supposed to liberate you, that is, to free you. A liberal education frees you from yourself or, put another way, frees you to become yourself. It frees you from yourself in the sense that it helps you to overcome your own prejudice, narrow-mindedness, and parochialism. It frees you to become yourself because, in shedding your unreflective assumptions and prejudices, you are able to freely and
consciously adopt new ideas and opinions, while preserving the old opinions that successfully pass through the crucible of critical inquiry. A liberal education helps you to become a full human being—someone who thinks for herself, someone who loves the good, the true, and the beautiful, even when she cannot (yet) be good, grasp truth, or appreciate beauty, and someone who is conscious of the world around her, her place in it, and her relation to it.

Grades, however, are another matter entirely. At their worst, grades can become a tedious burden for the professor, a source of great anxiety for the student, and, unfortunately, a distraction that can subvert potentially rich student-teacher relationships with empty, quasi-economic exchange. But grades should not have this power. They are not intended to gauge your moral worth, to label you as an “average” person, or to puff up or deflate your ego. They are not a mark of your ultimate success in life, or a reliable indicator of your future happiness, or a pre-requisite for admission to Heaven. Grades are simply a means of distinguishing unacceptable academic work from average academic work and average academic work from excellent academic work. Because grading student work is part of my job I feel obliged to grade well, that is justly. Justice in grading demands, among other things, fairly evaluating your work in the context of the work produced by other undergraduates at LMU. If a professor only gives marks of B+, A-, and A, this difference is obscured and the A earned by the gifted or diligent student is demeaned. If you are the sort of student who will not be satisfied with anything less than an A, I suggest that you prepare yourself to work hard for it in every aspect of our class. Of course, hard work will not guarantee that you receive an A--I am not grading you on your effort--but it most cases it is a necessary condition (and, in any case, diligent work is essential to your actual education).

II. Some General Remarks About Grades

Generally speaking, I do not ‘curve’ students against each other. If an entire class performed at a truly excellent level, I would be more than happy to give the entire class A grades. Likewise, if the entire class performed at an unsatisfactory or failing level, I would be obliged, though disappointed, to give the whole class D or F grades.

However, student work is measured against my understanding of “satisfactory” or “average” undergraduate work at LMU--the quality of work an average student at LMU should be producing--and, having been at LMU for quite awhile, I have a much better sense of this standard than you do. You are not being evaluated on the same criteria that would be used for students at your high school, students at the local community college, or my graduate students at LMU, but you are being measured against a certain standard of excellence.

Unfortunately, more and more students are coming to university radically unprepared to produce work sufficient to earn an A. Indeed, more and more students are arriving at university radically unprepared to produce work sufficient to earn a B or even a C. Wherever you fall on this scale of preparedness, you should get ready to step it up. If you were earning A and B marks in high school and find yourself earning C marks at LMU, the solution is not to whine, complain, or make excuses. The solution is to seek assistance and redouble your efforts. The vast majority of LMU students complaining about their grades are not even approaching the university’s suggestion of three hours of study for every one hour in class, much less exceeding it. How can you complain about your grade when you aren’t putting in the required work? This holds whether you earned a C and want a B, or earned and A- and want an A. You are never going to whine your way ahead in life, though the prevalence of this tactic in our society may indicate why it is the first option for many students. Instead, try working harder.

III. Regarding Grades and Their Meaning

The 2001-2002 Undergraduate Bulletin described the grade scale at LMU as follows: A, Superior; A-, Outstanding; B+, Very Good; B, Good; B-, Better than Average; C+, Above Average; C, Average; C-, Below Average; D, Poor; F, Failure. Since 2003 the Bulletins have been essentially the same, although they have omitted the description of +/- grades and changed the description of “C” to “satisfactory,” perhaps in
a misguided attempt to make us all feel good about ourselves by convincing us that at LMU, as in Lake Wobegone, “all the children are above average.”

By the time a person enters university she is very likely to have heard a lifetime’s worth of praise, at least some of which is surely undeserved or hyperbolic. Many of these people seem convinced they are exceptionally talented and gifted, and destined for success in whatever endeavor, any endeavor, they might choose. They assume that they will receive excellent marks in their classes at that all their professors will immediately recognize their exceptionality. This, of course, is often an abusive distortion of reality. In any given field—academic, artistic, athletic, or otherwise—most people are, say it with me, average. That’s what average means. Surely it is obvious that not every painter is a Caravaggio, Collins, or Cezanne? That not every author is a Joyce, Ishiguro, or Hemingway? That the Laocoon and Bernini’s St. Teresa in Ecstasy are exceptional? That Bach’s Cello Suites are fundamentally different than the homogeneous and forgettable pop music crafted by producers working with focus groups? This is not an excuse for any individual to accept anything less then her personal best, nor is it an indictment of any specific person’s human worth. It’s simply the recognition of a fact.

Once upon a time we could depend on other well-intentioned friends, family members, and mentors to criticize and correct us, and in so doing call us to become our better selves. However, much of that tradition has been lost in recent times due to the excesses of a culture that believes equality and fairness demand homogeneity and symmetry, views failure as deleterious to self-worth, praises mediocrity, and routinely dispenses hyperbolic accolades. Today we use the term “hero” to describe completely average people engaging in completely pedestrian acts of goodness, and “genius” to describe anyone with a clever idea.

In the field of higher education, this culture of undeserved praise is evident in instances of low expectations on the part of faculty, and in instances of academic dishonesty and sub-standard effort on the part of students. Under the influence of the noxious phenomenon known as “grade inflation,” many students have come to think that if they receive a B, they must be doing substandard work. This is not the case. The grade of B is not the university equivalent of some elementary school “certificate of participation.” To earn a B, you must do good work that clearly surpasses the average university student's performance. If you earn a B+, you are doing work that is very good indeed. If you earn an A- or an A, your work is exceptional, demonstrating a grasp of and engagement with the material at a level well above that of even very good undergraduate students. And remember that these descriptions refer to work at the university level.

“Average” work at the university level is significantly different than “average” work at the high school level.

Although philosophy does not lend itself to an objectively quantifiable grading scale in the manner of a mathematics class (“OK, you understood 76.09% of Plato, 87.32% of Descartes...”), the notion that there are “no right or wrong answers” in a philosophy class is false. Your grade will be based on some combination (depending on the mode of assessment) of the following: (1) your grasp of the material (i.e., correct exegesis); (2) the extent to which you have engaged that material (e.g., insight into the text, creative appropriation of the text); and (3) the manner in which you demonstrate and present this grasp and engagement (e.g., quality of reasoning, grammar, spelling and style) in your paper or examination.

\textit{Note Well}

- **Your work is your responsibility. Turn in your work on time.** “On-time” means “at the beginning of class on the due date,” unless an alternative time or location is given by the instructor. Unless you have made explicit, advance arrangements with me, your paper is considered to be turned in when it is in my possession, not slid under my door, emailed to my account, given to a friend or strapped to a carrier pigeon. To be on the safe side, you should assume that any late work will earn a failing grade.

- **Your work is your responsibility. Save your paper frequently.** Keep a backup copy of your paper on a separate disk. Print your paper out the night before it is due. “My printer ran out of ink” and “my computer crashed” are pretty weak excuses, which do not warrant an extension. The student computer lab is in the basement of St. Robert’s Hall. Your tuition funds this on-campus resource; use it if you need to.
You are welcome to discuss your grade with me at any time; however, grades are not a matter of negotiation. The “C” (or “B+,” or whatever) you receive is not my “first offer.” I spend a good deal of time and effort grading, and the grade you receive has not been given lightly.

IV. The Grade Scale: Descriptive Remarks, the Rubric, and Numerical Values

Achieving excellence in your academic work is not easy. Everything Aristotle says about the difficulty of acquiring the virtues applies here. The following three sections will help you to understand your grade.

(1) Descriptive Remarks

What follows is not exhaustive, but is intended to give you a general idea of what the letter grades mean.

A (Excellent): An A is the mark of excellence. Excellent work is much, much less common than you have been led to believe. Excellent papers contain clear and complete exegesis of relevant sources. They are free of errors in spelling, grammar, and usage. They are logically sound and argumentatively persuasive. They “flow”; they are easy to read and follow. And, in addition, they exceed these basic standards by their liveliness and brio, by the originality of their approach and conclusions, or by the meticulousness of their analysis.

Beyond the written work, it should be pointed out that coming to class unprepared is not excellent. Failing to be an engaged participant in class discussion is not excellent. Rude or distracting behavior in class is not excellent. Superficial reading and consequent failure to grasp the fundamental themes in the reading is not excellent. Rote memorization and regurgitation, even when complete, is not excellent. Even if you avoid all of these all-too-common errors, your work may only be satisfactory (C) or good (B). Most high school ‘A students’ are not university-level ‘A students’. Given that an A indicates excellence, you should not expect to receive an A in my class without significant effort on your part. Excellence is rarely, if ever, merely the product of innate skill or intelligence; true excellence requires effort.

