

Goal-Setting

By Michael Salmonowicz

The exciting (and challenging) thing about college is that you are starting from scratch. You have no commitments or predetermined destination. You can choose to study whatever you want, get involved in whatever you want, and be whoever you want. But how will you decide? And how will you stay on track?

One thing I have found helpful over the years is goal-setting. I think about how I want different aspects of my life to look in the future and then write down my ideas. I think goal-setting is useful because it helps you—while making decisions today—keep an eye on what you want to do in the future. Having goals can help you plan, keep you focused, and give you something to dream about. Keep in mind, however, that many of the goals you set now are likely to change! As I meet new people, learn more, and experience different things, I go back to my life goals and amend my previous ideas.

The following pages should help you begin to set some life goals. The first two pages include a list of guiding questions, that is, the things that you should probably think about when setting short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals. After that you'll find a sample of what a completed version would look like.

Before you get started, you may want to think about the following questions:

- ◆ What are my strengths? How did they become my strengths?
- ◆ What are my weaknesses? How did they become my weaknesses?
- ◆ How do I learn best?
- ◆ How do I work best?
- ◆ What are my non-negotiables that define who I am?

I hope you enjoy imagining all the possibilities that your future holds!

Life Goals Guiding Questions

Short-Term (first semester of college)

- How many hours per week will you study?
- How many hours per week will you work?
- How many hours per week will you spend on clubs/organizations?
- What would you like your first semester GPA to be? How will you achieve that GPA?
- What will you do to stay focused on your schoolwork?
- How will you deal with stress?
- How will you stay healthy?
- Other goals?

Intermediate (next 3.5 years of college)

- What clubs/organizations might you like to join?
- In what academic areas might you choose to major?
- Outside of your major, what topics/subjects would you like to learn about?
- Outside of campus, are there places near your school that you would like to visit?
- Assuming you leave the dorms after your sophomore year, where would you like to live during your junior and senior years? A house? An apartment? With a bunch of people you know? With one or two close friends?
- In what areas—both academically and personally—would you like to improve yourself over the next four years?
- What would you like your GPA to be at the end of your junior year? (If you plan to enter graduate school immediately after graduating, this GPA is the one that will end up on your application.)
- What would you like your GPA to be at the end of your senior year?
- What would you like your GPA to be in your major? (Graduate schools and programs like Teach For America will want to know your overall GPA, which includes prerequisites and electives, as well as your GPA in your major.)
- Other goals?

Long-Term (first 10 years after earning bachelor's degree)

- Educational
 - What degree(s) would you like to hold? In what fields?
- Economic
 - What would you like your annual salary to be?
 - How much money will you have invested for your retirement?
- Career
 - What kind of job(s) would you like to have? (Another way to think about this is, what job(s) do you think you would be excited about going to everyday?)
- Home/Family
 - Where would you like to live?
 - Would you like to be married? Have kids?
 - Would you like to have a pet?
- Personal
 - What are your fitness goals?
 - What are some things you might like to learn?
 - Where are some places you would like to go on vacation?
 - What are some fun things you would like to do?

Life Goals

Sample Finished Version

Short-Term (first semester of college)

- I've been told that you are supposed to study three hours for every one hour you're in class. But that would mean if I took 12 credits I would need to study for 36 hours per week! Instead of doing that, I plan to study for four hours each day (28 hours per week).
- I plan to work no more than 10 hours per week. If possible, however, I would rather wait until my second semester to start working. I don't know yet if my financial aid package will require me to do work-study during my first semester.
- I'm not sure how many hours per week I will spend with student organizations. It depends on how many I decide to join and how much I like them.
- I want my first semester GPA to be at least a 3.2. I will reach this goal by staying organized, studying every day, and not procrastinating. I want my GPA in future semesters to be higher, but I realize my first semester might be challenging as I adjust to college-level work.
- To stay focused on my schoolwork I will ask people in my classes if they want to form a study group. I also plan to stay focused on my schoolwork by becoming friends with people who are focused and staying away from people who don't take school seriously.
- If I am feeling really stressed out because of schoolwork or my hectic schedule, I will probably either go for a walk, take a short nap, or call up a friend to talk for a few minutes.
- I will stay healthy by eating three meals a day, getting at least eight hours of sleep per night, and going to the gym to exercise regularly. I might join a yoga class at the recreation center, and I also want to play intramural sports like flag football, ultimate frisbee, or basketball.

Intermediate (next 3.5 years of college)

- I think I want to write for the student newspaper, tutor students at a local elementary school, and be a part of student government.
- Possibilities for my major include history, economics, Spanish, and psychology. I might try to double major in history and economics.
- With all of the stories in the news about stem cell research, I think taking a few biology courses would be really interesting.
- I want to visit the state capital, and go hiking in the mountains that are two hours away from campus.
- During my junior and senior years it would be neat to live with the same group of 4-5 friends in a house.
- Academically, my writing could use some work. Also, I need to work on my debating skills because I can never think of the right thing to say when I disagree with someone. In terms of personal improvements, I want to become a better listener and start going to the gym three days a week.
- I want my GPA to be no lower than 3.3 by the end of my junior year. By the time I graduate I would like to have at least a 3.4 GPA. I would like my GPA in my major to be at least 3.5.

Long-Term (first 10 years after earning bachelor's degree)

- Educational
 - In May 2015 I want to have my bachelor's degree; I don't know what my major will be, though. After I graduate I would like to work for two years and then spend the next three years in law school.
- Economic
 - I would like to make at least \$45,000 per year during the two years I work after graduation. That way, I can pay most of my student loans before starting law school. During each of the two years I work, I want to put at least \$3,000 into a Roth IRA (Individual Retirement Account). I would like to earn at least \$80,000 per year during my first five years out of law school. By 2025 I would like my salary to be at least \$125,000 per year. I want to invest 15% of my salary each year into an IRA; with compounding interest, I hope to have \$1 million saved for my retirement by age 40.
- Career
 - If I major in economics, I would like to work for the state or federal government as a policy analyst. If I major in history, I would like to join Teach for America and teach eighth-grade social studies. I would really enjoy either of these jobs after I graduate. After law school I would like to work for a large law firm in the area of corporate litigation. I also want to spend as much time as possible doing pro bono work. If I was a lawyer, I think I would be excited to go to work each morning.
- Home/Family
 - After I graduate in 2015, I would like to move to Washington, DC, Atlanta, or Los Angeles. I will probably live in an apartment until I finish law school and get more settled. At some point after I graduate from law school I want to get married and have two or three kids. I would like to buy a house and live in the suburbs outside of Atlanta, or some other big city in the South. As long as my house has a big, fenced in yard, I want to have one or two medium-sized dogs.
- Personal
 - I would like to run a marathon, go on a camping trip, go to Times Square in New York City for New Year's Eve, and take a trip to Europe and visit England and France. I also want to go scuba diving, learn how to play chess, take a ride in a hot air balloon, read every book that Toni Morrison has written, and see a play on Broadway.