A Quick Primer on the Covey Time Management System

There are 4 quadrants according to the following dimensions:

**Urgency** (high/low)  
This reflects the practical (and sometimes emotional) need for something to be done

**Importance** (high/low)  
This reflects the importance for the individual (not necessarily for others)

The quadrants represent how we spend our time. Thus:

**Quadrant I (High Urgency/High Importance activities)**  
These represent crisis types of situations – they are important to the student and they have a clear, pending time deadline.

*Examples:* Term papers due tomorrow, exams, financial aide deadlines, etc.

**Quadrant II (Low Urgency/High Importance activities)**  
These represent things that are important to students but do not have an impending deadline.

*Examples:* Goals, the term paper due in 5 weeks, making plans to go home for a break.

**Quadrant III (High Urgency/Low Importance)**  
These represent things that are not necessarily important to the student but others need to be addressed soon. The key distinction here is that the urgency tends to come from the person making the request for a student’s time – not that the student sees it as necessarily important.

*Examples:* Phone calls, text messages, email from friends.

**Quadrant IV (Low Urgency/Low Importance)**  
These represent uses of time on things that aren’t important and don’t need to be addressed anytime soon.

*Examples:* TV, the Internet, Social Media

**Common student issues:**

1. Students can get wrapped-up in Quadrant III – spending a lot of time distracted by a flood of email, messages, etc. – especially if they have difficulty setting limits with others around their time.

2. Students can flip/flop between Quadrants I & IV – this is typical in cases of procrastination in which papers, exams, deadlines become crises that get considerable time (in the form of all-nighters, etc.). To recover from this intense use of time, students “recover” by spending time in Quadrant IV activities (which sometimes leads to another crisis situation – back to Quadrant I)
Conclusion / Main Points

Quadrant II: The most Important Quadrant
The most important Quadrant (according to Covey) is Quadrant II. He maintains that this is the one use of time that will 1. produce the greatest satisfaction (i.e., accomplishing important goals/plans) and 2. provide the best way to structure time.

Regarding the second point, consider the person who sets running a marathon as a goal (Quadrant II time). From that point to the time of the marathon itself, the person will need to build in a training schedule that helps structure and prioritize how their time is spend on a daily/weekly basis. This also provides a sense of accomplishment and achievement.

For students, Quadrant II is the one they sacrifice most to make time for the other 3. It is often hard for individuals to see the long term benefit of spending time in Quadrant II when the activities in the others are either more urgent (I/III) or more tempting (IV). It is important for students to be aware of the potential benefits and make time for planning/goal-setting.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Urgency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plans, Goals &amp; Interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texting, email, &amp; voicemails</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV, Netflix, Social Media, &amp; other distractions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>