

# FIVE P-TRAITS OF ACADEMICALLY EFFICACIOUS STUDENTS

How can you finish on time what you start? Academic acuity is maintained by five P's: *Plan* (roadmap), *playing your part* (obligation), *position* (ownership), *progression* (advancement), and *proactivity* (self-drive)

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## 1. PLAN: Where it all starts

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Doing a postgraduate degree begins with having a plan. This is a little like building a permanent house, where besides owning a piece of land, one also needs to possess an architectural plan, an engineer's drawing and a quantity surveyor's estimates. Similarly, as a student you must have a workable roadmap. Sometimes you may need a written proposal, within which describe a work plan and a budget. But you must have a wider plan to work with.

- 1) **The road to academic astuteness begins with having a workable master plan.**

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## 2. PLAYING YOUR PART: Whose responsibility is it?

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Perhaps you have heard about the species of birds known as "cuckoos". A cuckoo is a medium-sized and slender bird. A typical cuckoo is bigger than

most of the common birds like sparrows, swallows, and weaver birds but smaller than the birds of prey like eagles, hawks and vultures.

Some cuckoos are cunning birds. They belong to the group of organisms that biologists call "brood parasites". Brood parasites are organisms like birds, insects, and fish that depend on other organisms to raise their young.

Although most cuckoos lay eggs in their own nests and raise their own young, some species of cuckoos are parasitic. They are lazy schemers; they rest when other birds are building their nests. Then they lay their eggs in the nests of other unsuspecting species of birds. Because their eggs usually resemble, in appearance, the eggs of the host, the host birds never know the difference. Then the mother cuckoo disappears.

As the host bird feeds this little parasitic chick, the chick grows bigger faster than the genuine chicks. The chick then does something out of the ordinary and very cruel: One by one, it pushes off the genuine chicks out of the nest to their premature deaths so that it has no competition. And even when it has remained alone in the nest, the ignorant host mother keeps on feeding the foreigner, even as the chick becomes much bigger than the host bird.

Unfortunately, the host bird never realizes she is feeding the chick of another bird that killed her own chicks!

2) Academic acuity is your obligation and duty. The easiest way to avoid responsibility is to transfer it to somebody else; irresponsible students blame other people.

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### 3. POSITION: What is our standpoint as regards our work?

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There is a difference between duty and position; between being a servant and being a possessor (owner).

Suppose that a young woman is employed in the home of a rich landowner as an au pair (or house help; the modern word is *house manager*). Her duties include cleaning the house and household items, cooking, caring for the children, and doing other domestic chores. This is an *obligation* or *duty*. Her motivation as a servant is what she earns at the end of the month.

But suppose that the woman of the house passes on and the man of the house marries the au pair. Now the au pair becomes the lady of the home. She continues doing the same things as before: Cooking, cleaning, and caring, only that this time she does the work with even more enthusiasm and vigour. Why is this so? This time she is the owner; her locus has changed. This is ownership; this is about *position*.

When you work on your degree, whether it is BSc or MSc or PhD, and your drive is *what you hope to get* from your labours, you are doing it as a *servant*. If, on the other hand, you are doing it for yourself, with enthusiasm and vigour, *without consideration of immediate benefits*, you are doing so as the *owner*.

Are you toiling in your education as a servant or are you enjoying the work as the owner?

3) A paradigm shift often follows knowing our position as regards our work! We are owners, not hired servants.

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### 4. PROGRESSION: How do we regard our challenges?

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Depending on your viewpoint, your challenges can either be a *barrier* or a *ladder*.

A little boy was leading his sister up a mountain path and the way was not too easy. "Why", the little girl complained. "This isn't a path at all", she went on, "It's all rocky and bumpy." "Sure", her brother responded, "the bumps are what you climb on."

The "bumps" we encounter while studying as students are many. Some of this "bumps" are the following. First are *financial* challenges. We lack money for *fees* including tuition and other payments; for *subsistence* for food, house rent, travel, cloths, medication,

etc., for *research* (experimentation and data). Second are *supervision* challenges. Slowdown associated with supervision include: *absentee* supervisors, *supervisor* clashes, *ignorant* supervisors; *equipment* challenges. Thirdly, we have slowdown associated with equipment like lack of *computers*, lack of *equipment* or *instruments*. Fourthly, we have *student* challenges. Slowdown due to student's limitations like unfamiliar methods and failed experiments. But we also have *time* constraints, *health* challenges and *family* pressures.

Do you regard the bumps along your path as obstacles that discourage your progress, or as stepping stones that propel you forward? Do you see your difficulties as hindrances or as opportunities? Albert Einstein once said that *In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity*.

- 4) Difficulty makes our progression even more credible. Difficulty reveals our opportunities. Achievements made amidst challenges teach and yield more dividends than the mere academic knowledge!

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## 5. PROACTIVITY — What drives you?

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She was born in 1880 and died in 1968. She was an *author*, an *activist* and a *lecturer*. At only 19 months old, she contracted meningitis (or perhaps scarlet fever), which left her deaf and

blind and dumb; she could not see, she could not hear, she could not speak.

At 8 years old, she joined an institute for the blind. At 14, she joined a school for the deaf. At 20, she joined Harvard University. At 24, she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree, becoming the first deaf and blind person to earn a BA degree.

Mentored by her parents, mentored by Anne Sullivan, her first and most influential instructor, who was also visually impaired; mentored by her teachers at elementary school, at high school, and at University, mentored by writings of authors like *Charles Dickens*, and by family friends like *Alexander Graham Bell*; by the time of her death in 1968, *Helen Adams Keller* had become an itinerant speaker, a lecturer, an activist and an author.

Helen Keller wrote: *“One can never consent to creep when one feels an impulse to soar”*. To paraphrase her, You can never be contented and happy to crawl, moving slowly with the abdomen on the ground like a worm or snake, when you were designed to fly like a bird.

Helen Keller understood her position of ownership, regarded her challenges as stepping stones, and approached life proactively.

- 5) To complete what we start in a timely manner, we must be self-driven. We must have self-determination.