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## The Art of War For Pre-Med Penguins

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# THE ART OF WAR FOR FRESHMEN PRE-MED PENGUINS

Elyza Genilo

Organismal Biology: Mon/Wed, 8am; General Chemistry I: Tues/Thurs, 8am; Bio Methodology & Research: Fri, 8am. Great, you think to yourself, all 8am classes from Monday-Friday, a 17 unit workload that also includes College Algebra and Statistics for Health Sciences. This is what your college days will be like for the next four years as a pre-med student. How do you think you will survive? How will you be able to enjoy the college life—independence, new experiences, and especially parties—if you have math problems to do and quizzes to study for every night? How will you balance being a social college student with being a good enough student to get into Harvard Med? To finish your freshman year with a high GPA, find trustworthy classmates you can work with, and create memories to last you a lifetime, you should be mindful of the following guidelines (inspired by Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*): reevaluate your career goals, decide wisely when to study and when to party, and share your knowledge with your colleagues.

Sun Tzu says, "...the operations of war...will reach the total of a thousand ounces of silver a day" (9). The road towards this career path takes years, is emotionally and intellectually exhausting, and is very expensive. So, you really should question if being a doctor is what you truly want to do. At DU, more than half of declared science majors end up switching because they are simply not up to the challenge. Of the 20 biology graduates in 2009, only one is still on the medical school route. Really try to evaluate yourself and ask why you want to do this, because by the time you graduate from DU, you will probably be >\$60k in debt, with an additional >\$100k after medical school. Aside from the cost, the volume of material you have to learn is greater than any other major. Your brain will hurt, your spirits will be crushed, and you have to improve every day. The amount of time you study out of the classroom should be significant, so if you are not willing to invest this much time (or money) into your studies, change majors now!

Sun Tzu says that "He will win who knows when to fight and when not to fight" (15). Most college freshmen—no matter what major—do stupid things: party every night, binge drink, skip classes. Eventually, their 2.0 GPAs can land them in academic probation and to an eventual dismissal from DU. Despite the desire to party like your (insert non-pre-med major here) friends, medical schools take into account your freshman year GPA, so be mindful of your grades. There is absolutely nothing wrong with going to parties: it is essential that you do go out and have fun with your new friends who you can end up having lifelong personal and/or professional relationships with. Sun Tzu says, "He will win who, [is] prepared himself" (15), so never lose focus on

your grades. Remember, your parents sent you to an expensive private school to prepare you for medical school. In addition, when you do have fun with your friends, be mindful of your behavior (example: do not try to steal a Christmas nutcracker from Bon Appetite and drunkenly shoot at it). Also, don't get drunk enough to the point of stupidity: DU is small and the whole school will know your dirty little secrets. Worse than that, your friends will post up your embarrassing photos of you on the internet, which medical schools can easily see.

Sun Tzu says, "We cannot enter into alliances until we are acquainted with the designs of our neighbors" (38). Be open to collaboration, but be very mindful of who you decide to collaborate with. You will spend 75% of your classroom time with the same people, so naturally, study groups and lab partnerships will form. You will encounter colleagues who will not contribute anything, depend on you to do the work for them, and show no initiative to ask questions if they are confused—be all around useless, basically. Be wary of these "academic moochers" who depend on you for their grade and do not carry these people. Instead, collaborate with peers who bring new ideas to the table and have a genuine interest in learning and doing well in the class. These are the type of people you can depend on for study groups or labs, and they can be a great source for networking opportunities in the future. Furthermore, do not tolerate any form of cheating. Not only is it unbecoming, it will hurt you big time when you take the MCATs.

Life as a pre-med major is very hard, and many freshmen end up losing their focus early in their undergraduate years, which can significantly alter their chances of getting accepted into medical school. For your freshman year, remember the outlined guidelines: reevaluate yourself, focus on your grades, have fun without being stupid, and work selectively with your classmates. (Note: when you progress to sophomore year, you will have a longer set of guidelines to survive that year). Remember, despite the amount of hard work and focus it actually takes to survive your first year in any major, (or all four years of college for that matter), it really is important to have time to yourself and enjoy life outside of the classroom. College is the time to learn as much as you can, experience new things, and strive towards independence, so enjoy your college experience here at DU!

## References

Tzu, S. (2007). *The Art of War*. Filiquarian