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## Time for Today's Lesson: Learn How to Ask Questions, Seek Answers

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## Time for Today's Lesson: Learn How to Ask Questions, Seek Answers

By **Richard Crepeau**  
UCF Forum columnist  
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Time is a construct. There really is no such thing as absolute time. It is measured in a variety of ways and perceived in a multitude of ways. Is it relative? And if so, relative to what?

In the academic world, one unit of time is the academic year broken in into blocks called semesters, which in turn are divided into two parts split by the mid-term. Terms are also subdivided into weeks, and weeks into credit hours.

At the beginning of the semester the end seems a long way off, and at the end it seems to have sped by in the twinkling of an eye. At times it seems it will never end, while at other times it seems as if it could not be over yet – and one is left to wonder why there is never enough time to get everything done.

So here we are at the end of another semester, wondering how it could have gone by so fast. It is also the end of another academic year, which usually raises the same question.

For some students it is the end of their college career, and they will move on to a world in which time will be divided in any number of other ways. Yet, no matter how these blocks of time are divided, they too will have the dual character of speed and slowness.

As the graduates look forward, they anticipate a long life ahead hoping to fulfill dreams of career, family and personal growth. We know, of course, that for some the dreams will be realized, but for others they will fade. We know that for some, longevity will be denied, while for others the decades will push relentlessly forward.

For the life of a university, time will loop back on itself. The cycles will be repeated with new students taking the seats of those who have gone before them. For professors the challenge is to go back to the beginning of the cycle and find new energy and new ways

of conveying their knowledge and experience to students whose experiences are different from those who have graduated and left the campus.

The old must be made fresh and new for those students for whom all is new. For each new cohort of students the university experience is novel. Some come to the campus with great anticipation and excitement, while others come because it is what is expected of them by parents and peers; going to college is just something you do. It is simply a next step in life.

In the classroom, professors meet both groups and are challenged by them in very different ways. The trick is to reach both groups and give them something that will enable them to cope with a rapidly changing world filled with hope and promise, both real and false.

I am often asked how students today differ from those of decades past. I don't have any profound answer from years of observation, but one thing seems to stand out. Students today arrive in college with more information than any of their predecessors, but with no greater grasp of meaning or knowledge.

They have more tools than their predecessors and this constitutes both an advantage and a potential distraction. The value of tools, from the first discovery of the wheel onwards, depended upon the use to which they were put, and so, too, with the electronic wonders of our time.

So are students today different from those of the past? Yes, clearly they are. They have the same basic needs. They need to know who they are, and they need to have some notion of how to navigate their way ahead.

For me the most important things a student should take away from the university are an ability to ask questions, to seek answers, and above all to be able to identify all those things that masquerade as authentic, and separate them from those that are not.

A great university will assist its students in acquiring this ability, while an ordinary university will either let them pass through unaffected or merely prepare them to fill a job and pass their time on the planet.