From Dean of Undergraduate Studies Jeffrey Wolcowitz...

Using the Drop/Add Period Wisely

Welcome back to the start of a new semester at CWRU!

I hope that the holiday break provided an opportunity to reconnect with family and friends, perhaps a bit of travel to new places, time to read a good (or perhaps a trashy) book or to see a good (or not-so-good) movie. Most importantly, I hope you returned to campus refreshed and excited to set off on new academic adventures, balanced by engagement in extra- and co-curricular activities on campus and in the surrounding neighborhoods.

I encourage you to make good use of the two-week drop/add period that begins the new semester. While most of you selected spring courses back in November, this is a good time to take stock of whether these still make sense and whether you should make adjustments based on new interests, outcomes from the fall that were less good than you anticipated, or your first experiences in the courses you selected. In many majors, there are well-established pathways and sequences of courses that leave little choice in your course selections. However, there are areas of the curriculum, be they particular majors, general education breadth requirements or open electives, that offer a great deal of flexibility. Use the first week of the semester to try out different courses to find those that best match your interests, your learning style, and your other academic commitments in terms of when assignments are due and exams will occur. We want you to make the most of your CWRU education, so seek out unusual combinations of courses that will provide you with a unique outlook on the world. Consider courses that will prepare you to be engaged members of your community, as well as those that will advance your career. There is a wealth of course offerings out there. I urge you to be an engaged shopper and find those that suit you best.

Part of your review of your spring semester schedule should include a reassessment of whether the schedule you have put together is manageable. A manageable schedule is one that allows you to complete your work in a timely fashion, while also providing sufficient time to drift off into additional reading about topics that have piqued your interest, to engage in extra- and co-curricular activities, and to maintain a healthy lifestyle by eating meals on schedule, exercising, getting sufficient sleep, and relaxing with friends. Review your course syllabi carefully to understand fully what is expected of you. You may want to review once again your course selections with your advisor. And keep in mind that a student can make good progress through our curriculum with a schedule that includes 14 to 17 credit-hours during a semester. (You have heard me on this topic in the November newsletter, but you can find that essay again at http://issuu.com/gjh45/docs/cwru_ugs_newsletter_nov_2013_final.)

The start of the semester is also a good time to complete a planner with a schedule of exams and assignments. Be sure to double-check that schedule once you have completed it and update it as new information becomes available in your courses. There is little that I or my colleagues in Undergraduate Studies can do when a student misses an exam because she or he thought it was scheduled for a different date.

Finally, use the first weeks of the semester to think about the various resources available at CWRU where you can turn for help of various kinds should your courses not go as well as you hope or should life sneak up on you in unexpected ways. In some cases, you may know from experience that it will be helpful to identify a tutor from the start or that you should establish a relationship with someone in the
University Counseling Services or ESS. In other cases, it may be sufficient to know what resources are available and to think through in advance how you will know when it is time to engage those resources. What grades or what behaviors on your part will trigger stepping forward and asking for help?

All of us in Undergraduate Studies wish you a successful spring semester. We stand ready to help in any way that we can.

Let me know what you think. You can write to me at jeffrey.wolowitz@case.edu.