



The Handout

In this edition:

- Make the Most of Winter Break
- Memorization Techniques
- Maintaining Good Habits with Distance Learning
- *and more...*

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Volume 9, #3

November, 2020

The Handout

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Table of Contents

- 1 Does Exercise Affect Your Studying Ability?**
How keeping fit keeps your brain fit, too.
- 2 Make the Most of Winter Break!**
Relaxing is good, but keeping busy is good, too!
- 3 Study Break**
Did you know taking a study break helps cement the info in your brain?
- 4 Memorization Techniques**
There are a lot of tricks your brain can play to help you remember.
- 5 How to Make a Semester Escape Plan**
With a few weeks left in the semester, make a plan for a clean getaway!
- 6 You and the Pandemic**
Living with "the virus" takes a toll – and you now need to take control.
- 7 Maintaining Good Habits with Distance Learning**
It's easy to fall off the Webex wagon – don't let virtual world win!

1 | Does Exercise Affect Your Studying Ability?

Sara Slaiby, Centennial ARM

Have you ever heard the phrase “I am going to go for a jog to clear my head!”; well, there is actually some scientific evidence to back it! Hundreds of studies have been conducted globally testing the correlation between regular exercise and your brain’s abilities! For example, one study conducted by the University of British Columbia had test subjects perform regular aerobic exercise such as walking, running, swimming, biking, etc. They found that there is a boost in the brain’s size of the hippocampus. The hippocampus is a small part of the brain that is involved in learning and the formation of memories, as well as your emotions. Therefore, with an increase in the size of your hippocampus and the creation of new brain cells within the hippocampus, your memory and learning abilities will be enhanced.

Another study was conducted by Harvard Medical School which also tested the correlation between aerobic exercise and the brain’s functioning. They found that exercise ultimately decreased inflammation within the body, as well as increased the release of growth factors. Growth factors within the brain such as VEGF (vascular endothelial-derived growth factor), help to maintain the



brain’s cells, protect the nerve cells in the brain, and help with the maturation of newly created brain cells. In doing so, the brain is constantly growing, maturing, and improving, which all enhance your brain’s ability to function.

Both of the studies discussed above focused on the biological effects of exercise on the brain, but not so much on the indirect ways that exercise can affect your brain and ultimately your studying. By exercising routinely, you will experience an improvement in your sleep, and have stronger control of your emotions such as stress and anxiety, all of which can impact your studying.

If you are not one to exercise routinely, do not worry, there are still plenty of ways that small exercises can enhance your studying! Did you know that by performing a small exercise after studying

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such as a few jumping jacks, squats, or even hand squeezes can help stimulate your brain and ultimately create a stronger memory of what you just learned? By performing an exercise after studying, you are moving your muscles, which creates a stronger blood flow throughout your body, especially to your brain.

Therefore, performing small exercises after studying, or creating a routine workout regimen, will not only help your sleep, mood regulation, and decrease stress and anxiety, but it can biologically enhance your brain so that you are learning easier, retaining information longer, and studying more effectively. 📌



Semester Break Move-Out Information

If you are **moving out** or **moving to a new room**:

- You must **remove all your belongings** from your fall room when you check out for Thanksgiving.
- An RA or your RD must check your room when you leave to assure you have removed all of your belongings.

If you are **returning to your same room** for the spring:

- You may **LEAVE all** of your belongings in your room.
- We strongly suggest you take your valuables home (jewelry, game systems), along with anything you will need – laptops, IDs, medications, class items for spring in case of a delayed opening.

2 | Make the Most of Winter Break

Tamia Scott, Grasso ARM

Winter break is approaching and I know that we are all excited to finally take a break from school. However, sitting at home doing nothing can be a drag. I have compiled a list of productive things that you can do over winter break.

1. Make a Winter Bucket List

Include anything you want to get done on there and things you want to do. When I write down things to get done, I generally get them done, opposed to when I just wing it. Then, I tend to forget about what I even wanted to do! Write down places you want to go, people to visit, activities you want to do, etc.



2. Take a Winter Course

If you are behind in classes or need to take some extra credits, winter breaks are a perfect time to do that! Not only are they usually covered by financial aid, they also allow you to focus on just one class, which can help your GPA too. If you don't want to take one here at WCSU, see if your local community college offers winter courses.

