

Cedric: Welcome to the Student Success Podcast. I'm Cedric, your host, and today we're tackling a topic that can make or break your semester: staying on track with a weekly schedule. Joining me today is someone who sees this struggle firsthand on campus. Let's welcome Elizabeth, a psychology major and soon to be graduate, who is planning to pursue a career in the advising field of Higher Education.

Elizabeth: Thanks, Cedric. I'm Elizabeth, and I'm a senior here at UMass Boston. When I'm not finishing up my own degree, I spend a lot of my time tutoring freshmen and sophomore students. One of the biggest issues I see with my mentees—and often the main reason they aren't as successful as they could be—is their ability to actually stick to a weekly schedule. It's so common that I actually reached out to some experts in the Instructional Design Program at UMB. They've built a whole website devoted to this very issue, and after discussing it with them, I have some great advice from their research to share.

Cedric: That's awesome, Elizabeth. It's great to have that UMB expert perspective. So, where do we even start? Why is it so hard to stay on track?

Elizabeth: The experts pointed out that we often start with unrealistic expectations. We create schedules that look perfect on paper but don't reflect our actual energy levels or habits. You have to be honest about how long tasks really take. Instead of planning massive four-hour study blocks, the sources suggest scheduling study time in smaller chunks and, most importantly, including buffer time between activities so you don't fall behind the moment one thing runs late.

Cedric: I definitely fall into the "long block" trap. What about timing? I'm much sharper in the morning than at night.

Elizabeth: That's actually a key strategy! You should identify your most focused times. If you're a morning person, schedule your heavy reading or complex assignments then. If you find your focus peaks in the evening, plan your toughest tasks for later. The advice I got was to track when you feel most productive during the week so you can plan your hardest work for those windows.

Cedric: That makes total sense—don't fight your own biology. But what about those massive, intimidating projects that we just keep pushing to "next week"?

Elizabeth: Procrastination usually happens because a task feels too big. The sources recommend breaking large tasks into smaller, manageable steps. You should divide projects into tiny tasks and then assign each specific step to a day

in your schedule. And don't forget to celebrate that small progress—it helps keep your motivation high for the long haul.

Cedric: I love the idea of celebrating the small wins. Now, when I look at a "busy" schedule, it's usually just a list of chores. Is that the right way to look at it?

Elizabeth: Not exactly. One of the most important things the UMB experts emphasized is building in time for self-care. A good schedule isn't just work; it must include sleep, meals, exercise, and social time. You need those breaks to decompress because they maintain the energy and focus you need to actually stay productive.

Cedric: So it's about a balanced life, not just a balanced to-do list. But what happens when life gets in the way?

Elizabeth: You have to expect your schedule to change. The experts told me that a schedule should be flexible, not rigid—think of it as a guide rather than a strict rule. You should review your schedule weekly and be ready to adjust when new commitments arise.

Cedric: Do they recommend any specific apps or planners to keep this all straight?

Elizabeth: They actually say the tool matters less than the habit. Whether you use digital calendars, task management apps, or old-school paper planners and sticky notes, the best system is simply the one you will use consistently.

Cedric: Consistency is key. Any final tips for students who want to start fresh next week?

Elizabeth: Just remember to reflect and adjust. At the end of the week, ask yourself what worked well and what felt overwhelming. Using that reflection to improve your schedule over time is the best way to stay on track.

Cedric: Thanks, Elizabeth. That is such practical advice for our UMB community and beyond.

Elizabeth: Happy to help. It's all about making the schedule work for you, not the other way around.