A- (Superior): An A- indicates superior work, which clearly surpasses the work of good undergraduate students, but which falls short of true excellence in some way.

B’s (B+, B, B-) (Good): A B is a mark that indicates good performance. Because of rampant grade inflation, many people who think they are producing A level work are really producing B level (or in some cases even C level) work. To earn a B you must be performing at a level that is clearly above that of an average LMU undergraduate; your work must be substantially better than your peers (not just better than those who happen to be your friends, or the crowd on the Thursday night party bus). In this range, a B+ indicates work that is very good, while a B- indicates work that, while above average, falls short of a “B” in some way.

C’s (C+, C, C-) (Satisfactory or Average): A C is a mark given for average or satisfactory performance and, by definition, most students are average. Read that again: a C is the mark of “average” or “satisfactory” work, and most students are average. It follows that many, indeed most, students should wind up with a grade of C. “Good regurgitation” of information is often the mark of C work. The student can correctly reproduce factual information, or “use the right words,” but has not really digested the information to make it his or her own. At the risk of pedantry, let’s read that again as well: “good” regurgitation merits a C. Thus, regurgitation that is something less than good merits less than a C. The ability to “use the right words” or to “sound like you know what you are talking about” is not sufficient for a good (B) or excellent (A) grade. If you want one of these higher grades, you need to show me that you understand a given argument or concept, and that your understanding penetrates past the surface to grasp the essentials of the given issue as well as its implications. A C+ indicates work that is above average, while a C- indicates work that is close to average/satisfactory, but which falls short of satisfactory work in some way.

D (Unsatisfactory, but passing): A D is a mark that usually indicates passing but unsatisfactory work (although there are certain cases in which a D is in fact not a passing grade, these are intended to be general comments on grading). A mark of D indicates that the student has completed minimal requirements for the
assignment in question, but has produced work that is not satisfactory. There are no marks of D+ or D-.

**F (Failing):** An F indicates failing work that does not meet minimal standards for acceptable university work. In addition, any work that fails to meet the requirements for an assignment—e.g., work turned in late, work turned in via email, plagiarized work, work that ignores the criteria of the prompt—will receive a failing grade.

(2) A **Rubric for Papers (and an important word about its limitations)**
Writing an A paper is about more than checking things off a list (e.g., running the spell check, properly formatting footnotes, answering the questions, raising and answering objections, and so forth). Your professors do not need to “justify” or “make an argument” at length for why your paper earned a B. If your paper earns you an B, it is a good paper, and pointing out the ways in which it is not excellent (that is, an A) may take only a few comments about style, logical coherence, originality, insight, or something similar. While students are often under the mistaken apprehension that writing an A paper can be accomplished by merely checking items off a list or rubric, the reality is that you might check everything off “the list”—and so there would not be a great deal of criticism to level—and still “only” have a good, solid, B-level paper. Writing an A paper is not, I repeat not, about simply following a list or applying a rubric. An excellent (A) paper requires style, insight, and originality that distinguish it from a merely good (B) paper which is complete, grammatically correct, logical, well-argued, and so forth. Not to worry, my papers will have plenty of comments to help you. Nevertheless, I feel obliged to disabuse you of this “checklist” mentality before providing you with this rubric (Rubric.doc), which may help you to understand some of what I am looking for in your paper, and should aid in proofreading and evaluating your first draft.

(3) **Numerical Values of Grades**
When a grade is assigned by a number or percentage, I will follow the standards set by the LMU Philosophy Department:
- A: 100-95
- A-: 94-90
- B+: 89-86
- B: 85-83
- B-: 82-80
- C+: 79-76
- C: 75-73
- C-: 72-70
- D: 69-65
- F: 64 and under

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**How to Behave, and Succeed, at University**

Before you take exception to what follows, consider the fact that it was written to a general rather than individual audience: all my students are encouraged to read this document, and others, during the first week of classes and before the “add/drop deadline.” If you are one of those students reading this during the first week of class, I probably don’t even know you yet. However, if you are one of my students I do care about you, and offer the following in the spirit of friendly and helpful advice, not as a harangue. I can tell you with certainty that this advice, if taken to heart, would help the vast majority of undergraduate students I’ve encountered. Ultimately, however, like all advice, you can take it or leave it. You will need to decide for yourself how relevant it is to your situation.

**Preliminaries**

First things first: get your priorities straight. You are at LMU to study. Other things will no doubt happen along the way, some good and some bad, but your primary focus while at university should be your education: your classes, studying, and the cultivation of a rich, deep, and varied intellectual life.

Your goal while at LMU should be “A” marks in every class, all eight semesters. Actually, those “A” grades are a potentially misleading shorthand because you should not focus on the grade itself, but rather on the understanding, comprehension, and mastery it represents. The grade is incidental. Of course
many people will not achieve that level of comprehension and mastery, or the “A” that goes with it, but that should be each student’s goal. If you are here for any other reason you should sit down and think, really think, about what you are doing. As of September 2012, one year at LMU will cost around $56,000. That is an enormous amount of money to spend, and it is largely up to you whether it is well-spent or not. Take advantage of the opportunities and four years at LMU can be time and money very well spent; but waste those opportunities and you will wish you did something else with that money and time. You should squeeze every last cent of value from your education.

Note that this document is about how to succeed at university. I fully recognize that there is more to a good life than a successful undergraduate career. You don’t need a college degree to be a good person. You don’t necessarily need a degree to make decent money. And you could certainly get certain sorts of training for less than it costs to attend LMU. You could, for example, attend a trade school. There is nothing, I repeat, nothing wrong with that. You can get a decent job and be a good person.

Most of the other things people choose to do while at university can be done elsewhere as well, more easily, and without the expense. If your main goal is to have a good time or to socialize, maybe you should take off a few years and do that while working a regular job, where someone will be paying you for your time rather than while at university where you are paying for an education. Work parties thrown by young employees are every bit as crazy as college parties. If your main goal is to engage in service work, consider dropping out and joining the Catholic Workers or a similar group. Again, you won’t be paying tuition and so will be saving a lot of money. Moreover, you will be doing much more service work than you will at LMU. If your main goal is to check things off a list and earn money, again, you can accomplish that without paying LMU’s tuition. There are various sorts of trades, internships, jobs, and careers where you can get started making money right away.

LMU does not exist to facilitate socializing, or social work, or vocational training. A university is not good at these things, which are done better and more cheaply by, respectively, social clubs, service organizations, and vocational schools. Universities exist to educate students. However, there are various ways to pursue this goal. As you have chosen to enroll at LMU, we assume that you want what we have to offer: a liberal education in the Jesuit tradition, and working under that assumption we are going to demand certain things of you.

The primary goal of a liberal education is not to help you to get a better job, or earn more money, or accumulate vast amounts of factual knowledge, or train you to do a specific task very well. Traditionally, a liberal education encompassed the sort of learning appropriate to a free man (or, unfortunately less frequently, woman), someone who, freed from the humble toil of struggling to secure or protect his daily bread, was able to turn his thoughts to ‘higher’ things. Of course, more or less everyone who reads these comments is “free” in this sense. It is unlikely you are someone’s chattel. However, many undergraduates are, or are in danger of becoming, slaves of a different sort: prisoners to the hedonic treadmill of consumerism and the workaholism that it demands; inmates of ossified and lifeless ways of living; blind captives of systems that narrowly circumscribe their possibilities and limit their potential. Such people have no time for deep thinking, big questions, or fundamental inquiry. Seen in this light, there are many people in need of ‘liberation’ today, and so it still makes sense to think of a liberal education as consisting of those modes of inquiry, ways of thinking, and types of understanding that are the privilege of the free person.

Moreover, a liberal education is the means to achieving the freedom necessary to value it. A liberal education is supposed to liberate you, that is, to free you. A liberal education frees you from yourself or, put another way, frees you to become yourself. It frees you from yourself in the sense that it helps you to overcome your own prejudice, narrow-mindedness, and parochialism. It frees you to become yourself because, in shedding your unreflective assumptions and prejudices, you are able to freely and consciously adopt new ideas and opinions, while simultaneously preserving the old opinions that successfully pass through the crucible of critical inquiry. A liberal education helps you to become a full human being—someone who thinks for herself, someone who loves the good, the true, and the beautiful, even when she cannot (yet) be good, grasp truth, or appreciate beauty, and someone who is conscious of the world around her, her place in it, and her relation to it.

But no university can give you a liberal education, because such an education requires your active participation (and, increasingly, wise choices among certain curricular alternatives). LMU can offer you a liberal education, but it is ultimately your responsibility to take up the task of liberating your mind. How do you do this? By choosing a course of study that will do more than simply teach you vocational skills. By choosing classes that will challenge you, classes that will take you out of your intellectual comfort zone. By opting for certain classes that are, unfortunately, not required. And by striving to be the best student you
can be in each of your classes.

