

A STUDENT GUIDE TO SUCCESS AT PENN STATE — 2025 Edition

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A STRATEGIC GUIDE FOR STUDENTS
AND FAMILIES NEW TO PENN STATE

This book was prepared primarily for Pennsylvania State University students and families. Students at other universities will find value in it too.

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Feedback on this book may be sent to the authors at GetOnState@gmail.com and will be used in future revisions.

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To our students, so talented

Colophon

This book was typeset in 12 pt. Times New Roman using Word, where every version is better than the next.

Foreword to the Third Edition

The university experience can be overwhelming for students transitioning from high school—balancing classes, extracurricular activities, part-time jobs, and, ultimately, preparing for life after graduation. A Student Guide to Success at Penn State offers invaluable insights to help you navigate and maximize your time at Penn State.

Like many of you, I began my academic journey at Pennsylvania State University. It was here that I first met Dr. Glantz, one of the authors of this book, as a student in his course. Later, I had the privilege of working with him as a teaching intern, an experience that led to a lifelong friendship. I hope that you, too, will forge meaningful relationships with professors who inspire and guide you throughout your undergraduate years.

During my time at Penn State, I immersed myself in a variety of academic and extracurricular activities. I served as an officer for the Economics Association, the Nittany Lion Fund (a student-managed investment fund), and the Thai Student Association. I was also a member of the fencing club, worked as a research and teaching assistant in economics, finance, and mathematics, and tutored students privately. Additionally, I was a residential assistant (RA) and a member of the Phi Eta Sigma Honor Society.

In four years, I earned two honors degrees—a B.S. in Finance from the Smeal College of Business and a B.S. in Economics from the College of Liberal Arts—along with a minor in International Business and a Mathematics module.

After graduating in 2006, I started my career in finance before being recruited by PTT, a Fortune 500 company and Thailand's

national oil firm. At PTT, I contributed to developing a five-year business plan worth \$107 billion, then managed the Indonesia development team's \$300 million investment in coal mines and a \$50 billion joint natural gas project with ExxonMobil. Later, at the peak of the energy crisis, I was assigned to the trading department, where I helped prevent a billion-dollar loss by designing a strategy to mitigate oil price fluctuations. After earning my MBA from the MIT Sloan School of Management, I returned to PTT to help launch its EV strategy, manage the CEO's office, and establish several subsidiary companies, including a social enterprise. Together with my friends, I launched an online business channel called Trader KP to guide young investors on investment strategies and provide insights into business decisions from top industry leaders, policymakers, and thought leaders with half a million subscribers in less than 6 months.

Looking back, I realize that among the many instructors I encountered at Penn State, only a few left a lasting impression. Dr. Glantz was one of them. The first lesson he taught wasn't about coursework or classroom etiquette—it was about what we, as students, should strive to accomplish in life. Throughout his course, he seamlessly integrated real-world insights with theoretical knowledge, always prioritizing student learning. I believe this commitment to student success is what inspired him to write this book.

This guide is an essential resource for any Penn State student seeking to make the most of their undergraduate experience. Drs. Glantz and Ritter provide practical strategies for building a strong academic foundation, gaining leadership experience, and preparing for future career opportunities.

I particularly appreciate the Get Success chapter, where they outline the critical credentials that recruiters look for—factors that

help students stand out in a competitive job market. The Get Ahead and Get Involved chapters are also among my favorites. Having sat on both sides of the interview table, I can attest that while GPA may serve as an initial screening metric, it is your college experiences beyond coursework that will truly set you apart and open doors to meaningful career opportunities.

In Get Ahead, Drs. Glantz and Ritter emphasize essential study strategies, note-taking techniques, and the benefits of studying abroad. In Get Involved, they explore the wealth of student activities at Penn State, from academic organizations and service groups to Greek life and alumni networking.

I firmly believe this book is a must-have for every Penn State undergraduate. It consolidates essential university resources, powerful study techniques, and career-planning strategies into one comprehensive guide. I only wish I had this book during my time at Penn State—it would have saved me countless hours and helped me achieve even more. I sincerely hope Dr. Glantz and Dr. Ritter continue to update and expand this invaluable resource for future generations of students.