3. Work

It's a great way to continue to earn a bit of an income over the break. See if you can get a job for a few weeks wherever you'll be staying over the break. This time of year is super busy for a lot of companies, so it's a great time to help them out too!

4. Catch Up on Personal Stuff

I know for me, when I'm on break, I tend to do a lot of things that I've "been meaning to do". This could be from deep cleaning your room to doing those long boring errands and working on side hobbies, to taking your car into a shop to get an inspection. This is the time to catch

up on your own personal stuff! Have you been meaning to clean out your wardrobe or wanting to bake the perfect sugar cookie? Now's the time to do it!

5. Do Something Fun

This may seem a bit generic, but it's so true! Plan out a fun activity or a trip this winter break! Regardless of your budget, there are countless things to do over winter break. You can visit a nearby city and spend the day there, go ice skating with friends, visit family and so much more! Don't forget to have fun – safely, of course – over winter break before you're sucked back into college study mode!

6. Start Working on Spring Semester

When was the last time you updated

your résumé? Have you ever updated it?? Time to start updating it or perhaps even making a whole new one. Find a good template for any future cover letters that you can use. Do you know what you need for future classes? Plan it out! This is a perfect time to get a week or two ahead; that way you won't be stressing when the next semester starts!

This is just a small summed up list. The point of this is to let you know to be productive. Use your time wisely. Don't let the whole winter pass you by and then you are scrambling to get things ready for the spring semester. I hope this helps! 🙌

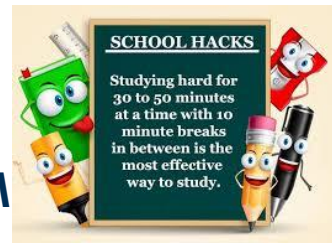
It's time for finals, and here's some tips for taking them online:

- **Before the test:**
 - Read & understand the test guidelines
 - Know the test format
 - Test yourself
 - Check your computer
 - Study the class materials
 - Pick a spot with few distractions
 - Determine *when* you'll take the test
- **During the test:**
 - Keep an eye on the clock
 - Don't leave the test page
 - Alert your prof immediately if you have technical issues
 - Check your work before you hit submit
- **After the test:**
 - Assess how you did
 - Check your grades



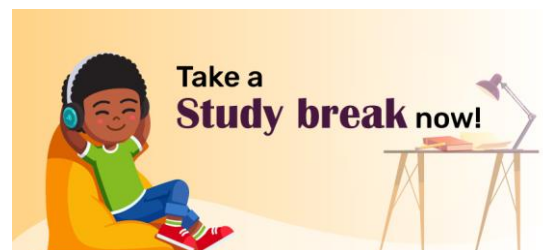
3 Study Breaks

Caitlyn Archambault, Centennial ARM



Study breaks, the savior of the day. Those small breaks that we look forward to after long classes. These breaks are important to keep your focus and to be able to retain the information you are learning. These breaks should be periodic and productive, but also change from person to person. To stay on task, you should plan out your day. Sit down first and plan out your classes and when you will study beyond classes, **but do not study more than an hour at a time.** From there, you should add in your breaks. If you are unsure how long each break should be and when, here is a general rule of thumb – you should take a fifteen-minute break every hour you study, and a thirty-minute break every two hours you study. For example, if you have a class that runs for an hour and fifteen minutes, you should take a fifteen-minute break. If you have two of these classes in a row, or a lab session, you should take a thirty-minute break. These breaks are even more important with online classes, because not only do you need the break for your mind but for your eyes as well. The blue light emitted by electronic devices can cause strain on your eyes and longer exposure over periods of time could even cause damage. This light is also one of the reasons why, when you take a study break, you should not spend your time on social media. Using your full break for social media, tv, video games or other social media, actually hinders your productivity and can

make you feel more tired than you were before. When you take your breaks, you should stray away from naps, drinking caffeine, eating comfort food, or big meals. Any of these activities can hinder your productivity, or make you feel sluggish or tired. You should focus more on activities that will stimulate other parts of your brain. For example, if you were reading or writing during your study time, you should do something creative, like draw, color, sing, or dance. Other things that will help you stay focused and increase your productivity are to get active, stretch, go for a walk, or meditate. You could also run an errand, take a shower, tidy up, phone a friend, or cook a healthy meal. If you start to feel distracted in your study space, get a change of scenery. Move your study space – this will also help it feel like shorter times between your breaks. Never study where you sleep! You will be too comfortable and fall asleep. You want to be somewhere comfortable, but where you are upright and can sit up straight. If you need more fresh air and sunlight, move outside. Know what personally works for you, and if are unsure, try a few of these tips out. Leave your phone and social media for a quick check in your break. Never forget to set a timer for your breaks so you never take too long a break.