If you are not at LMU first and foremost to excel in your education, you might need to do something else for a while—work, surf, travel, ski, whatever. Get it out of your system and come back when you are ready to buckle down and commit to your studies. I dropped out of my undergraduate studies for some time, and probably would have done better if I had stayed out even longer. It’s not the end of the world. In fact, while a few of my friends excelled at university straight out of high school, many did not; however, almost every single friend who took time off to figure out what he or she really wanted out of life excelled after returning to university.

In any case, whatever your age, if you have chosen to attend university you should be here to do everything you can to excel. Here are some suggestions regarding how to do so:

1. Time Management

To help ensure you keep your priorities straight, you should construct a schedule at the beginning of each semester. First, block out all the absolutely non-negotiable commitments you have during the term, namely: (1) your classes, (2) time for reading for each class, and (3) time to use for review, study, outlining, and/or writing associated with each class. One credit hour should require three hours of work each week. Thus, a three unit class should require nine hours of work: approximately 2.5 hours in class and about 6.5 hours of work outside class time. Similarly, a four unit course will meet approximately three hours per week and require about nine hours of work outside of class, for a total of twelve hours each week.

So you should begin by planning for about 45 hours of academic work each week, and should block out that time--both time in class and time dedicated to study--in your schedule.

These times should be sacrosanct, inviolable except in the rarest of circumstances. If someone asks you to go to a movie, or to lunch, or some other social activity during one of these times, just tell them you have another commitment and suggest an alternative time outside of your fixed bloc of school hours. The same goes for events associated with “campus life,” extra-curricular service and volunteering, and other non-academic pursuits. Study comes first—every day, every week, every semester. Plan your life around school rather than trying to fit in school around other activities. You’ll still have other interests: you will still meet boys or girls that you like, you will still go on dates, you will still have time for some other pursuits and time to enjoy life. It’s just a question of priorities; and it seems like an endeavor costing you $224,000 and four full years of your one, finite, precious life is the activity that should be at the top of your list of priorities, no?

If your preparation and study for a particular class does not actually take five hours in a given week, consider whether you are really engaging the material. If you read Plato’s *Phaedo* in an hour and consider yourself done, you’ve fundamentally misunderstood what you should be doing. First, you probably have not read well in terms of taking notes, outlining arguments, and developing questions for discussion. For more on this, see the discussion of reading below. Second, I can assure you that you did not really get all you could from the text in one short reading. Your grade—and more importantly you—will certainly benefit from additional readings and the deeper insight they will bring. Finally, in the event that you thoroughly engage the material, meticulously prepare for class, conscientiously organize your notes and outlines, and still find that coursework and preparation has not taken the full five hours you have allotted for it that week, consider the radical and counter-cultural idea of doing additional work with the material simply to enrich yourself. Crazy, I know; but bear with me here. For most students their years in university will be the only time in their lives when they will be reading the great books and thinking about important ideas in close proximity with others who are doing the same thing. This is your best chance to expand your horizons, develop an intellectual life, contemplate the things that make us human, and consider your place in the world. Give yourself the gift of the best education you can possibly get.

Note that I’m not suggesting that you should always stack on more study to the total exclusion of other things that contribute to your well being. Far from it. First, the academic calendar ebbs and flows; some weeks will require less work than others. Moreover, if you have cultivated the habit of completely engaging your studies and frequently going above and beyond what is required, you should make sure that you take time to have fun, be idle, and reward yourself during days or weeks when classes are less demanding. Experience life. Go to the beach or hike in the mountains. You might even consider rewarding yourself with something illuminating by taking advantage of any one of the myriad literary, cultural, intellectual, and natural attractions at LMU or in the wider LA region. Do not, however, fool yourself into thinking you can ignore your academic work for weeks and then somehow “make it up” in a series of all-
night study “binges”; that strategy is unlikely to get you the results you want.

Back to scheduling. If you have other non-negotiable commitments, such as work or family obligations, you should put those in your schedule next. I worked, often close to full time, all the way through both my BA and my MA studies. I was also a very active competitive athlete, I traveled, and I had a social life. So I understand it is difficult to juggle things. However, prioritizing your obligations and understanding which ones—the academic ones—constitute your core, bedrock commitments will make organizing your schedule much easier.

Now your schedule should include fixed times for classes, reading, studying (reviewing, writing, problem sets, lab work, creative work, and so forth), as well as other fixed commitments such as work or family time. Next make sure you have time for sufficient sleep. Whatever time is left over is the time you have, all the time you have, to fit in clubs, dates, parties, service orgs, intramural sports, and so on. If this sort of planning seems odd it is only due to the unbelievable, counter-productive, and misguided upside-down priorities of most students at LMU.

2. Planning

Once classes begin and you have a chance to review your various course syllabi, it’s time to do some additional planning that will take into account the predictable ebb and flow of the academic calendar. You should, for example, plan to dedicate additional time to study around midterms and final exams. Think about when papers are due, when lab assignments will take place, when field- or research-trips are scheduled, and any other similarly predictable academic demands on your time. Starting with the due date, work backwards and figure out when you need to start working on the project in question. For example, if you have a paper due, decide when you will need to have a firm topic, when the research needs to be done, when the rough draft must be complete, and so on. Put these dates in your schedule and, if you are using a digital calendar, tag them with alarms to remind you when they arrive. Even if your professor does not require you to meet intermediate deadlines for these various stages of the project, you should set and meet them yourself. It is not your professor’s job to check in with you daily to make sure you are not falling behind. You need to cultivate enough self-discipline to avoid procrastinating and to insure you prepare to meet medium- to long-term obligations. First, you are very unlikely to earn an “A” mark when you hammer out your paper the day before it is due or cram all night before an exam; and, second, even if you manage to earn a good mark in a last-minute scramble, you have utterly wasted part of your educational opportunity by doing so. This sort of planning and use of self-imposed deadlines is obvious once you think about it— and, indeed, you can find this same advice in many books and articles addressing study habits—nevertheless, it’s astonishing how few students make use of it.

3. Preparation

In order to get the most out of your classes—and, therefore, your education—you must prepare. Too often, students think this is reducible to simply studying for exams. However, the exams, like the grades, have relatively little to do with your education. Your education does not take place the night before the exam is given or the the paper is due; and it doesn’t take place solely during class meetings three hours each week. Your education takes place every day of your life. Therefore, while at university, you should prepare for each class meeting.

First, you should always do all the reading in advance of each class. However, be careful about reading too far ahead because if the reading is not fresh in your mind, or if you have not prepared meticulous notes, or if your comprehension was less than optimal, you may be ill-equipped to participate in class discussions or to follow the lecture.

You should also, obviously, do any other “homework” that has been assigned: problem sets, library work, reading responses, and so on. This is true even if the assignment is ungraded. If a professor tells you that you should complete thirty problems in your math textbook, or that you should watch a Senate debate on C-SPAN, or that you should read the environmental coverage in The Guardian, or that you should outline the argument in the Euthyphro, you should do so whether or not it is a graded assignment. Your professor did not give that assignment on a whim or as a joke, but because he or she thought it would improve your comprehension, understanding, and overall experience in the class. Do the work, even if it is not going to be graded.

Full preparation—the kind of preparation that will enrich your education, improve your grades,
and prepare you for success in other endeavors by engraining the habits of discipline and initiative—will occasionally require additional work on your part. A friend of mine in grad school had done his undergraduate degree at Berea College in Kentucky. On his first day of class as a freshman he found himself in a history class. As part of the introductory lecture, the professor mentioned the Mason-Dixon Line and, parenthetically, said, “now y’all know where the Mason-Dixon Line is” as he glanced at the class. Met with blank stares that might have come straight off a herd of sheep, the professor grew frustrated and began to rant, first to himself and then more loudly: “What the hell? None of you know where the Mason-Dixon Line is located? You call yourselves Southern ladies and gentlemen and you don’t know where the goddamn Mason-Dixon Line is? You should be ashamed of yourselves, every one of you! What the hell is the world coming to?” As his ire cooled he composed himself and returned to his lecture. At the end of class he assigned some reading related to the founding of the republic. Well, Wednesday morning rolls around and my friend arrives in his history class for the second class meeting. The professor walks in, puts his books on the podium, calmly turns to the class and, sure enough, asks “so, where is the Mason-Dixon Line?”

The students sat in a stunned silence as the realization of their individual and collective error washed over them. People shifted uncomfortably and nervously in their seats, unable to meet the silent gaze of their professor and hoping someone would save them from the explosion that was surely brewing behind the podium, each person making excuses as to why he or she did not do what, in retrospect, was the obvious thing to do: spend just a few moments looking for some information that the professor obviously thought significant. The professor was, predictably, apoplectic and cursed a blue streak I won’t record here, maligning the stupidity and, worse, the fundamentally unteachable nature of such a collection of passive, indolent, and hopeless children.

It’s a great anecdote, and I wish I had been there personally to witness the event, though perhaps not as one of the students. In any case, the lesson is both fundamental and obvious: your education is your responsibility. In order to be simply a satisfactory student at university, you should be the sort of person who does a little more than the work that is assigned by your professors, someone who genuinely engages the material, puts effort into the process, and takes pride in her work.

