Welcome everybody and my name's Christine Connerly, I'm the coordinator of the Student Learning Center. I've been teaching study skills for many years. I also tend to be a procrastinator as I think most people are at one time or another. So this is actually one of my favorite workshops to do, Avoiding Procrastination because I think it's something that everybody does. I don't know of anybody who has not put something off at one time or another. It's very unlikely that you haven't done that. And so we're going to talk about some different ways to try to avoid procrastination and some things you can do to manage your time a little better and do some things I think you might not even expect would be coming up in a workshop. So we'll talk about some tips here and if you have any questions along the way, let me know, we have some interactive things that will be happening. We're also taping this to put online so just ignore the camera like I'm trying to do right now.
Okay this quote is a quote from my son's high school English teacher and I really like it, procrastination is not your friend. He will whisper sweetly into your ear offering tantalizing games and adventures and then in your hour of greatest need, 11:00 p.m. the night before the paper is due, he will abandon you, leaving you to wallow in steaming pools of regret... pools formed from tears of remorse and the sweat of panic as you ruefully peck away at the keyboard into the sad, wee hours.

~Craig Matthews, Chico High English Teacher
Here's another quote I really like, don't do today what you can put off until hell freezes over. And I like this one too, I like deadlines, I love deadlines, I like the whooshing sound they make as they fly by.
So what is procrastination? How do you define procrastination?
Student: Waiting till the last minute to do something.

Presenter: Waiting till the last minute to do something, that's definitely the big one that we all think of. Is there anything else that you would say? Yeah?

Student: Putting something off.

Presenter: Just putting something off because you'd rather be doing something else, like zombies something, somebody mentioning something about zombies. And here's the definition for it, more formal definition. To voluntarily delay intended course of action despite expecting to be worse off for the delay. So even though you know it's going to be the wrong thing to do, it's still, you still tend to do it sometimes. It happens to everybody.
So what I'm going to do is give you a little survey here, a little procrastination survey and have you fill it out and we can talk about it when you're -- Just the fact of knowing why you procrastinate may help you think a little bit about some of the reasons why and then you can also think about what you might do differently. Hopefully I've got enough of these. Let's see, plenty. Those people online, the survey should be available for them to take it during this time.

[Silence Take some time to take the Survey]

Okay, looks like most of you have done, gotten through most of these. So which of the one of these, which one's of these stick, stood out to you the most as things that right away you thought, oh yeah, that's definitely me?

Student: Working well under pressure.

Presenter: Working well under pressure, that's the one I think that a lot of people say. And I love what it says on the back, on this one, it says, you might, you may think that you work best under pressure but may have never examined the quality of your work while not under pressure. It's often the case that people haven't really tried to do it on time and they use that kind of a way to motivate themselves, oh yeah, yeah, I work best under pressure. Which can be true, a little bit of stress does actually motivate you to do things and to do it a little bit better sometimes, to step it up a little. However, sometimes we underestimate how much time we actually need and we end up not doing our best work because we don't have enough time to do it. So that's definitely one that stands out to everybody. And I hear that a lot, people saying, oh I work well under pressure. And anything else that stood out to people?

Student: Losing motivation in the middle of a task.

Presenter: Losing motivation in the middle of a task. There's other things that distract you, other things that come up that you would rather be doing. Let's see, what does it say about that one, that's the number ten? Yeah, it says, it's definitely if it's a long tedious task, it's definitely very difficult to, to hang in there with it. And the way to do that of course and we're going to talk about this a little bit more, is to try to break it up into smaller bits so you can actually do a piece, kind of give yourself some sort of a reward for finishing that piece and then move onto the next piece instead of having this big giant task. Because sometimes it just seems too overwhelming so we'll talk about some ways to do that. So feel free to read the, the answers on the back, the different answer keys. Is there, is there anything else that anybody else wanted to talk about before we move on? Okay, let's move on then.
So creating new habits is always a challenge. When people say, oh I'm going to, it's like New Year's Resolutions, I'm going to lose weight, I'm going to get in shape, I'm going to go to the gym every day. I've noticed I've heard that the WREC center was very, very popular at the beginning and now that the pressure of school is and social life is kind of coming up people are not, the attendance has gone down quite a bit. Still pretty busy certain times of the day but it's definitely not as busy as it was. So getting at yourself to form new habits can be really challenging. And but however, if you do have successful results from doing something, then it tends to motivate you to want to keep going. So anything you can do to help create a cycle of success is going to help you keep, change your habit and create a more positive habit.
Avoiding Procrastination