Sincerely,

Will

Phuree “Will” Smittinet

PSU Class of 2006, MIT Sloan M.B.A. Class of 2012, and Chief Partnership Officer (CPO) for Trader KP

Preface

Today's college experience is different from previous years. For example, students who are learning to make decisions find their choices scrutinized through text, blogs, and YouTube. Students face a never-ending barrage of live and streaming opportunities that makes even finding a regular time to sleep a challenge. There remains confusion on how to work with faculty or take advantage of student advisors, or apply for internships that are, in some cases, almost mandatory.

Our motivation to write this book stems from a concept we call the "College Success Quotient." We use this idea to suggest that students can recognize and leverage the significant time and money of the college experience. Parents and guardians can also be guided by this quotient in the critical role of assisting students as they exploit new opportunities and overcome pressures and distractions.

We also write this book to introduce the university to people new to the university, primarily freshman, but also new graduate students, faculty, and staff. The book will be useful for full-time, part-time, and online students. There are many resources at universities and Penn State in particular, that are often overlooked and underutilized. For example, you can play water polo, learn about SCUBA, find more reading than you have time, spectate numerous sports, and more importantly participate in a wider range of activities than you can after you graduate.

We have taught—and learned from—almost 15,000 students at Penn State. To write this book we have combined this experience with 24 (total) years as higher education students, 22 years working in industry and recruiting students, over 15 years as Penn State parents, and over 40 years teaching at universities.

Welcome to Penn State. Please use your time to become the best you can be.

Acknowledgments

We are deeply grateful for the valuable insights received from our teachers, mentors, students, and business partners. The College of IST made figures from their web site available, and we used several. Mizzah Tocmo created the book icon used in the hints and helped as a production assistant. Isaac Earnest helped with the layout, provided several pictures, and designed the cover.

We also would like to thank those who commented on the 2025 (third) edition of this book, including Khera Abogourin, Betsy Campbell, Russell Ehalt, Chris Gamrat, Taylor Jenkins, Serhii Serdiuk, and Mizzah Tocmo.

We would also like to recognize those that took time to review and comment on the first two editions of this book, including: Rob Stone, Ryan Glynn, Martin Mamett, Dave Hall, Joe Sanford, Houston Hunt, Clara Ocneanu, Matthew McClurken, Justin Glantz, Lisa Weaver, and Will Smittinet.

Picture of students on p. 111 credit to Paul Hazi Photography. Unattributed pictures are by the authors, freepik.com, or courtesy of the College of IST.

Overview

This book's unique focus on student success at Penn State adds to the wonderful resources available to help transition and orient students and families to college life. As such, this book is particularly useful to undergraduates starting at *any* of the wonderful Penn State campuses. In fact, over half of our students started at a smaller campus before “changing assignments” to University Park for the last two years.

Penn State's University Park campus welcomes new students with all the hustle of a small city, including:

- Around 49,000 students
(datadigest.psu.edu/student-enrollment)
- About 3,200 faculty
(datadigest.psu.edu/faculty-and-staff)
- About 14,000 total employees
(datadigest.psu.edu/faculty-and-staff)
- Approximately 7,000 acres and 600 buildings
(opp.psu.edu/project/university-park-master-plan)
- Two campus shuttles and local bus service that includes two no-charge campus loops
(transportation.psu.edu/buses-and-shuttles)
- University Health Services (studentaffairs.psu.edu)
- University Police and Public Safety (police.psu.edu)
- Fire Prevention and Protection
(ehs.psu.edu/fire-prevention-and-protection)
- Housing and dining for 14,000 students in eight housing areas (liveon.psu.edu/university-park)

Although this book is not a guide to getting accepted to Penn State or surviving a roommate, suggested links and readings to these and other common issues are provided at the end of each chapter, and in the appendices. These can help with a wide range of these and similar problems that are related to student success.

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