4

Memorization Techniques

Gabby Christofor, Pinney ARM



Have you ever sat in your room staring at the words in front of you that you wish could simply teleport into your mind? There are many times that we stare at our screens and wish that we began to study earlier. We also wish after tests that we took the time to study the little things because those are the ones that show up on the exams. Memory is a key part of college, whether it's memorization in a short period of time, or remembering concepts over time. You can work on both types of skills to be successful.

The best possible way to study is using working memory to divide the work into chunks. Allowing your mind to process chunks of information at different times will result in a deeper understanding of the information in the long run. It is not cramming pages of information into your mind at once; chunking allows you to process piece by piece. Your mind puts the pieces together later and they are able to be found when you need them for a test.

However, most people find themselves using short-term memory to cram for an exam in a technique called maintenance rehearsal. This does not work as well as using the spacing

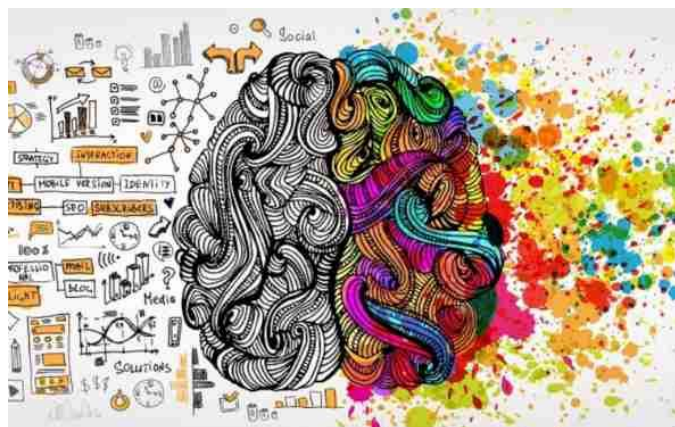
effect, which is a distributed study practice that allows for long-term retention of studied materials.

Maintenance rehearsal involves saying terms over and over until they are stuck in your head. It's the repetition of facts and terms over time that lets the information stay in your brain for a short period of time, sometimes enough to stick just for the test. This method can work when you made a mistake and studied too late, but it is not recommended because the information will not stick with you for a long time. You will definitely have to re-learn rehearsed information for the final exam.

There are some memory tips that can be used ahead of time to get the best results. It is most important to find somewhere to work that you are comfortable with. You don't want to feel judged by others, but you do want to be comfortable in whatever clothes you may like, in a space that meets your noise needs (quiet vs. loud), etc. Make sure this place is comfortable enough to focus, but not too familiar where you might talk to friends or take a nap. I highly recommend working somewhere other than your bed.

Take the next tip from the masters of world memory competitions: assign meaning to the words. Study the real-life examples that professors provide from class. If they do not give examples that connect to you, make your own. It might seem hard at first, but the way I still know French was because my mom pointed at random things while saying French words. Even doing motions like this will make you think of the concepts/ terms whenever you see the movement. New information is more likely to stick in your brain when it's connected to a strong memory from the past. In addition to this technique, learn the more general concepts first. The lesson objectives will be on exams, so if you only have time over the long-term to ingrain one thing in your memory, make it a general understanding of key concepts.

Just like rehearsal for the stage, information sticks better when it is said out loud, said by someone else repeatedly, or connected to a movement. Look down at your page, say the term, then look up and say it again. Next time you're reading the definitions, don't look at the terms, try to say it into the universe versus saying it down at the paper. This could also be done using a quizlet or making flashcards. The act of writing or typing the information takes a long period of time and your brain is able to absorb that information. Next time you see it on a flashcard, you'll know it better than if you used someone else's quizlet.



Another tool that works very well is teaching someone else the information. If there is someone else in your class that you can work with, you can teach each other. Saying the information out loud and explaining in depth can only be done if you understand the concept yourself. If you don't feel ready for that, your classmate can help fill in the gaps. Many times, you know something they don't and vice versa.

