**Building a Trajectory of Achievement**

Your four years at Mercer are a journey. During this time, we want you to have fun, to develop your abilities, and to find solutions to problems, and after Mercer, we want you to achieve your highest aspirations. This is a guide to help you move toward your goals. Use it as a list of suggestions and ideas, not as a formula. Every path will be different, but the idea is to build momentum over the course of your academic career.

**Freshman Year:**

* This is the time to build a broad foundation. Focus on your general education curriculum, build a network of friends, and establish yourself as a Mercerian. College is a process, and you’ll be more successful if you’re enjoying it.
* Take the foreign language placement exam as soon as possible and complete your foreign language coursework sooner rather than later.
* Choose your courses wisely. Identify courses that both meet requirements and focus on topics of interest to you. Explore your interests and look for faculty mentors. Keep in mind that your intended major can and probably will change.
* Engage in co-curricular activities such as community service, clubs, creative projects, social organizations, or intramurals. These activities help you build a network of friends, and they can lead to important opportunities for development.
* Seek out experiential learning opportunities such as service learning or undergraduate research.
* Get to know your faculty. Speak up in class, visit their office hours, and show interest in their work. These are among the most important relationships you will develop.
* Find the support services that you need to succeed. Look for help from residence life, campus life, counselling and psychological services, the academic resource center, the religious life center, or your faculty. If you are struggling, there are people here to help you.
* Cultivate a habit of reading national and international news. To get started, follow social media for *The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, TIME, BBC,* or other major outlets. Think about how the issues you are studying on campus apply off campus.
* Consider summer options to advance your course work such as summer school, online classes, or transient classes.
* Scholarships to consider as a first-year student include Gilman, Freeman ASIA, Critical Languages, Boren, US-UK Fulbright.

**Sophomore Year:**

* In this year, your aspirations may become somewhat clearer. Continue to explore your interests, but also plan to declare one or more majors. When you declare a major, have a conversation with your major advisor not only about what courses to take but also about your aspirations and how you can achieve them.
* Take classes that count toward your general education requirements or your major(s) but allow yourself some space to explore your intellectual interests.
* Seek out experiential learning classes that include service learning, undergraduate research, or study away experiences.
* Get involved in co-curricular activities on campus or look for meaningful way to get involved with the local community. Begin to think about the leadership roles you could assume and the impact you could have.
* If invited, join Phi Eta Sigma.
* Use your summers wisely. Look for opportunities to continue strengthening your academic achievements and clarifying your career goals. This is an ideal summer for MUBS, Mercer on Mission, study abroad, or summer research, such as an NSF REU.
* Keep reading the news. Demonstrate an awareness of the world around you.
* Scholarships to consider as a second year student include Critical Languages, Boren, Gilman, Freeman ASIA, Fulbright US-UK, Mount Vernon, Udall, and Goldwater.

**Junior Year:**

* This should be your highest-intensity year on campus. In this year, you will want to take on more positions of responsibility and more involved learning experiences. Think deliberately about the experiences that will lead you toward your aspirations.
* Finish your general education requirements and make significant progress in your major. Continue to explore your intellectual interests but maintain your progress toward completion.
* Continue to cultivate relationships with faculty. Ask for their advice about your future plans. Not only are these relationships rewarding but they will also lead to persuasive letters of recommendation on your behalf.
* Invest in leadership positions that reflect a depth of commitment to a particular cause or interest either through an on-campus organization or through involvement with an off-campus activity.
* Engage in a major experiential learning project. Take on an internship, spend a semester studying abroad, or get involved in an undergraduate research project that will lead to off-campus presentations or publication. This is the project that is likely to be the centerpiece of your applications for jobs or graduate or professional schools.
* Use this summer to extend your learning experience. Participate in MUBS, Mercer on Mission, study abroad, internship, or summer research. There are several summer research opportunities for STEM students, including NSF REU, AMGEN, SURF, DAAD RISE, and others.
* If invited this year or next year, join honors societies for your majors or the elite academic honor societies Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi, and Omicron Delta Kappa.
* Scholarships to consider as a junior include Truman, Goldwater, Udall, Critical Languages, Boren, Gilman, or Freeman ASIA. In the spring of your junior year, attend an information session about the Fulbright Student Program and about the UK awards: Rhodes, Marshall, Gates, and Mitchell.

**Senior Year:**

* This year, think seriously about life after Mercer. Make plans and back-up plans for what you will do after graduation and consider how those plans mesh with your long-term future aspirations. Look into graduate or professional school, research jobs with companies or foundations, and consider gap year options.
* Visit the career services office to develop a resume and have a practice interview. If applying for fellowships or graduate or professional school, draft a personal statement and take entrance exams.
* Finish coursework in your majors and file an application for graduation.
* Take on a leadership position in an on-campus or off-campus organization and make a plan for transitioning a younger student into your position.
* Craft an excellent thesis or senior research project and seek publication or presentation.
* Consider spending a year or two engaged in public service through AmeriCorps, Teach for America, or Peace Corps. Also consider options to teach abroad for a year.
* Apply for a fellowship for a gap year, such as a Fulbright S/R or ETA, or for graduate study, such as NSF GRFP, Rhodes, or Marshall.

This document is based on a handout by Ashley Floyd, University of Alabama-Birmingham.