4. How to Read

At university you are expected to study, digest, and reflect on the readings at home so that we can discuss them in class. Although most courses will incorporate some lecture, and some courses may be primarily-lecture based, almost all university-level courses will demand your active participation, which requires that you come to class with a sound preliminary understanding of the reading. Not only will this make the class discussions much more interesting, but it will help your participation grade. When you participate without proper preparation, the fact that you have not done the reading is painfully obvious to everyone who has done the reading, including your professor. You should always bring the book or article under discussion to class so that you can refer to the text. This is part of proper preparation for and participation in class.

When you read, you must read actively. Reading well requires that we learn, as Nietzsche says, “to read slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers.” Reading is not like watching television. You need to develop the habit of reading actively and carefully. My own discipline, philosophy (and, frankly, most things worth reading), demands close and careful attention to the text. Oftentimes, it will take two or more readings in order to achieve even a basic understanding of the main issues. You cannot expect to read philosophical works in the same manner that you read a light novel, textbook, magazine, or newspaper. If you find that your eyes are merely passing over the text without your brain absorbing or reflecting on any of the ideas, you need to read more slowly.

Remember everything your parents and elementary school teachers told you about writing in your books? Forget it. Underline, mark, and annotate your books—anything that will help you to keep in mind the main issues, follow the steps in an argument, or note interesting correlations. Dotting down notes in the margins is generally more helpful than underlining or highlighting. The physical text in front of you is not sacred, except insofar as it represents a tree sacrificed so you could address philosophical issues. The ideas in the text are the important things. That being said, only write in books that you own—don’t be one of the reprobates that marks up library books.

You must get in the habit of looking up unfamiliar words. Do not assume that the meaning of a
single word is unimportant or that you will glean the meaning of the word from the context in which it appears. Although a particular author may use a word in a manner other than, even contrary to, its dictionary definition, a dictionary is the logical place to begin if you are completely unaware of a word's meaning.

In addition to highlighting and writing in the margin, you should take some notes. You need to think about what you are reading as you are reading. First, write down questions—either questions related to difficulties you are having with the text, or questions that might contribute to class discussion. Note, with respect to the first sort of questions, that sometimes the meaning of a difficult passage will become clear from what follows, so keep reading and see if things become clearer. In addition to writing down questions, you should try to summarize what you have read. Depending on the length and difficulty of the reading, you might summarize each paragraph with a sentence or two, or each section with a short paragraph, or each chapter with several paragraphs. Such summaries will prove absolutely invaluable in enriching your understanding and in studying for exams. Finally, since you’ve made a summary or outline, you should take a look at it just before class as part of your preparation.

When you read, your first goal should be to understand what the author in question is saying. To that end, you should read charitably. Although you—or your professor—may disagree with them, the authors you are reading in university have been assigned for a reason. It is very unlikely that you will find something in their work that is obviously stupid or false. If you find yourself thinking, “that’s insane” or “that makes no sense at all,” chances are that you have failed to understand the argument. In order to learn from books you need to understand them, and in order to understand them you must read them well. It is exceedingly arrogant to think that you have everything figured out at 18 or 20 years of age (or, for that matter, at 50 years of age). This is, unfortunately, an easy vice to fall into, particularly for the sort of intelligent person one hopes to find at university. However, you owe it to yourself to leave open the possibility that new information or new argumentation might reveal errors in your current positions, or that alternative positions might be superior to those you currently hold. People who do not read or listen to other perspectives in a charitable way suffer from the vice of close-mindedness. If you are bound and determined to remain close-minded, you should demonstrate your “intelligence” by dropping out of college and saving yourself an enormous amount of time and money. After all, if you already have the answers and are not going to be affected by anything you read or discuss, why pay $56,000 per year to read and discuss things?

Although the preceding comment suggests we should be charitable readers, we should also be critical readers. Things that are true are not true simply because they are held to be so by an authority figure. Though of course it makes sense to weigh a person’s expertise when assessing her opinion—when you are ill you go to your doctor, not your accountant, and when you want to know about climate change you listen to a climate scientist, not a political pundit. In any case, it is important to attempt to come to your own reasoned opinion about the merits of any given argument or idea. The authors you read may be wrong. Your professors may be wrong. Do not be shy about challenging a point that you think demands challenge; just be sure that you have fully and accurately understood the point before you challenge it, that you support you challenge with a good argument, and that you make your challenge respectfully. The Brando approach—Q: “What are you rebelling against?”, A: “Whattya got?”—is not particularly helpful.

5. How to Write

A man may take to drink because he feels himself to be a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks. It is rather the same thing that is happening to the English language. It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts (George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language”).

A full account of mechanics and style is neither possible nor appropriate here; but I will allow myself to quickly insist that grammar matters, diction matters, style matters, and logical coherence matters. At the risk of painting with too-broad a brush—since there are very clearly exceptions—if you are at university in the 21st century you probably do not write either as well as you should or as well as you think you do. You should take this seriously and make a concerted effort to improve as a writer. It’s not enough to write often, you have to write often while trying to write well.

Rather than address the mechanics of writing well, here I aim to talk about the process of writing. First, carefully read the assignment. All the effort in the world won’t make for a good paper if you answer the wrong question or otherwise miss the point of the exercise. Once you have a clear understanding of
what is expected of you, schedule self-imposed intermediate deadlines for completing the research, deciding on a thesis, developing an outline, completing a first draft, and so on. Having a plan and a schedule and trying to stick to them will help insure that you don’t procrastinate.

Not all papers are research papers. Sometimes all you need are the texts you are reading in class. However, some of the papers you will write in college will no doubt be research papers. Unfortunately, many students think Google is the only necessary research tool, which seriously limits their resources and often directs them to sources that are fraudulent, non-peer-reviewed, erroneous, out of date, or otherwise misleading. There are good resources on the Internet to be sure, but there is much more rubbish. You need to be able to distinguish the gold, not only from the surrounding mud, sand, rock, and detritus, but also from the pyrite. In short, in the vast majority of cases, undergraduate students using the Internet for “research” are likely to end up with sub-standard results. Therefore, if you are not intimately familiar with library research, you should find out when the library is having an orientation and sign up. If fact, all students should try to do this the first semester of their freshman year in order to familiarize themselves with the research facilities on campus.

In reading and researching for the paper, you should follow all the suggestions about reading enumerated above: read carefully, avoid distractions, take notes or otherwise summarize what you’ve read. Depending on the course subject and the paper assignment, your reading may entail reading a large volume of material or reading a small amount, perhaps only a single text, very, very carefully. I’ve already mentioned that you should expect to read academic books multiple times to get an adequate understanding. This is especially true of the sorts of text you will encounter in a philosophy class. Expect to read, take notes, read again, talk to classmates, think very carefully, read again, and then think some more before you have any chance of really grasping what you should. Don’t fall into the trap of skimming texts you should be reading and, in general, avoid Sparknotes, Cliff Notes, Wikipedia, and similar resources as they generally give you, at best, selective and superficial coverage—exactly what you don’t want from your education.

At some point, however, you will have to begin writing. While most students fall into the practice of paying insufficient attention to reading, it is possible to focus too much on reading. If the paper is to be done by the deadline, at some point you are going to have to make a judgment call that further reading is not in the best interests of your paper. Once you’ve done the bulk of the reading, it’s time to decide on a thesis and develop an outline of your argument. The structure of your outline will be determined by the assignment, so you’ve got one more chance to make sure that you’ve properly understood what your professor wants.

The outline will lead naturally into the crafting of your first draft. There are many different ways to proceed at this stage, but one possible strategy is to simply add layers of detail to your outline until you’ve got a rough sketch of the argument as a whole. As the outline gets more and more detailed, the information fills in and the stages of the argument develop. Once the entire argument is there in rough form, it’s time to polish that into an acceptable first draft. Your first draft should be a complete, readable, grammatical paper that you can proofread, critique, and show to friends.

This is, unfortunately, where most undergraduates stop; however, for any student not wasting her time (and money), this is really only the halfway point of crafting a good paper. Once you have a draft, put it aside for a few days—again, having begun the writing process early will pay dividends here. When you return to the paper it will be with a relatively fresh eye, so sit down and give it a good, careful, critical reading. Pay special attention to the overall arc of the argument and the transitions between sections. If anything is unclear, revise the prose to make it clear. Don’t ever put yourself in the situation of responding to some future criticism of your writing with the defensive, “you know what I meant.” Instead of hoping your reader will know what you meant to say, just clearly say what you mean to say.

Once you’ve done a first proofreading and revision, it’s time to enlist the help of some friends. Don’t pick these people because they are the people you hang out with on Saturday night, or because they are part of your intramural soccer team, or anything of a similar sort; you need good academic friends who will be critical judges of your work and who will offer constructive criticism to improve it. The obvious place to look for such friends is in your classes. If a friend proofreads your paper, it’s only polite to offer to proofread her paper in exchange. After you receive your friend’s comments, take some time to sit down together and talk through the paper. You may accept some of her suggestions or critiques; but defending your position against those criticisms you don’t accept will help with your next draft.