Memory is all about practice. It is hard to cram information into your head and if you do, it will not stick. Try to get into the habit of looking at work well in advance and using a technique such as chunking, teaching, flashcards, acrostics, or physical movements to remember better. If you ever need help learning information, the ARMs are always there to help, as well as the PASS tutors and academic tutors in the library. If you are interested in playing some games to strengthen your memory, check out my program on November 20th over Zoom or in the Pinney Hall Lounge. I will be presenting ways to strengthen your memory, and then we will be trying the methods out through games! Memory skills are learned over time. We can learn together.

5

How to Make a Semester Escape Plan

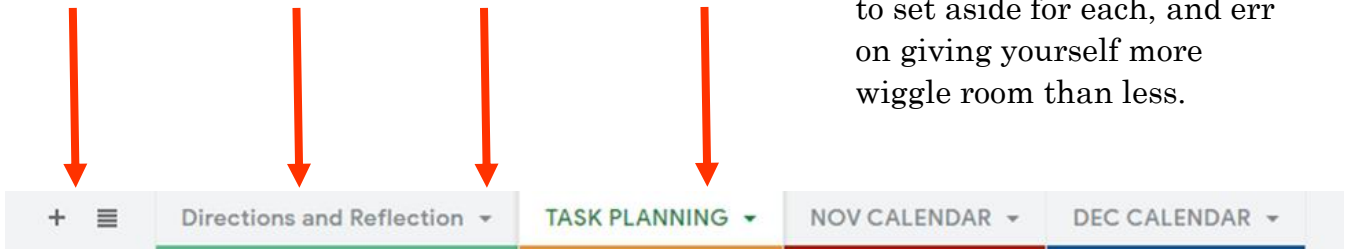
Audrey Redpath, Pinney Hall ARM



We're turning the corner on one of the hardest semesters of many of our college careers and the work left can feel overwhelming. Like most difficult things, it's easier to tackle this period in the semester if you have a plan. To this end, I've made a tool for you based on an organizational system many successful students use to track and plan the final month of this semester.

Here's how you can use it:

1. Go to tiny.cc/plantemplate and use the ESCAPE PLAN template to create a new google sheets workbook.
2. You'll get a menu of tabs to use at the bottom with the first named Directions. Use these tabs to navigate between your plan and your actual calendar schedule.



Make your own end of Fall 2020 semester plan tiny.cc/plantemplate



3. On the task planning tab, take some time (it should be no more than 30 minutes) to review your class syllabi and your Blackboard courses to figure out what assignments, quizzes, and tests you have left between now and finals in each of your courses.
4. List each of these assignments, the courses they're from, and their deadlines and reflect on how long similar ones have taken you to complete in the past. Set a length of time you need to set aside for each, and err on giving yourself more wiggle room than less.

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- If you have a major paper or a big project assignment, split it up into multiple parts or mini-assignments on the task planning tab and assign segmented deadlines of your own. So for example, if you have a project that you need to outline, draft, and revise you would add each of those as their own line with their own time prediction and deadline.

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Assignment	Course	Time Needed	Deadline	Priority	Status
2	Quiz Study	ART 150	2 hours	11/19/20	1	Finished
3	Task Assignment	JLA 198	1 hour	12/3/20	2	In Progress
4	Major Paper	ENG 500	30 minute	12/10/20	3	Not Started
5	Final Paper	ART 298	5 minutes	11/26/20	4	In Progress
6	Final Test Prep	JLA 490	Seven years	11/26/20	2	Not Started
7	Task Assignment	WRT 398	10 days	11/26/20	1	Not Started

5. Do this for every assignment in each course. Once you have your tasks laid out like this, you'll want to assign a priority to each one. You can do this based off your gut feeling, based off of the points each assignment is worth on your grade, or using a tool called a priority matrix.

- The priority matrix included with this tool is what's called an **Action Priority Matrix**. It decides your priorities based on how much effort it takes you and how much impact the result has toward your goals. Your most time consuming assignments that take the most effort become your number one priorities, but it's good to keep an eye on your second category: those are quick, low-effort assignments that can boost your grade.

- The third and fourth categories offer low impact to your ultimate goals and generally anything that falls in the fourth category should end up 'dropping off' your list. Still, items that fall in the third category might be worth a little bit of your time: think non-graded review assignments or extra guidance from your professor. They may not impact your grade directly, but if you budget your time wisely, a quick low-effort session with them could contribute to a larger assignment's success.