So basically if you can structure something when you start a project, structure it so that your early efforts lead to success. So that whatever the first step is is something that you do well. This is, kind of goes along with the saying that I'm, when you're doing a test, you should probably do the easy ones first, start with the ones that you know because that way you feel more confident and it builds confidence and it makes you want to keep going. So do something that you can do, that you know you can accomplish first. Taking small steps in an easy or safe environment really helps and hopefully that will be very motivating for you.
So what I'd like you to do right now is think of a goal that you'd like to accomplish, something that you know that you need to do. Perhaps you have a project due or a major test coming up, something like that or maybe it's something more, getting a job application in, something like that. And think of a goal that you have and what would be the first step in doing that. Has everybody got something? Okay, does anyone want to share what their goal is? No?

Student: I have a test coming up.

Presenter: Okay, you have a test coming up. In what class?

Student: Nutrition.

Presenter: In nutrition. And what, what would be the first step that you could do to --

Student: Getting all my notes together.

Presenter: Okay, collecting your notes. Now that's a very achievable thing and that's actually an excellent first step to think about. So now what I want you to think about is, what would it feel like to actually do that? Would you feel like you've made a, made some progress? Do you think that would be rewarding?

Student: [Inaudible]

Presenter: Okay, somewhat motivating maybe? Even just to have the notes together in one place would be very motivating. So that's the kind of thing that I'm talking about. Thinking about not just, okay, I need to study for six hours for the test, that sounds really daunting. But if you talk about just collecting the notes together and maybe going through them and marking the, the main things that you're going to need to know, that sounds much more achievable than I need to study for six hours for a test or something like that so, all right.
Another good way to, good tip for working on changing your habit is to schedule a small task for a specific time of day. For example, right a to-do list at a certain time every day, a little, a quick list. Does anybody do this with their phone or some people actually put in things in their phones, do you do that?

Student: Well not in my phone, I [inaudible]

Presenter: Awesome, I think a white board works extremely well for this because it's big and visual and you can actually see it. So that's an excellent to do it. Anybody else write things down in a planner or, okay?

Student: I have a white board also.

Presenter: Awesome.

Student: Big calendars [inaudible]

Presenter: Great, yeah big calendars that you can see on the wall help a lot and you --

Student: I just stick it my phone usually it warns me three or four days in advance.