Revise the paper again in light of your friend’s comments. Proofread it again. At this stage you should try reading the paper out loud—not mumbling or sotto voce, but at a good, normal conversational
volume. Why? Simply because something close to 99% of current high-school and university students lack any solid grounding in the grammar and usage of the English language. The grammar-checking software that comes with programs like Microsoft Word is a very uneven and inadequate tool, so don’t rely on it. However, if you are a native speaker of English your ear will catch grammatical errors you can’t identify simply because they sound odd. Don’t know what a sentence fragment is? Don’t know why subjects and predicates must agree? Can’t tell the difference between the past perfect and the past perfect progressive verbal constructions? Don’t worry; your ear can catch many common errors if you read out loud. Take care, however, because some grammatical howlers have crept into the vernacular and may sound appropriate even if they are gross errors in usage. The clearest example is in the agreement of subject and predicate. “A person needs to vote if they want their voice to be heard” may sound appropriate because, perhaps unfortunately, we speak this way in casual conversation. However, “a person” is singular and “they” is plural. Whether or not you choose to speak this way, you cannot write an academic paper this way. Or, more specifically, you cannot write an academic paper this way and expect to be taken seriously. Your ear will not catch certain other grammatical issues either, such as the proper uses of commas, colons, and semicolons. Thus, your best long-term strategy is to familiarize yourself with grammatical structure and the mechanics of writing. Start with The Elements of Style and move on from there. Do yourself a big favor and take a few semesters of Latin. Seriously. Although I am still developing as a writer, Latin helped me immeasurably.

At this stage in the process the major elements of your paper should be well-established and you should really be working on the clarity, style, and readability of the paper. Pay special attention to transitions, grammar, and diction. Avoid using what Strunk and White call “twenty-dollar words” simply in an attempt to sound learned or appear cosmopolitan. Ditto for tired clichés and metaphors. Be very skeptical of any suggestions from a thesaurus—especially a software-based thesaurus—because it may suggest words are synonyms when in fact they have substantially different connotations or flavors. Choose the word that expresses exactly what you want to say. If saying what you want to say actually requires the “twenty-dollar word,” then by all means use it. I’m not suggesting, as Strunk and White do, that the fancier word is always to be avoided in favor of the simple or common. I’m merely suggesting that you should not choose the longer or less-common term merely because you think it sounds intelligent or sophisticated.

Proofread your draft very, very carefully. When you get to the point where you are confident in the argument, grammar, style, and so forth, and find yourself agonizing over individual word choices, you are almost done.

6. How to Study

The first important point about studying was addressed above: schedule out dedicated times in your weekly schedule for studying and stick to them so you don’t fall behind. However, you should obviously try to insure that the time you dedicate to studying is as effective as possible.

You need to make sure you study in an environment conducive to studying. There will no doubt be some personal variability in this choice. Some people study best in the library, some in quiet spot at home, and others in coffee shops. However, don’t deceive yourself here. You need to study someplace that will allow you to focus on studying, someplace without temptations or distractions.

In graduate school my Latin reading group would meet a couple of times per week in the local coffee shop to study and work on translations. One winter morning I arrived to find one of my partners already there, sitting at our customary table; however, he had turned his chair away from the table and was now facing the corner, hunched over his book. Confused by his position, which looked like a child who had been given a “time out,” I asked, “What’s going on?” Without lifting his eyes from the Latin text or turning around he gave an exasperated sigh and muttered, “Girls. Too many pretty girls.” So, whatever you need to do to find an environment free of distractions, do it.

To that end, you should swear off multitasking. To study well you need to monotask. Start by unplugging—no television, no talk radio, no music you can sing along to, no mobile phone, no Internet. Many of you will assert that you can study perfectly well while watching TV, or while fielding status updates on Facebook. The fact is you cannot. Research supports the very common sense notion that when you do two tasks at once you do them both more poorly than you would if you focused on either one. You simply cannot focus on your work if you have two or three other things competing for your attention. If this seems like a problem, stop reading now and go back to reread the introductory paragraphs of this document. Given the resources of time and money you are committing to this endeavor, you should not be
engaging the process half-heartedly. If television and Facebook are really that important to you, save yourself the tuition and just go get a job.

When you study it is important to take breaks and often helpful to change the scenery. You will find yourself studying more effectively if you take breaks when necessary. Again, there will be personal variability in this regard. Try giving yourself a 10-minute break every hour to get up, get a drink, stretch the legs, knock out some pullups, do some yoga, or whatever; but (a) don’t let the 10 minute break turn into 30 minutes or 60 minutes, and (b) when you sit down for the next 50-minute study session, you should focus only on the work in front of you. I also find it useful to change venues during study sessions, especially longer sessions. I’ll start at a library and, after several hours, move to a coffee house. After a few hours there, I’ll move to another coffee house, and from there to my home office. Of course, not all study sessions are so long. If you only have three or four hours of studying in a given day you might move only once. Be sure not to waste time in transit. You will lose your focus if it takes you an hour to accomplish each of those moves; however, on our campus this should not be a problem, as you can move from the library, to your department’s “village,” to the Lion’s Den, to a study room, and back to your dorm in just a few minutes each. Obviously, if you find yourself on a roll, don’t ruin things by changing venues. Wait until things are going poorly and then try to shake things up a bit with a quick break to move to a new environment.

Try to incorporate as many different “inputs” as possible when studying. That is to say, read, write, and speak as part of your studying. This is one reason it is important to take notes in class: you hear the material, write it down, and later read it back to yourself—engaging the material three different ways. If you explain the material out loud to a study partner you’ve incorporated a fourth way of engaging the material. This sort of “repetition with variation” is one of the best things you can do, and it will go a long way toward really engraining the material into your long-term memory. This, of course, is your goal. Good studying is not about cramming material into short-term memory for an exam without concern for whether or not it is retained over the long haul. Notes, outlines, and summaries are all part of good studying. If you just read the book and leave it at that, you are shortchanging yourself.

As you think about varying your study methods, don’t be afraid to incorporate unusual components. When I was in graduate school I was of course reading, writing, and discussing things on a daily basis. However, I was also a very enthusiastic and committed climber, and would spend most weekends climbing in New Hampshire or Vermont. So, I started building up a set of flash-cards to prepare for my oral comprehensive exams. Now, philosophy is not the sort of thing that lends itself to flash-cards—which are more appropriate for memorizing vocabulary, Latin declensions and conjugations, chemical reactions, or anatomical structures—but I wasn’t studying only with flash-cards. The flash cards were just to supplement all the other work I was doing, and to allow my climbing partners to quiz me on the long drives north to climb. “What are Thomas’s ‘five ways’?” “What are the major steps in Kant’s transcendental deduction?” “What is the definition of eudaimonia found in the Nicomachean Ethics?” And so on. Each flash card had bulleted points on the back so my long-suffering, non-philosophical climbing partners could verify my answers. Good times; good times.

On that point, don’t discount the power of memorization, which is often disdained these days. You will do yourself an enormous favor if you practice memorizing material—not just scientific formulae or social science statistics, but philosophical arguments, speeches, and poetry as well. It’s a great gift to yourself to memorize some poetry. And by “memorize” I don’t mean “know it well enough to recognize it,” but rather “know it well enough to recite it out loud, from memory, verbatim.” Memorization not only builds intimate familiarity with the material, but also exercises your mind in a way that is becoming increasingly rare in our “let me Google that” culture. However, be aware that memorization alone is insufficient for learning. Oftentimes excellent memorization and good regurgitation are, while necessary for an A, only sufficient for a C. A parrot or a computer can collect and regurgitate information. You, presumably, are a person. Your goal is not only familiarity with data or facts, but also integrating facts into a larger coherent picture, critically engaging information, assessing the value and validity of different arguments, thinking about and cultivating virtue, contemplating the mysterious, and experiencing wonder.

Be careful with study groups. When they work well they can be excellent resources for pooling notes, exchanging papers for proofreading and critique, and verbally explaining key concepts to others, adding the crucial third input of speaking to the more common reading and writing. However, study groups work poorly more often than they work well. They often degenerate into social get-togethers rather than real study sessions, and very often there will be one or more slackers who are not pulling their weight. If you are going to use a study group for a specific exam, paper, or class, be sure to identify people who will
be very serious about the goal of the group, and bow out at the first sign that the group is not focused and really committed to studying.

Read as much as you can given your other commitments. Nothing will enhance your education as much as reading. Your reading should be both deep, investigating your area of interest in greater detail, and wide, engaging things outside your main area of interest so as to expand your horizons.

Finally, though I’m loathe to express it here in the context of trying to get my students to study more seriously, remember to live your life and seek out new and varied experiences. Socrates reminds us that the unexamined life is not worth living, and he was certainly right about that. The comments above are designed to aid you in reflecting on and examining your life in the academic context. However, without rejecting or in any way diminishing Socrates’ assertion, I’d add that the unlived life is unworthy of examination; you need to experience the world to have something to reflect on.