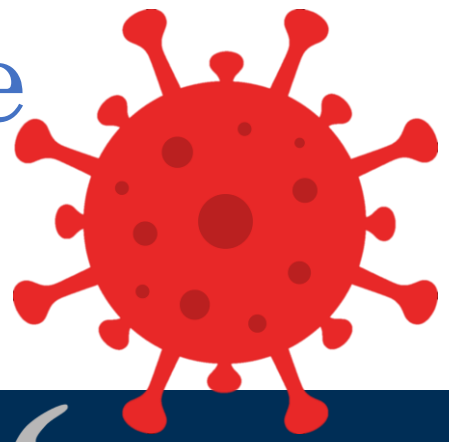


6. Once you have the entire semester laid out like this you can add each timeblock for each assignment into your November and December calendar tabs (and ultimately into whatever planner or calendar tool you use normally.)

6

You and the Pandemic

Sam Cross, Newbury Hall ARM



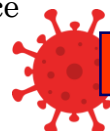
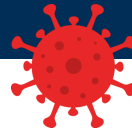
In the midst of a global pandemic, where do you fit in? The world outside is tumultuous, unrelenting, and harsh, but there's still a spot for you in it. This year has thrown a lot at us: a global pandemic, waves of protests and riots, and a presidential election. There were a lot of things that should have happened, but didn't: the Olympics, tons and tons of concerts, vacations, weddings, and a bunch of movies and TV shows that all got put on PAUSE. I'm sure there were things you were looking forward to that didn't happen. This year has tested our patience, endurance, and our limits of understanding one another.

Quarantine made a lot of people think twice about their lives. We have been stuck in our homes for months and months on end; we were left to do nothing but pick up new hobbies, shop online, and spend countless hours in front of the TV, remote in hand. I'm sure you know Netflix and Hulu's options by heart now or mastered the Instagram or TikTok algorithms. This quarantine proved itself boring for some – where does it stand for you?

This can be a time for purging yourself. It's a time to clear your energy and headspace and maybe even clean your room (which you've been *meaning* to get around to). The more time we spend at home, the more we have to take care of ourselves and our mind. Staying in one place for days and days can be challenging on the mind and heart. The saying, "Clean space,



This year has thrown a lot at us: a global pandemic, waves of protests and riots, and a presidential election... This year has tested our patience, endurance, and our limits of understanding one another.



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clean mind” is true. It’s easier to think when there is less meaningless stuff in your space and more meaningful belongings. Goodwill and Savers are still accepting donations, so you can donate your knickknacks and clothes there. Donating your possessions helps to save the Earth because you’re not chucking them into a landfill- you’re giving them a second life in the hands of someone less fortunate than you. If you go out to donate your possessions, make sure you wear a mask and ask for a tax slip!

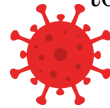
I think it would be wise to practice mindfulness, too. The semester is coming to a rapid close, and it might be stressful for some of you. I, myself, have been listening to guided meditations to help me wind down at night. It has helped me create peaceful dreams and a far more restful sleep. Exploring your mind,



through journaling or meditation, away from influence of the world, is a great resource for you to better understand your position in this pandemic. Quarantine is a perfect time to focus on yourself because you’re not running out everywhere like you used to. A trip to the store isn’t just a trip to the store anymore—now you have to think about who you’re with and who you want to see.



I encourage you to explore what you enjoy. There is a whole world of creative expression for you to see. Whether you enjoy written expression, artistic expression, dance, or even martial arts, it’s a good time to look up some tutorials on YouTube and spend your free time on you. The world will be waiting for you and everyone else when this time finally comes to a close.



7 Maintaining Good Habits with Distance Learning

Lizzie Hinds, Litchfield ARM



As this semester comes closer to ending, WCSU is preparing to close the year 2020 with completely virtual learning. After a semester of establishing and keeping up beneficial habits, routines, and study skills, what changes can we expect when reverting back to completely virtual learning? How can those same habits be maintained from home? For many students, learning has always been online, whether synchronous or asynchronous. For others, being on campus has been a reality this semester. These factors will make maintaining positive routines much easier, but not necessarily easy.

How do I Implement Good Habits at Home?

