

# Extension

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SPRING/SUMMER  
2013

# MATTERS

## Surviving College

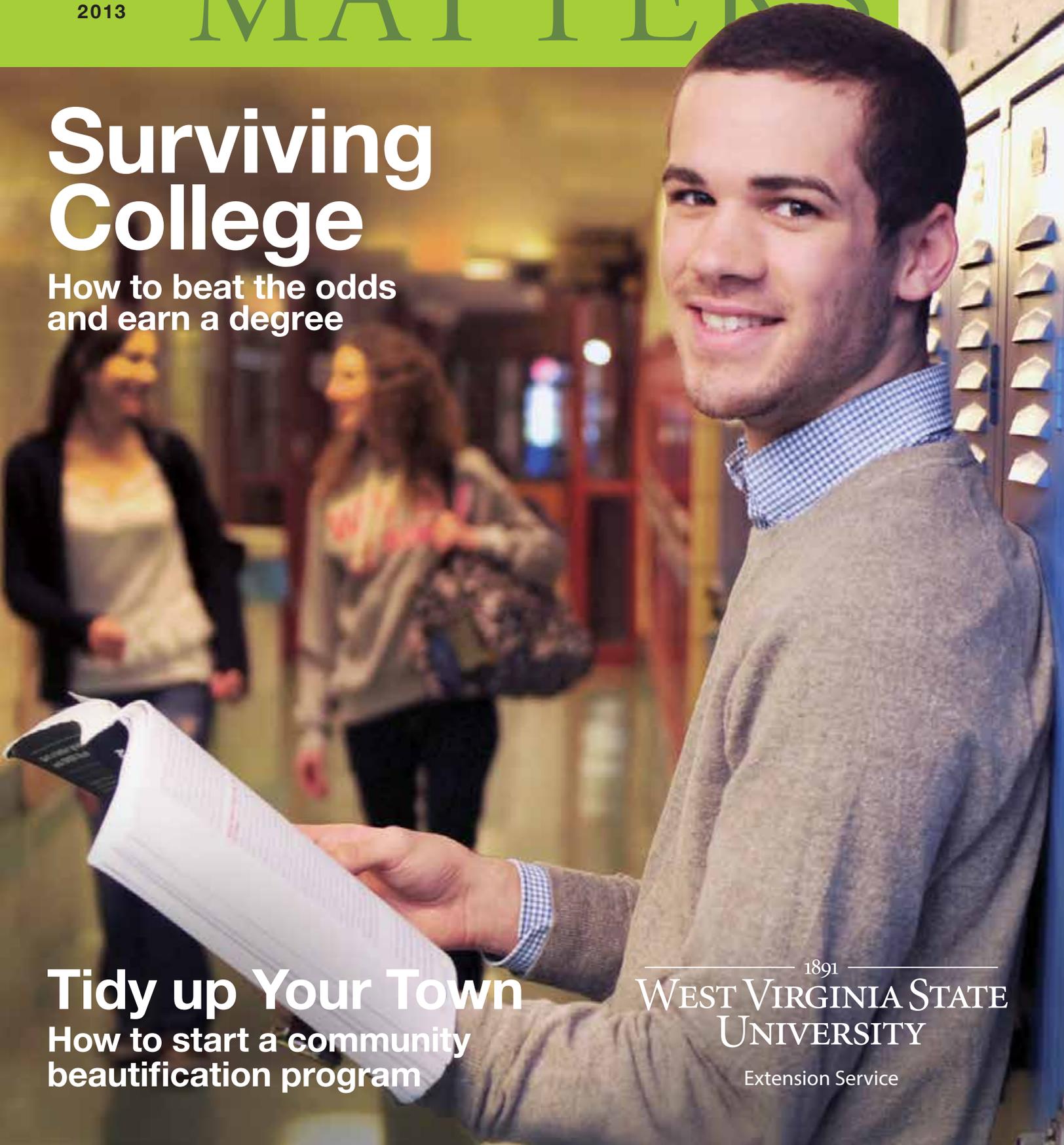
How to beat the odds  
and earn a degree

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# ~~THRIVING~~ Surviving in College:

## How to Beat the Odds and Earn a Degree

Danielle Metz  
HOUSE Program Coordinator  
dmetz@wvstateu.edu

*Every fall, students begin the exciting journey of heading off to college. Faced with increased independence and responsibility, the first year can be a difficult transition.*

According to American College Testing, one in four students leaves before completing their sophomore year, and half of freshmen will either quit altogether or complete their education elsewhere. The statistics are bleaker for first-generation students: 89 percent leave without a degree within six years (Greenwald, 2012).