7. How to behave in class

First and foremost, attend all your class meetings. There is a tremendous temptation to skip classes in college. You are likely living away from home, and so have no authority figure looking over your shoulder to make sure you do your homework and go to class. Many of your professors will not take role; assuming you are an adult and are responsible for your own choices, they are willing to give you enough rope to hang yourself. Don’t give in to the temptation to skip classes. It will both harm your comprehension in the course you skip and, eventually, create extra work for you as you try to catch up.

Since you will be attending your classes, you might as well make the most of your time there. Bring the book under discussion, sit in the front of class, take good notes, ask questions, and participate in discussion. Sitting in front will help you stay attentive and focused, since you will feel like you are in the spotlight of the professor’s gaze. Taking notes and bringing the book under discussion will insure that you have a chance of following the class, and help you to get more out of it. Note, however, that you can go overboard with notes. Different students and different classes will require different approaches. Sometimes it’s best to take very detailed notes, as if you are trying to write down everything. Other times it’s best to take notes in outline form, as if you are trying to summarize the main themes and key points of the class. Still other times it’s best to take few or no notes and simply participate in discussion or follow the lecture without being distracted by writing. You will have to work out what works best for you and what is appropriate for each class. Asking questions—even questions from the reading or questions that come up in the course of the class meeting—will increase the odds that you don’t get completely lost. If you ask a question, the professor might be able to clarify things in class, helping you and potentially other students who are struggling with the same issue. If the issue cannot be clarified to your satisfaction during class time, you should visit the professor during his or her office hours. Asking questions and participating in discussion will increase your engagement with the material as well as increasing your participation grade in the course, if participation is graded. Trust me, professor’s notice who is actively engaged in the class.

I forbid students to use any electronic or digital devices in my classes. Why? Because even the very best students will give in to the temptation to surf the Internet, send emails, check Facebook, or otherwise distract themselves from class. It is inevitable. I think every professor should adopt my policy banning electronic media. However, since some of your professors will unfortunately let you use computers in class, I suggest sticking with a pencil and paper to avoid getting distracted. If you just can’t tear yourself away from the soothing hypnotic glow of your laptop, do yourself a favor and install a program like Freedom, which will disable your wireless connection during class time and help insure you stay focused. Ideally, folks would just cultivate some self-control but if people need an aid in doing so they should use it. Don’t look at your cell phone in class; you are not that important.

In general, you should err on the side of being too fastidious, disciplined, and formal in your class interactions unless and until it becomes clear that you can or should ease up and adopt a more casual attitude. Things like this generally “become clear” only when your professor explicitly clarifies things for you. You do not, for example, call your professor by his or her first name unless invited to do so. It doesn’t matter if you hear someone else do it. Stick with “Professor” until invited to do otherwise. In graduate school many students assume they can address their professors informally without first asking permission. That is, frankly, rude. I addressed all my professors as “Professor,” and still address many of them in this way. It took me several years after earning my Ph.D., and a great deal of informal interaction, to address one of my dissertation advisors by his first name. I have other mentors with whom I am very close that I feel confident I will never address informally.
Likewise, don’t treat your professor or class like a DVR system into which you can tune in and out. Show some respect for your education, your classmates, and your professor. The activity that goes on in a university class isn’t a rerun of your favorite sit-com, and you shouldn’t act like it is. Don’t get up to go to the bathroom, don’t check your text messages, don’t play the class clown, and, in general, don’t act like the class is somehow an intrusion on your life that is preventing you from doing something you’d rather do. If you can’t behave in this way, then simply go do whatever else you think is more important than your class; but in that case don’t complain about getting a “D,” or worse, in the class and don’t whine about not getting your money’s worth out of your college experience.

A final example: dress appropriately. As far as I’m concerned there is a large range of individual variability and personal style that falls within the “appropriate” range, and I’m not suggesting a jacket and tie for the average class. We are in California, where more casual dress is the norm, something clearly evident in my own sartorial insouciance. Nevertheless, you shouldn’t dress as you would for either bed or a night out clubbing in Hollywood (and that’s putting it delicately). Of course, if you are making a presentation as part of your grade in a class or as part of a research panel, you should take it seriously and dress appropriately for the event.

Other behaviors should be approached with similar restraint: don’t bring food or drink to class, don’t arrive late, don’t pack up before the end of class, don’t leave early, don’t leave class and return, don’t whisper to your classmates, don’t read material unrelated to class, and in general treat your class like it is a serious business. Just because others are rude does not mean you should be. Err on the side of respect, politeness, and class. Trust me, you’ll stand out like a prince among thieves in this day and age. There are real consequences for your grade when you act like a idiot in any of my classes, so I’m giving you this advice for your benefit in other classes, internships, and jobs where, even if the expectations are not as clear, there are consequences for half-witted behavior.

Your professor has office hours. Make use of them. In general, you should go to your professor’s office hours rather than trying to make an appointment outside those office hours. First, it’s simply easier. Second, your professor has many other responsibilities—other classes, other students, grading, class preparation, conferences, publishing expectations, committee work, and home life with his or her family. Although you might be able to arrange a meeting outside posted office hours, it’s more complicated to do so. Certainly don’t try to arrange a special appointment because your professor’s office hours fall during your favorite television show or because of some similarly trivial conflict. Remember, your classes come first and your other activities are scheduled around paying attention to those classes. If, however, there is a genuine unavoidable conflict—perhaps your professor’s office hours are during another one of your classes—don’t be shy about asking for an appointment. However, never, ever fail to show up for an appointment you have made with your professor outside of office hours. Your professor may well have gone out of her way to accommodate you, arranging for childcare or canceling other appointments. Certainly other work will have been put off (trust me, you professor has more than enough work to fill the day and then some). When you do show up—at office hours or for an appointment—it’s generally best to arrive prepared to talk about what you want to talk about: bring clear, specific questions. There may be other students trying to see your professor as well, so it’s a good idea to make sure you can get your issue taken care of efficiently. If there is no one else waiting and your professor has no other pressing commitments, then you’ll have time to chat casually.

Finally, never ask, “will this be on the test?” It doesn’t matter if it is on the test or not; if you professor mentions it he or she thinks it is worth your while to know it. Likewise, never ask, “did we do anything important on Friday?” Seriously? No, we just wasted class time talking about unimportant things. In any case, you needn’t worry: if we had anything important to discuss we surely would have cancelled the class since you were not there and, as everyone knows, the world revolves around you.

8. Other Issues Related to University Life

There are many other helpful hints I could offer, but obviously this short document cannot aim to be comprehensive. Therefore, I’ll conclude by offering the following suggestions and insights related to life at university.

Your time as an undergraduate is likely to be some of the most significant of your formative years. Who you are in college influences who you are in you twenties and early thirties; and who you are in your twenties and early thirties has an enormous influence on your prospects in life—existentially, professionally, socially, economically, artistically, educationally, and otherwise. Note that the previous two
sentences speak in terms of influence rather than casual determination; there is always the possibility of a second, or third, or fourth chance to get your act together and turn yourself around—something to which my own life is a testament. Nevertheless, whatever life you choose to live, your development during your years at university is likely to be critical in forming your adult self.

With this in mind, make sure you put in the effort to do whatever you are doing well. Unrealized potential is the most common commodity in the world. I’ve passionately pursued a number of different endeavors in my life and, once or twice, I’ve *almost* gotten good at something. But authentic excellence is elusive, generally because people don’t focus, don’t commit, and don’t put in the hard work and effort required to realize their potential.

If you don’t take up the violin until you are forty years old, or don’t practice daily, it’s pretty unlikely that you are going to become a first chair violinist in a major orchestra. If you don’t focus on your studies as an undergraduate you are seriously handicapped, and therefore less likely to succeed, in an attempt to get into a good graduate program. Again, I’m not suggesting that either playing the violin at a high level or going to graduate school is a necessary ingredient for a good life. There are, as Henry David Thoreau said, as many ways to live well as there are “radii from the center of a circle.” It’s up to you to figure out what will constitute a good, meaningful, well-lived life. Moreover, it’s not impossible that an individual can “come from behind” and excel at any given task later in life. I myself was a lackluster student as an undergraduate and only got my academic act together when I returned to graduate school later in life. Nevertheless, as an undergraduate you find yourself at a point in life blessed with an extraordinary number of opportunities and possibilities. If you pass up these opportunities and forgo these possibilities, they may not come around again.

That being said, consider the following points, which don’t really fit neatly into any of the topics I’ve already addressed.

(a) Challenge yourself and work hard

Rainer Maria Rilke wrote, in his poem “The Visionary,” “The secret of growing lies in this: / being totally defeated and disarmed by ever greater forces and their cause.” Growing in a variety of ways—but especially as an intellectual—should be a major goal of your university years. Therefore, while at university you should challenge yourself by trying new things and trying more difficult things.

Trying new things is essential to expanding your horizons, and university is one of the best places to accomplish this. Unless you are very, very lucky you are unlikely to ever again live within a five-minute walk of intellectual debates, choral concerts, dance recitals, theater performances, poetry readings, and all the other things that are regular events on a university campus. You may be a chemistry major, but you won’t know if you also love poetry until you hear, read, and perhaps write some poetry. Use your time at university to become more fully alive and to exercise the full scope of your humanity.