Presenter: That's great, yeah, yeah and especially moving the due dates stuff like that to have things give you a little advance warning a few days in advance, that's very helpful. So if you're actually scheduled to do something at a certain time each day and you wait until that time to do it, it becomes a routine, it becomes a habit and then it becomes easier to do it. It's just like automatic, you know that when you go to get that morning cup of coffee or whatever, that you're going to also do your to do list at that time. And if you'd stick to that for two months, they say that's about how long it takes for you to actually become, for it to become a habit and to be doing something that you do every day. Okay.
So as I mentioned before, if you break tasks into small bits instead of all at once, you know, some big giant task it's definitely less daunting. Break things down into smaller pieces.
So like if you schedule your work and study time and work day and study time and right a to do list everyday as I mentioned before, you prioritize the list, what's the most important thing to do. But start, the first thing you want to do is what's achievable? Something very much that you can do so you can actually have that satisfaction of crossing that off. And that's one of the best things of having a to do list, I actually have on my Outlook, Microsoft Outlook, a little task bar that comes up every day that tells me what I need to do and if I can click those things completed at the end of the day, it's like, yeah this is awesome, I can, I feel so satisfied. I know if you can cross something off on a big white board I bet that's extremely satisfying and motivating to say, oh yeah, I got something done. So you can start with completing an achievable item and cross that off the list and then start on the most important item, it's going to help you want to keep going.
Another trick that you can use is to actually associate a new habit with an old one. And so if you drink coffee, the first cup of the day would be a perfect time to start writing down your priority list and write down your to do list. So if you associate something that you have that you do as a habit every day, it's like okay, I'm going to check my Facebook, check everybody's status or something like that and right after that I'm going to do my to do list. I mean let's face it, we all do that first thing in the morning. So and actually if you associate something like that with something positive that you enjoy, that's a habit, it's going to create a neuro-connection that's going to make you want to keep doing that.
Another thing you can do is to keep track of your success. And if you do break your routine, this is what we tend to do when we break the routine is say, oh day, it was a stupid thing and I'm not going to do it anymore, or we just say, you know, I'm just not going to keep this up. But just start over, if you say you kind of get down on yourself, oh I suck, I'm really terrible, I shouldn't give up so easily, but just start over. Just let it, let it go, let the fact that you broke the routine go and start over.
Another really helpful thing is to think about somebody in your life that you would consider a role model, someone who does manage their time well. Does everybody have somebody that they can think of right off the bat? Another, this guy's shaking his head, is he in your fraternity [laughing] that means that one of you are role models for him, this is, this is bad [laughing], that's why you're all here [laughing]. And so you definitely want to think of somebody in your life, maybe it's a family member or a professor or someone, someone who can actually serve as a role model for you and think about what they do and that helps a lot. Maybe it's someone famous that you know. You could actually ask somebody for advice about what works for them. Usually there's somebody in your classes or someone you can for, you know, how do you manage your time so well, how do you always get A's on these tests, things like that.
Obviously your planners your friend, how many of you have a planner? Okay thank for holding up the visual image of the planner, excellent. Your planner is definitely your friend. I just, my son's just starting at View College this semester and I just got him a planner, now the next step is getting him to actually start writing things down in it. Because actually writing things down helps you focus on what it is you need to do and actually writing it down also increases the likelihood that you're actually going to do it because you put it in writing and that actually makes you commit to doing it. Putting things down also helps free your mind up so you're not waking up in the middle of the night thinking, oh dang, I didn't do this or first thing in the morning, oh crap, I didn't do this, you know. So this way you write things down it's out of your mind and it's onto the paper and you don't have to carry it around in your head anymore along with all the other clutter that's in there. So it's very important to try to use that planner as much as possible.
And I mentioned before, breaking down assignments. There's some really good tools for this that are available. If you're writing a paper, instead of thinking I have a six page paper to write or a four page paper to write, think, schedule separate due dates. I'm going to have my topic done by this date, I'm going to have my sources together by this date. So instead of just thinking of the date the paper is due, break it into smaller due dates along the way.
And there's an excellent resource online that I just love, it's the University of Minnesota library's assignment calculator. So if the date that you were going to start an assignment was today and does anybody have an assignment that's due, a paper that's due? What's the due date?

Student: The 2nd.

Presenter: The 2nd, November 2nd? Okay.

Student: That's what [inaudible].

Presenter: Okay.

Student: The 9th of [inaudible] November.

Presenter: The 9th of November? Okay, so what's the, what's the class that it's for?

Student: Law.

Presenter: Okay, like business law or?

Student: Construction law.