Although intimidating, these statistics are not meant to prepare those considering college for failure. With a strong foundation, all students can be successful. The decisions made and the actions taken during the first year of college directly impact the remainder of the experience. Consider the following practices of successful students.





## Tour Campus

Many students never tour the college they plan to attend, only to end up miserable once there because it is a bad fit. Odds are if a student loves the city life, they are going to dislike being on a campus in the middle of nowhere.

Tours are often led by students to provide a more personal perspective than what is represented in university marketing.

This is a great way to learn more about the campus atmosphere or information such as what professors to take or where to find the best pizza.

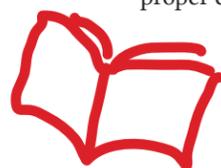
## Go to Class

Without the fear of detention or grounding, skipping an 8 a.m. class can be tempting. However, many schools have attendance policies, and some professors have even stricter ones themselves. Some will lower grades significantly for absenteeism; others remove absent students from class.

Missing once may not seem like much but can lead to falling behind. Professors move quickly and do not always follow the textbook. Useful information can also be missed, such as what to expect on tests, deadline changes, etc. Being present, interested and engaged as a student also helps build good relationships with professors, which could be useful in the future for career mentoring or job references.

## Be a Better Student

Making good grades takes more effort than it does in high school. Students should plan to study approximately two hours for each hour of class. This sounds like a lot, but it is better than pulling an all-nighter to *cram* what could have been *learned* in advance. One cannot procrastinate and catch up for exams.



Professors will not handhold through coursework and deadlines. They will usually give out syllabi to inform students of assignments and due dates for the entire semester. Students should invest in a planner or calendar, or set a smartphone reminder — whatever it takes to remember assignments.

## Seek Help Early

Many students wait until they are failing before they seek assistance, and by then it is often too late. Students should find help before failure, at the first sign of struggle.

Writing labs, tutors, study groups and counseling are available at colleges for free. Students that are doing well should utilize these also to help maintain grades. They may learn something and develop relationships in the process.

## Be Healthy

Many problems students encounter are associated with missing several classes due to illness, which causes them to struggle all semester. Fatigue and malnourishment increase the likelihood of sickness. Students should get adequate sleep, take vitamins, wash hands and eat right. In addition to a healthy diet, students should avoid the “freshman 15” by getting exercise, even if it is walking to class.

## Buy the Book

Students should get the books that professors require. Professors generally expect students to know book material for tests even if they did not cover it. Campus bookstores can be expensive. Books can be ordered or rented elsewhere, but one must make sure to have the correct ISBN so the proper edition can be found. Students should also



check that the estimated arrival date for shipped items has books arriving promptly for assignments.

## Maintain Financial Aid

Services are available to help, but it is the student’s responsibility to maintain their financial aid. Every student must reapply yearly by filing the FAFSA in January. They must also know if awards have requirements or restrictions, such as GPA, course hours, time limits, etc. Students can also seek out additional aid, such as to cover books or study abroad.

## Get a Job

Working provides extra money and makes students feel self-sufficient. It will also look good on future resumes, as employers seek experience. On-campus positions are most desirable as they work around students’ schedules and can require fewer hours. They may even include benefits such as free printing or food.

## Utilize Resources

Students are often not successful because they fail to take advantage of services available to them. Most universities provide academic assistance, health clinics, career centers and counseling services that are free to students. Some even offer childcare and special housing at a reduced cost for families.

## Build Faculty Relationships

Students should visit professors for assistance. Meeting also gives opportunities for them to get to know the student, which can be beneficial in the long-term. Professors will be more likely to assist with problems or give students the benefit of the doubt when their hard drive crashes if they

know the individual is hardworking and honest. Similarly, students should know their advisor. This person helps with anything involving classes, such as scheduling and conflicts.

## Get Involved

Many students feel homesick or feelings of not belonging. Joining a group, such as a club, fraternity/sorority, student government or intramural sport, can alleviate this. Even if a student lives off campus, they should stick around for more than just classes. Campuses have activities going on regularly. These events are great opportunities to meet people, learn and feel more connected to the college. However, students should not get so involved in campus life that they lose sight of why they are there: their education!

College is a challenge that will never be regretted once a degree is earned. Whatever a student does, they must strive to be receptive and enjoy the journey. It will not be easy, but every student should remember that they will get out of the experience what they invest into it. The decisions made in the beginning will help them to not only survive college, but to thrive in it.

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