

The Big6 and Freshman Year: How to Select Courses

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Today is the first day of classes at my University. After a summer of “quiet,” it is time for students to return to college classes and their quest for learning and knowledge. I made an interesting observation while walking through one department on our campus. I saw many students waiting outside an introductory psychology classroom, some had a nervous look on their face. These students may have been wondering what the first day would be like, have questions about the class, the professor, or even the assignments that would be required.

These were freshmen students and perhaps this was the first class of their college years. I began to wonder about the planning that lead these students to the Psychology Department. Often a student will arrive on campus with no clear major in mind, and may rely on an academic advisor to help determine a course of study during the initial semester.

Students can apply Big6 strategies to clarify academic goals, develop a course of action, or to select a major. When I taught a freshman experience program, I had a group of 18 freshmen students in their initial college semester. We explored study habits, note taking, how to adapt to college life, and career exploration. At the time, I did not consider the Big6 as a model to assist in the decision planning process for entering college, scheduling classes, and deciding on a major. Now, I think differently.

Mike and Bob encourage a student to use Big6 when there is a decision to make or a problem to solve. I envision the Big6 as a tool to help students in the decision making process all through their college career, but in this instance let’s consider how to use Big6 to determine a class schedule.

Big6 and Course Selection

Students typically consult with an academic advisor before they enroll in classes. If the student has declared a major, the advisor will be a member of the department associated with the major. When a student prepares for his or her first or second semester at a liberal arts college, he or she will often concentrate on the core curriculum or general education classes, plus a few beginning level classes in the major.

Task Definition:

For Task Definition (Big6 Stage 1), a student’s Task is to work out a class schedule. There are guidelines for the number of credit hours to take each semester and prerequisite courses to consider for future course work. A student might ask “What classes should I take, and how can I work out my schedule?” Most of the questions can be answered by working with an advisor and the university bulletin of classes and major requirements, which leads the student to Big6 Stage 2, Information Seeking Strategies.

Information Seeking Strategies:

As mentioned earlier, the university bulletin of classes provides students a list of all classes offered during the semester, the number of credit hours for each class, along with meeting time, meeting days and the name of the professor. In addition to the bulletin, students should consult the list of core

classes required to obtain a degree at the university or college, plus a list of required classes within a chosen major. These three items, along with the help of an academic advisor, are necessary to develop a plan of academic study. Most of the information identified in Information Seeking Strategies (Big6 Stage 2), can be found on the university web site.

Location & Access:

Big6 Stage 3, Location and Access, can include locating the required information through a departmental web page, a college bulletin page, or comparable source. The academic advisor, a human expert, has office hours posted near his or her office door and will encourage students to make an appointment to develop a plan of action. The Location and Access stage may include using a computer to find the advisor's office location within the chosen department.

Use of Information:

Once the student has gathered the information, it is wise to review everything before meeting with an academic advisor. I recommend all students become familiar with the requirements for graduation before meeting with an advisor. This process relates to Stage 4: Use of Information. Reading the university bulletin and schedule of classes offered provides the students with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions. Additionally, the academic advisor can assist with the scheduling by suggesting a course load, which is typically 12 hours per week for a full time student. Sometimes a job or other situation can influence the Use of Information for scheduling purposes.

Synthesis:

Synthesis, Big6 Stage 5, can be achieved by compiling all the necessary components for the entire process and submitting the finished schedule through the proper channels. With all the demands on a student's time, including classes, work, study time, outside activities, or other commitments, Synthesis is a time to review everything and develop a workable schedule that still leaves time for the age old college tradition of having fun and making new friends while learning and enriching your life.

Evaluation:

Evaluation, Big6 Stage 6 may be completed throughout the next semester as the student settles into a new schedule, study time, job or other responsibilities. The Evaluation process may also be accomplished through consultation with the academic advisor to identify any potential problems or issues that may arise during the semester. Each day of the college student's life can be seen as Evaluation, because a good student continually monitors his or her progress and makes adjustments as necessary. Through this process a student may identify the need to build in more time for study or take a class that is a requirement for a higher level course within the major.

The Big6 truly does provide a map that can be used by the college student throughout the college career and beyond. By following the steps outlined in the Big6, a college student can develop a plan of action that will lead to the ultimate goal - Graduation!