Presenter: Oh, construction law, okay. See if the have construction law in here. Construction management, we'll go with that.
Okay, so they, this is, this actually breaks it down so this gives you a really good way to sort of be able to do this on, with some help and by today you should understand your assignment, by tomorrow hopefully select and focus your topic, by and also write a working thesis and design a research strategy, that's all by tomorrow and then find, review and evaluate books by Friday if you have a big research project to do.
By Monday look at journal magazines, newspaper articles, find and review, evaluate Websites, outline and design overall structure. By Tuesday kind of start with an outline, a general idea of what you're going to write.
Write the first draft by Wednesday November 4th, conduct additional research as you might need if there's other stuff that you can, that you need, revise and then rewrite and then put the paper in the final form. So I like this because it actually helps you sort of figure out what steps might actually be needed. A lot their, the resources that you can click on to this are related to University of Minnesota but it does help you see at least how to break the assignment down which is an extremely valuable thing. Because sometimes it's like, well you don't really know even what steps you need to take. So I, I encourage you to use this site and I can email the PowerPoint to you if you're interested afterwards or email the site to you.
Some guidelines that Dr. Patterson and the Wellness Center likes to recommend. When you're writing a paper to allow a day per page plus two not including the day the paper is due. So that if you have a four page paper, you're going to start six days before the paper is due minimum which is a great way to do it because then you're breaking it down into smaller bits instead of that, I work great under pressure and trying to do it all the day before or the day the paper is due. And also he has a similar type of system for studying for exams, a day per chapter plus two, not including the day of the exam. So a four page paper or a four chapter test, you would start six days ahead of time. And that way you're spending maybe a shorter amount of time each day instead of freaking out and really stressing out the last day. I love this and it gives you plenty of time too if you need to come and see a writing tutor or you need to have somebody else review your paper, you've got time to do it or if you need to adjust your study strategy because you realize there's a whole lot of stuff somehow spaced over in class or don't know then this gives you time to really focus on it.
Another thing that's extremely important and this is probably something that we tend to, you think maybe that you schedule fun but a lot of times what you're doing is going out and having fun without really scheduling it and then you're feeling guilty because you should be doing something else. So if you schedule your fun, you're actually more likely to do something that you need to do if you know that you have something fun to anticipate later. When you're actually trying to anticipate pleasure instead of trying to avoid pain, you're far more likely to actually do the thing that, that isn't, you know, eat your broccoli so you can have your desert kind of thing.
It's also, like if you're writing down in your planner something or on your big white board something difficult or boring, make sure that you schedule something that you're actually going to look forward to, some sort of a reward. So after, you know, I'm going to watch my favorite TV show, I'm going to visit a friend, I'm going to call somebody, go have some ice cream, spend some time on Facebook. Of course my younger son who's in high school right now, this, I'm sure none of you do this, he's sitting there working on his homework, he's got his computer up, he's got his iTunes going, he's got his My Space and his Facebook on at the same time. And you know, he would be texting but we don't get any cell phone reception in Forest Ranch otherwise he would be texting as well I'm sure. Does that sound familiar to anybody? Is anybody? It's very, very challenging to try to multitask like that. If you can try to break something down and say, okay, once I get this piece done then I'm going to go look at this. It maybe motivates you to try to get through the assignment piece first. One of the student's that came to a workshop I did recently said that one of the things he does is plans to go to a computer lab or somewhere where he can't open up the sites that are distracting, he can't go to You Tube or Facebook or My Space or any of those and then he can actually work on his homework at those, those places in some of the computer labs. So he finds that much more helpful.
Another thing that I'm going to recommend that you might not assume that would be something I would recommend but it's really important and college students tend to not do this very often, do nothing. Plan to spend a few minutes every day not doing anything and by that I mean, no cell phone, no TV, no computer, no technology, unplug yourself from all technology and just spend a little bit of time to just sit quietly and breathe. That's good too but breathing is something that we actually don't do a lot of sometimes. You see people walking around, it used to be everybody was always on their phone and now they seem to be more texting. I saw a student a few weeks ago sitting in a tutoring session for chemistry and there were four or five people in the session and she was sitting there the whole time texting, I don't think she heard a single word, I don't even know why she bothered to come to tutoring. And she walked out of the, the tutoring session and she was still just texting away so, you know, trying to unplug yourself from being completely available to everybody else. Taking a little time to actually just decompress, gives you mind a little chance to actually think of things that, to just calm down, clear your mind so that you can actually focus on doing what you need to do later. I find that walking down to the little bowl by the creek behind the physical sciences building, that's a really good place to do this, just watch the creek for a little while. We still have some beautiful trees with leaves on them that are falling; just spending a little bit of time clearing your mind is very helpful.
Another thing that I think is the most underrated study skill is sleep. Students tend to not get enough sleep. Does anyone here feel like they get enough sleep? Okay good, a few of you do. It tends to be one, one of two things. They either don't get enough sleep or they tend to use sleep as a way, because sometimes they sleep a little too much especially on the weekends. My kids tend to sleep in a lot on the weekends but they also tend to stay up most of the night so. I have two teenage sons so. All right being too tired is often a common reason to procrastinate. You're too tired to do anything so I'm just going to take a nap. So getting, if you get enough sleep, you know, it increases the likelihood that you're going to get your studying done and going to be more energetic and do a better job.
Also really important to try to eat regularly and these things may not seem to be really due to procrastination but a lot of times you're not eating, you're not sleeping and you're not, you're so plugged in and your mind is buzzing all the time from all your interconnected activities, you can't think straight, you can't figure and focus on what you need to focus on. The reason I put up here to maintain energy, to study and also to avoid fainting because many times in the student learning center several times during finals week we've had students right in the middle of a tutoring session just slump off a chair and faint because they haven't eaten for several days, they didn't get to the grocery store, they've been too busy to focusing on studying so. Hard to believe but it does happen periodically. We've had to call the 911 and have somebody come in and give them applesauce or something. It's happened, my, my husband works in the library and he said one day somebody actually fell flat on his face and hurt his nose because he passed out from not eating for several days. The other problem is that sometimes they're trying to substitute things like Red Bull instead of food which is not a real healthy way to go. It may help you with you with your mind of energy, short, quick short term energy but it's not going to help you in the long run. So if you try caffeine it's only going to give you some short term results and, has anybody tried to sort of fuel up on Red Bull and, yeah, how did that work for you?

