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Winter is Coming – With its Pressures, Joys

By Vu Tran

UCF Forum columnist

Wednesday, November 5, 2014

My favorite time of year is autumn, when the weather is perfect and I am reunited with one of my loves: pumpkin spice latte. Everywhere I look I see pumpkins, golden-colored leaves, and children running around in their costumes eating leftover Halloween candy. And, of course, let us not forget about the wonderful breaks and vacations coming up!

With Thanksgiving just around the corner, many of us soon will be reunited with our beloved families and friends for a delicious feast filled with turkey, pie, and whatever else your heart desires. Even if you don't celebrate Thanksgiving this way, you may still get to enjoy time off from school or work to focus on yourself and your loved ones.

And so, with the end of fall, comes winter. Aside from the fact that Florida weather rarely drops below 40 degrees, the arrival of winter brings finals week and the hectic holiday season.

For students, I like to refer to this period as the calm before the storm. As much as I love to daydream about roasted turkey, I have to be realistic. Like all semesters, this one has been long and hard, but before we can celebrate our accomplishments, we must conquer one final hurdle: the final exam.

Whether you have dreaded that exam since the first day of class or you have been enthusiastically gathering sources for your paper all semester, you must now face this final challenge of the year. Just like all things in life for everyone – not just students – if you have a final paper or project, you should not procrastinate until the last minute to get started! Revisions are the key to perfection and are necessary for a commendable submission.

Time management is also an important skill to practice if you want to move on to a professional career. I admit that I have been guilty of procrastinating on occasion depending on the project, but when I have something I am passionate about, I am cognizant of the time.

And if you are struggling in a class, simply ask for help. Consult with your professor or teaching assistant on how you can improve before the final assessment. Never assume about your status in a class or at your job. I once had a friend who thought he had an 'A' until he found out at the end of the semester that the professor had subtracted points every time my friend took his phone out to check the time.

Some of you may have semesters left to finish while others may be graduating in December. If you are walking for commencement, arrive early and dress appropriately. After all, you are representing the university, and your family may have traveled from far away to support you on your big day. I suggest that you do not come late with mismatched shoes and a hangover.

Winter can also be a stressful time for everyone because of the holidays. Whether you are cooking for a large family or preparing for an office party, you may have a daunting task ahead. Make sure you do all your shopping early for the event or holiday. My mom always scowls me for procrastinating before a holiday party to buy a gift or food.

I constantly struggle with finding the perfect gifts for my parents because they do not view material belongings in the same way. They grew up in small, rural villages along the coast of Vietnam and often did not have money for presents. As a result, they prefer handmade gifts, which they believe have more sentimental value.

However, after about 20 years of working on do-it-yourself projects, I believe that my creative juices have run dry. If you are experiencing the same problem, I suggest creating a Pinterest account to explore new ideas.

If you are a parent, remember that spending time with your child will always be more valuable than an iPad or a new toy. My brother and I would always look forward to the holidays when we were growing up because my parents would have the entire day off to play with us. Sure we would have liked a new Barbie or action figure, but nothing can ever replace family.

So as winter dawns upon us, use your time wisely. Do not be lured into a false sense of security.

You might not be defending against video zombies or massive armies of trained killers led by the “mother of dragons,” but you do have your own battles to face. Remember that there is light at the end of the tunnel, and we will be able to relax during the winter break.

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