In addition to trying new things, you should challenge yourself by trying more difficult things. Imagine a student who is already conversationally fluent in Spanish. She could enroll in a beginning Spanish course where she can be confident of an “A” that would boost her GPA—which seemed to be a common practice among a number of the students in my Japanese courses at UCLA—or she could enroll in a Spanish literature class in which she will struggle to read great literature in the original Spanish. Which is more likely to help her grow and develop?

That friend of mine who did his undergraduate at Berea struggled a bit during his first semester at university. Deciding to try and set things aright, he identified a group of “A” students and struck up some friendships, hoping to figure out what he was doing wrong. So far so good. However, he realized quickly that this particular group of students maintained high GPAs because they declared easy majors and dropped any class that appeared difficult. Thankfully, my friend was mature enough at 18 years old to realize that there was something fundamentally wrong with this strategy. Rejecting the easy road, he decided to simply take the classes that interested him and let the chips fall where they may. He ended up a double-major in philosophy and classics, and, amazingly, did not open up a single report card during the rest of his time at Berea. He focused on his education instead of his grades. After he graduated he sat down with his uncle and a bottle of bourbon, and together they opened each report card, laughing and joking about the various grades he had earned. Incidentally, this approach worked perfectly well in terms of his practical career prospects: he went on to graduate school, where I met him, and he’s now a tenured faculty member at a major state university.
(b) Be responsible for your choices and your actions

This one seems so simple, but on reflection it is one of the most difficult of these various recommendations. It’s difficult in part because we have so few examples of people behaving in this way. Without dismissing the reality of unforeseeable tragedy or unwarranted misfortune, the fact remains that in our society everyone seems to have an excuse ready when things go poorly; few people are willing to simply admit that the problem lay in inadequate preparation, lack of discipline, or insufficient effort.

Students are responsible for their own education. Certainly faculty are responsible as well. Faculty must present the material, assist in its comprehension, model certain virtues, and in general mentor students as they develop. Nevertheless, the prime responsibility for your education lies with you.

It’s your responsibility to attend class. If you miss class it is your responsibility to make up the material, to find out if any work has been assigned, and to turn in all work on time. Professors should not be expected to re-lecture material during office hours; it is your responsibility to do the reading, get notes you may have missed, come to office hours prepared to ask intelligent questions, and in general do whatever is necessary to insure that you grasp the material you missed.

It’s your responsibility to keep track of your schedule. If the syllabus indicates the paper is due on December 15, you need to keep track of that deadline and prepare to meet it. Don’t expect the professor to remind you and check in to make sure you are doing the work that is your responsibility. Many times your professors will in fact check in verbally to ask if the class is keeping abreast of work expectations.

However, it’s not the professor’s responsibility to keep you on schedule; it’s your responsibility to keep on schedule.

It’s your responsibility to do all the work necessary to succeed, including any remedial work you might need. Unfortunately, more and more students are coming to university radically unprepared to produce work sufficient to earn an A. Indeed, more and more students are arriving at university radically unprepared to produce work sufficient to earn a B or even a C. Wherever you fall on this scale of preparedness, you should get ready to step it up. If you were earning A and B marks in high school and find yourself earning C marks at LMU, the solution is not to whine, complain, or make excuses. The solution is to seek assistance and redouble your efforts. The vast majority of LMU students complaining about their grades are not even approaching the university’s suggestion of two to three hours of study for every hour in class, much less exceeding it. How can you complain about your grade when you aren’t putting in the required work? This holds whether you earned a C and want a B, or earned and A- and want an A. You are never going to whine your way ahead in life, though the prevalence of this tactic in our society may indicate why it is the first option for many students. Instead, try working harder.

If you make choices that indicate your education is not your first priority, you should be ready to lie in the bed you’ve made and take responsibility for your decisions. It becomes quite irritating to hear, as I have over the years, student X whine about the amount of reading assigned over a weekend, or bemoan a required extracurricular outing that conflicts with a party, or complain indignantly about the final schedule when the exam is on a Friday, especially when I happen to know that student Y is first-generation college student working full time, or is raising children, or is on chemotherapy, or is helping to care for her dying parent and, in each case, is not using it as an excuse. I hasten to add that I am actually very willing to go out of my way to help students like student Y, who are dealing with real challenges or problems, and such students should feel welcome to discuss these issues with me. However, if you are a “student X,” don’t expect me to think that your family vacation in Hawaii, planning the sorority formal, lip-sync practice, or auditioning for a role on some reality television program qualifies as a “real challenge or problem.” (Note that all these “student X” and “student Y” examples are drawn from actual students I’ve known.)

It is astonishing how far good, old-fashioned, roll-up-your-sleeves work will get you. It won’t do everything, because life is not fair; there’s an undeniable element of chance and luck at play. Some students are smarter than others, some students are more talented than others, some students are better prepared than others, and some students face extra-curricular challenges that others never even have to consider.

Nevertheless, each person must play the hand she’s been dealt as best as she can. Do your level best. Don’t be afraid to seek help. Work hard. Persevere. Believe in yourself without deluding yourself. Despite the fact that life isn’t fair and people don’t always get what they deserve, you’ll be surprised at how often we reap what we sow.

(c) Don’t over commit
One of the big pitfalls that trips up otherwise promising students sometime around the beginning of their sophomore year is getting spread too thin, committing to a large number of endeavors that would individually be goods but which together become an anchor that pulls them down. Would you rather do a dozen things poorly or three things very well?

I had a student several years ago who I met during the fall semester of his senior year. He was clearly bright and seemed reasonably hard working, but he seemed stuck as a B- student in my class no matter what we did. Over lunch one day he apologized for his mediocre performance in class, and indicated that an overcommitted schedule was proving to be a major problem for him. When he arrived at LMU from high school, he was prepared to buckle down and work hard. All his advisors, all the orientation counselors, and all his professors told him to he would have to work harder than he ever did in high school, and that classes would be more demanding and more difficult. His first semester he focused like he had never focused before and was rewarded with straight A marks in all his classes. However, as he settled in to life at LMU during his second semester he became involved in a number of clubs, a fraternity, a service organization, and so on. Soon he found himself stretched too thin and his grades slipped from As to Bs and Cs.

It’s possible to do too much, even if the things you are trying to do are each good things. Go back up to the beginning of this essay and think about your schedule and how many hours there are in the week. Neither social life, nor service orgs, nor Greek life, nor student government should be your focus. You are at LMU for an education. If you really dedicate yourself to your education, you’ve got room for, at most, a handful of other things. When one of the things you are doing costs $56,000 per year, it’s better to do two or three things well than do a dozen things poorly. Keep your priorities straight.

To that end, I strongly suggest you do not join a fraternity or sorority. This recommendation is likely to be met with disdain or scorn at LMU—disdain from those freshmen who aspire to join a fraternity or sorority, and scorn from those students who are already members. Nevertheless, since this essay may persuade at least a few among the former, I feel compelled to make the point. Fraternities and sororities generally work at cross-purposes with your educational goals, or at least with the educational goals you ought to have. To explain at length why this is the case would take more space than I’m allocating to this point here. However, I’m happy to discuss this if you are interested.

It is true that some excellent students are in fraternities and sororities. Indeed, among the dozen or so truly great students I’ve had in a decade at LMU, at least two belonged to a sorority, apparently enjoyed it, seized the opportunity to get a great education here at LMU, and went on to prestigious post-graduate endeavors. Thus, those of you in the Greek system can rest assured that I will treat you as unique individuals in the hope that you will prove yourself to be another anomaly. In any case, I believe that the two students in question were exceptions to the rule. For the vast majority of LMU students, Greek organizations actively undermine their ability to get the best possible education.

That’s not the same thing as saying that joining a fraternity or sorority will necessarily lead to worse grades (although it might). Remember, while this document says a great deal about how to succeed in the pragmatic task of maintaining an excellent academic record, your real education cannot be reduced to your grade point average. When I speak or write about your education, I am thinking of that term as it is used in the tradition of “liberal education.”

(d) Become the person you want to be

There are relatively few changes in life that afford you the ability to make a break with your past. Of course, we can never fully escape our history, but there are moments—and moving out of your parents’ home to attend university is one of them—of relatively radical rupture. When you arrive at LMU, nobody knows what sort of person you were in high school and they don’t have any expectations about who you are and what you have done. The upshot? You don’t have to step right into whatever role you played in high school. You don’t have to be the “class clown,” “jock,” “party girl/boy,” “nerd,” “loner,” or whatever other persona you occupied during high school. You can start the project of making yourself the person you want to become without the accumulated weight of the person people expect you to be.