Student: Worked good. Short term, worked great. I do it every morning and it wakes me up.

Presenter: Okay and, you know, and, and I think that's fine but I have a couple students that worked here one, once finals week they had been basically living on nothing but Red Bull for a couple days, they were giggling nightmares. They were just like rolling around, laughing and it was, it was bizarre.

Student: I feel that [inaudible] it helps you like if you have a long like lab or a test, it helps you focus anyway.

Presenter: I think the energy drinks have their place but I think that they sometimes can be overused a little bit. One time I was actually doing a session, a study skill session, workshop over in the library and I had these two girls walk in with little backpacks and they're like, can I energize your class? And they had Red Bull's, Red Bull things that they were giving out free samples. Believe me the participation level went way up in that section, they were like bouncing off the walls, it was great, lively. Make sure that you eat a fairly balanced meal as much as you can.
Another quote I like, anyone can do any amount of work providing it isn't the work she is supposed to be doing at that moment. I think we've all sort of found that it's easy to do something like, oh I'm going to actually go wash my dishes because you'd far rather do that then study. A lot of times peoples rooms get real cleaned during finals week because it's actually something that sounds really awful normally, sounds kind of appealing compared to, to studying sometimes. I like this one too, I like work, it fascinates me, I can sit and look at it for hours. That would probably be my older son, he likes, he's pretty not, not real into doing work.
It's also really important as I mentioned earlier to sort of try to switch between fun and boring projects. If there's something that you're working on that you actually enjoy, that's a little bit more enjoyable, try to switch between something a less enjoyable and something more enjoyable. It's also helpful to try to study with a friend, not any friend, but a friend who will help keep you on track. And we all know there are two types of study partners. One that's fun to study with and then there are people that are productive to study with. So try to focus on the people that are productive to study with. Also set a reasonable specific goal for each study session. When you sit down to study, actually set a goal for that study session. What are you going to do, what are you going to accomplish? Because sometimes you just sit down and you go, oh I'm going to study but you don't have any idea what it is you want to accomplish or how much time you want to accomplish it in. If you have a finish line to know when you've actually reached your goal, say it's like 4:33 and you're going to start studying for something and you're going to be done by 6:00 or 5:30. Let's say that you say I'm going to complete X amount of pages in that amount of time, I'm going to read X amount of pages. And if you set a goal, you're finally likely to actually work a little bit more quickly then if you don't. If you just kind of just say, I'm just going to do it, you know, and it just kind of rolls along and you don't really, really get yourself organized to do it.
So which is more active? Read 20 pages of Chapter four in your history textbook or create ten flash cards for words in bold in your Chapter four of your history textbook? Which is more specific here and active? Yeah?