Just like you did on campus! With the knowledge you have of your class type (synchronous or asynchronous), you can map out your day just as you did on campus. Remember the importance of scheduling meal times, free time, and additional time to complete assignments. In order to keep up what has been started on campus, it is essential to also keep up with the necessary healthy habits to create productive time. What

will be most challenging is that the environment is no longer primarily academic. Students will be in their homes, with family, nearer to friends, and more prone to distractions.

How can this obstacle be overcome? Frankly, this will take significant self accountability, responsibility, and diligence. It is not the time to forget that the semester isn't over yet! Some guiding factors that can be relied upon are that plenty of assignments will be due, that final exams will take place, and that scheduled times of any synchronous classes are still there. These deadlines and class times will hold you to your responsibilities and minimize the distractions that may surround any student at any time. By staying up to date on all BlackBoard announcements, checking your WCSU email, and communicating with professors, staying on top of all the work will be a far less daunting task.



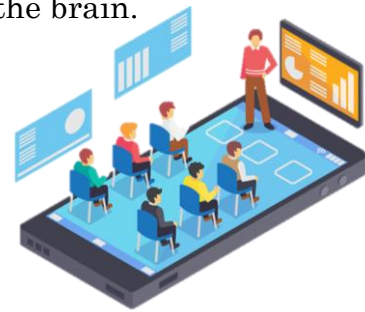
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What can I do to Help Myself?

First and foremost, create a space specifically for studying in wherever it is you're staying during the extended break. Just as you were encouraged to not do homework in bed at school, do not do it at home. Set up a space that holds all your materials ready and waiting, a space that is as quiet as possible, and a space that is as organized as possible. Once you have established this space, you can personalize it to your study habits. With the bare minimum of what is needed, you can add music if you listen to music while working, you can add personal items to your space if you work best in a more decorated environment, or you can add study aids or technology that assist you. By setting up and customizing this space, you are setting yourself up for success personally and academically.

Additionally, consider timing. Spending too much time on a computer, even if for academics, is not healthy. Fatigue and headaches will happen if too much time is spent staring at blue light. To prevent this, pace yourself. Ensure that there is enough time before a due date to work steadily at a major assignment without doing it in one sitting. Not only will this prevent the consequences of too much time sitting behind a computer, it will allow your brain to rest and enjoy other activities you enjoy. While our minds are fast, high functioning, key parts of our being, we cannot overuse them. Allow some time to breathe. Read for pleasure, go for a walk, or make a snack. These simple actions, in addition to many more that can be used, will help our minds function to the best of their abilities.

Lastly, keep your body healthy, just like your mind. Leaving campus does not mean disregarding COVID precautions. Remember to practice social distancing and wear your mask. Additionally, eat foods that will support you physically and mentally. Foods like blueberries, broccoli, eggs, and nuts have proven to boost memory and brain function. If coffee has been part of the routine thus far, keep it steady, don't increase it. During the holidays, it's perfectly acceptable to indulge, but don't forget about the extreme and significant connection between the body and the brain.



What if I Need Additional Help?

Adjusting back to completely remote learning can be hard, and it's natural to need some help. Know that until the semester ends, your Academic Resource Mentors are still here to support and guide you through! Likewise, maintaining communication with your professors will be of great importance. Not only do they provide instruction for each course, they also provide assistance. These are only two of the resources you can turn to even in a remote learning setting. Remember that it's not a bad thing to need or ask for help. Use your productivity and proactivity skills to reach out at the right time to ensure your success. By doing so, and by holding true to the wonderful habits created this semester, success is almost guaranteed.

About THE HANDOUT

The Handout is a product of the Department of Housing & Residence Life at Western Connecticut State University. There are 6 editions each year, 3 in the fall semester and 3 in the spring semester.

The ideas for and execution of the articles are the work of the Academic Resource Mentors, or ARMs, who provide academic coaching and resource referral to all members of the WCSU residence community.



Just a reminder that the
**Housing & Residence
Life offices are at
Westside.**

We're now in Pinney Hall, suites C21 and C24. Our phone numbers are the same, but you'll need to come to the Westside to see us! Please call ahead for an appointment.



Want to know more about campus resources and other advice to improve your academic life? You can check it all out on Gab & GROW, a weekly podcast you can find here:

www.wcsu.edu/housing/gab-grow/