The flip side of this is that, if you are quite comfortable with who you are and who you are becoming, you need to continue the work of self-development here at LMU. Your professors do not know you are an “A” student or a “good” student (they are not the same thing), so you are going to have to prove that you are. Unlike your high school, where your 10th grade teachers may have told your 11th grade teachers what a fine student you are, your favorite high school teacher (or parent, or priest, or mentor, or
whatever) has not communicated to the LMU faculty your exceptional qualities. In fact, even if they had done so I would view it skeptically given grade inflation and the hyperbole of letters of recommendation. If you are the sort of student who thinks of herself as smart, dedicated, hard-working, and creative, you’ve still got to prove to others that you are those things.

Wherever you are in the process of self-cultivation, choose wisely and think very carefully about what you want out of life. Read some philosophy and literature to get a sense of what sorts of lives might be meaningful. Then read some history, economics, and psychology to complement those insights. Varied sorts of research suggest that most people are very, very bad at predicting what will make them happy and, as a consequence, many people spend a great deal of time and energy pursuing things that are ultimately not in their best interests. Think about that carefully and frequently.

You should also think carefully about the people with whom you choose to be friends, as your friends will exert an extraordinary degree of influence on the person you will become. If you are thinking of joining a club, or fraternity, or sorority, consider the people involved. When you are a freshman, it is all too easy focus on how “fun” it is to stumble off the Thursday night party bus with the seniors in whatever organization you are thinking of joining. However, you ought to be asking yourself another sort of question as you laugh at drunken upperclassmen stumbling around at 2:00am the night before an exam or other commitment: not “isn’t he funny,” but rather “is that the sort of person I want to be in four years?”

It is certainly important to have fun, and that includes revelry, silliness, horseplay, and ‘killing time’ doing ‘useless’ things. Well and good. But there’s more to life than that. Much more. You’ve got one life to live: one “wild, precious life,” as Mary Oliver puts it. Think carefully about how you intend to spend it.

(e) Don’t be stupid

There are a number of predictable pitfalls you should avoid, chief among them substance abuse and academic dishonesty.

I’m neither naïve nor prudish, and I expect that students will experiment, in a wide variety of ways, during their university years. Alcohol is not an unmitigated evil, and the worst part of university drinking culture is that students seem utterly incapable of indulging in a moderate and responsible manner. If student drinking amounted to opening a bottle of wine with dinner rather than shotgunning beer, keg stands, and binge drinking then student drinking would be a non-issue. I’ll leave it up to you whether or not you choose to drink; however, if you do choose to drink I urge you in the strongest possible terms to drink moderately and responsibly. Alcoholism can be a real problem in some cases, and even if you don’t become a full-blown alcoholic drinking can really interfere with your well-being: undermining your education, impacting your grades, putting you in unsafe or vulnerable situations with strangers or acquaintances who are themselves impaired by alcohol, leading you to make poor choices that alienate friends, affecting your health through weight gain, and so on. Don’t drink to get drunk and never, ever, under any circumstance get behind the wheel of a car if you have been drinking.

Stay away from illegal drugs and from abusing legal drugs, including Adderall and similar substances. Bracketing for the moment whether milder drugs like marijuana are more or less harmful than alcohol, the fact is they are illegal. Getting caught with any illegal drug is a mistake that can follow you for some time and foreclose opportunities that you will regret losing. It should go without saying that you should stay well clear of any serious drug. Without getting too far into personal history, I’ve seen people become addicted to serious drugs and can assure you that such a state is something you want to avoid at all costs, including the cost of not experimenting at all with these substances. Drug addiction is not trivial, is not pretty, is not something one brings under control easily, and, as any addict will tell you, is not something from which one ever fully recovers. Abusing prescription drugs can lead to similar outcomes.

The other predictable temptation is academic dishonesty: cheating, plagiarism, and the like. There are strong practical and ethical reasons not to cheat. Unfortunately, academic dishonesty runs rampant in the modern university. Statistics suggest that most students will cheat in some way during their undergraduate careers, so many of your acquaintances will be cheating in one way or another and you may be tempted implicitly or explicitly to cheat yourself. Don’t give in to this temptation. First, there will be consequences if you are caught. These consequences vary from professor to professor; however, my own policy is to immediately fail the cheater in the class, not simply on the assignment, and to report the dishonesty to the appropriate Dean or Deans. If it is an egregious case or a repeat offense, I will advocate for the expulsion of the student from the university. Academic dishonesty undermines the integrity of the
university community, undermines your fellow students, and undermines your own education. It demonstrates that you care nothing for what a university education is supposed to accomplish and that you would be better off leaving university, taking some time to get your act together, and returning if and when you are ready to take the process seriously.

Well, that’s the end of the essay. However, for those who are interested, here are a few other thoughts.

(f) Final thoughts

Here are some final thoughts that either don’t fit under the topics above or which I have not had time to integrate into this essay, which is still very much a work in progress. I apologize for the awkward laundry list of what follows, and for the fact that a number of these final thoughts stray from the topic of “how to behave while at university” and encroach on the “life lessons” that have been too often debased by a host of pop psychologists and self-help hacks. You’re better off reading the great thinkers—ancient and contemporary—of the various wisdom traditions, who address how to live well more profoundly than I ever could. Nevertheless, if for nothing else than to serve as a placeholder for ideas I may develop and include above:

1. First and foremost: don’t forget to slow down, be idle, and appreciate the present moment. I realize this essay might sound as if you should be an academic workaholic, but in some measure this is a result of the target audience: it’s what most undergraduates need to hear. Nevertheless, it is certainly possible to focus too much on activity, work, and productivity. Indeed, in many ways that sort of misguided hyperactivity is endemic to our culture. Life is about more than producing results, and if you lose sight of that you will likely end up very, very unhappy. Read The Death of Ivan Illych (Tolstoy), The Razor’s Edge (Maugham), and Walden (Thoreau) as primers.

2. Although this essay focuses on your intellectual life, don’t neglect your physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

3. Read Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics. Cultivate moral virtues. Simplicity, discipline, courage, temperance, compassion, generosity, and proper pride/humility are good places to begin.

4. Become self-disciplined. You will find it indispensable in achieving your goals, whatever they are.

5. Beyond a modest threshold that you are likely to achieve in any number of ways, money will not make you happy, so avoid making life choices as if it will.

6. Cultivate simplicity. Learn to accurately distinguish needs from wants. Take pleasure in the simple things in life.

7. Learn how to sit around a table with others and make conversation like an educated adult. Become genuinely comfortable eating and socializing in circumstances as diverse as a circle in the dirt around a campfire, a dinner party at a friend’s house, and a formal banquet or celebration.

8. Be courteous. Discourtesy, posturing, and bluster of all sorts are, as Eric Hoffer noted, the weak person’s imitation of strength.

9. Regularly do things that benefit others, and do them because they benefit others. Living selfishly results in an empty life.

10. Don’t be a poser. Rather than pretending you are something, or someone, you are not, why not craft yourself into the person you want to be?

11. Study a foreign language.

12. Travel, but not frivolously. Travel is better on a low-budget, low-carbon, low-resource model that will allow you to experience a different culture without the filter created by a mobile bubble of affluence catering to your customary habits. Be a traveler, not a tourist. Better yet, be an immigrant, if only temporarily. Live for a while as an expat if you can. If you are going to study abroad, go for a year rather than a semester, and a semester rather than a summer.

13. Familiarize yourself with the history of your country, culture, family, or religious tradition. Be both proud (where appropriate) and critical (where appropriate) of these traditions.

14. If you want to be good at something, practice regularly. Note that practice doesn’t make perfect; perfect practice makes perfect. You can’t just do something; you need to do it mindfully with the intent of getting better.

15. Be sure to arrive on time for classes, work, appointments, and any other situation where someone is
depending on you. “On time” is a shorthand expression meaning “five minutes early.”

16. Take pride in your work, and always meet deadlines for your work.

17. Appreciate and care for nature. Learn the names and habits of local flora and fauna. Learn about local edible plants. Familiarize yourself with the different ecosystems in your bioregion.

18. Spend time outdoors (if you are like me, do this a lot). Get away from cities, towns, roads, and buildings. Leave the car and travel on your two feet. Drink from a mountain stream. Eat wild blackberries. Climb a mountain. Swim in a glacial lake. Sleep where you can see the darkness of night sky and sense the immensity of space.

19. Spend some time alone, enough so that you no longer associate being alone with being lonely. It’s important to remember we are social beings, and that friends and family contribute to our flourishing. But if you only know yourself in society—as you fulfill the social roles of student, son, daughter, friend, employee, and so forth—you’re missing something. Take a solo backpacking trip or attend a silent retreat. Get comfortable with yourself.

20. Learn to cook for yourself and your friends.


22. Learn to repair things rather than disposing of them.

23. Choose a sport or physical activity to pursue. It will keep you healthy, and it is better, cheaper, and more interesting than joining a gym. Seriously, with the whole beautiful, wild world out there, how sad is it to plod along on a treadmill? Pretty damn sad.

24. Cultivate an appreciation for art, and try to develop some artistic talents of your own: learn to play an instrument, sing, write poetry, paint, or whatever else suits your spirit.

25. More to come I’m sure…

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