Student: Ten flashcards.

Presenter: Ten flashcards, so if you do something that's more specific then just read, reading is a very vague term so if you talk about I'm going to underline, I'm going to pull out the bold words or I'm going to do two pages of notes, that actually helps you be more specific and get more done during your study sessions. And it's far better to do that then to try to read something without underlining, without taking notes and then you have to go back and reread it because you realize that you've just read like five pages and have no idea what you just read. I think everybody's had that experience too where you've read a few pages and it didn't, it didn't sink in.
Now if all else fails, there's a few little tips here. You can fool yourself, move your due dates up, tell yourself that you're papers and things are due actually earlier than they actually are. Another thing you can do is just say, I'm just going to do this for ten minutes, I'm just going to, you know, ten minutes I'm going to start and that's all I'm going to do. And once you've done ten minutes, you might actually feel like doing a little more but if you just tell yourself it's just ten minutes, it sounds doable, it sounds like something you can get started with. Another thing is to just gather the materials. That's why I really like what you said about getting, collecting your notes as a first step for starting to study for an exam. I'm just going to collect the materials and put them in front of me. Maybe once they're in front of you, you're going feel like actually getting started and doing something but it's something that's very achievable. You can also say I'm just going to survey the notes or the chapter. I'm just going to look things over a little bit and get some general ideas. Not necessarily, because sometimes I think our minds tend to, to rebel if it's like, oh I'm going to read this, yeah I'm going to have to spend like three hours reading this chapter in political science and I just don't want to do it. If you just say, I'm just going to survey it and look at it and get an idea of it before the lecture, it's a lot easier to do. And the last thing is to just take one step, I'm going to just do one thing. And maybe if you do one thing, it motivates you to want to take the next step. But if you just sort of break things down a little bit, it helps your mind adjust.
Let’s start NOW:

- Write down 3 important items you need to do this week and prioritize them
- Write down the date and time you will do each of these items

So I'm going to actually ask you to do this. I want you to write down three important items that you need to do this week and prioritize them. Does anybody need any paper? I've got little cards you can use.

[ Background noise ] Here you go, if you need them. It's kind of nice to do this on little cards because then you actually post these cards or carry them around with you, put them in your back pocket.

[ Silence ] Three things that you need to do and then most important, second most important, and last most important.

[ Silence ] They may not all be school related.

[ Silence ] So what I'd like you do next to that is to write down the date and the time that you're going to do each of these things. I want you to make a commitment here.
[ Silence ] And once you've got a date and time, the last thing I'd like you to do is to write down a name of a person that you will think will help hold you accountable to get these things done. Somebody that you know that you can let them know, I've got to do these things and they will make sure that you did it. Maybe your mom, maybe a friend, maybe a teacher, whoever.

[ Silence ] A lot of times in these study skills workshops so much of it is just giving out advice, you know, like sort of like eat your vegetables, get enough sleep all those sort of thing. But actually getting some, getting yourself to change habits and do something is the most powerful way to make a difference in how you approach your study habits. So make sure you ask this person to help keep you on task and get things done. And then start with whatever's the most important, the number one item on your list to make sure you start with that. Okay. You're all organized for the week now right?
And the last thing I want you to do is actually write down what you're going to do to reward yourself when you complete these tasks. What are you going to do to celebrate your accomplishment? Hopefully it's something legal. But I'm not going to ask. [Silence] Okay some people are getting really into this, oh I'm going to do this, I'm going to [inaudible] my friend looking at that.
[ Silence ] Procrastination, I'll find a picture for this poster later.
Avoiding Procrastination

So basically that's the workshop, last quote. He's begun, it's half done, dare to be wise, begin and you've already made a step towards avoiding your procrastination. I have a survey for you that I'd like you to fill out real quickly. I can go and make a copy of the sign in sheet for those of you who need proof of attendance. For people who are watching this online, there's a survey you can fill out as well. All right. So that's it, thank you for coming, I appreciate it and I'll give you a survey to fill out.