

COLLEGE 101



PROGRAMS & MAJORS · CAMPUS LIFE · ON-TIME GRADUATION

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Your guide to college and career planning

The College Foundation of West Virginia (CFWV) offers a website, cfwv.com, with free tools and information to help students get ready for college, succeed on campus and prepare for a career.

The site offers a career interest survey, information on degree programs and majors at all of West Virginia's colleges and universities, a résumé builder, sample career interview questions and dozens more resources.

COLLEGE 101

Going through (not just to) college

Deciding to go to college is a great first step in preparing for your future. But applying and being admitted are just the beginning. Getting through college takes a lot of hard work, determination and focus.

As a college student, it is your responsibility to take charge of your future, manage your time and workload and follow through to achieve your goals. There are many people and resources to support you on your way. This guide provides tips for staying on track and making the most of your college experience. It also offers a starting point to help you find support on campus.

Completing college isn't easy — but it is worth it. The work you put in now will pay off in the long run. College graduates earn far more over their lifetime, are more likely to have careers they enjoy, are less likely to be unemployed and generally lead happier, healthier and more fulfilling lives.

College will help you learn about the world and yourself. It will open your mind to new ideas and the doorway to new opportunities. Enjoy the experience!

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PROGRAMS AND MAJORS

The end game

For many students, college is a brand-new world filled with novel ideas, places and people. But you'll quickly find that college also is a balancing act. You must find a way to explore these new experiences without getting distracted from your end goal — earning a degree. You should begin developing your degree plan as soon as you start thinking about college. It's ok if you're not sure what you want to do — but that's not an excuse to avoid planning. Work with your counselors and advisors to develop a college schedule that will help you earn core college credits and explore your skills and interests.

Understanding degrees and credentials

When you complete an education or training program or earn a diploma, you are earning a “credential.” Credentials serve as documentation of your knowledge, skills or qualifications. Some careers require very specific credentials to work in that field. For example, you must earn a medical degree (M.D.) to work as a doctor. In other instances, credentials are more flexible and serve as symbols of advanced skills that help you compete in the workforce.

Double duty

Many students have interests in more than one field of study, or are pursuing careers that require skills in multiple areas. Colleges offer different options allowing students to earn multiple credentials — sometimes at the same time.

For example, a student can “**double major**,” meaning he or she will earn a degree with qualifications from two disciplines. A double major can be awarded only if the two disciplines offer the same type of degree — such as a bachelor of arts in English and a bachelor of arts in communications.

If degree programs offer differing types of degrees — such as, a bachelor of arts in English and a bachelor of science in journalism — then a student can choose to pursue “**dual degrees**.” Under a dual degree program, the student receives two degrees, rather than one with multiple specializations.

In other cases, a student may complete a degree and then later return to school to earn a “**second degree**.” Students earning a second degree usually do not have to take as many credit hours as were required for their first degree.

COMMON TYPES OF DEGREES AND CREDENTIALS

Certificate

Signifies that a student has earned knowledge in a very specific area of study, often focused on a vocational or professional subject. Typically does not involve taking general education courses and usually can be completed in days, weeks or months, rather than years; often serves to enhance a student's field of study. For example, a student pursuing a bachelor's degree in education might also earn a certificate in special education.

Associate Degree

Traditionally a two-year degree program requiring students to earn approximately 60 hours of college credit; often awarded through community and technical or junior colleges.

Bachelor's Degree

Traditionally a four-year degree program requiring students to earn approximately 120 hours of college credit; also known as a baccalaureate or undergraduate degree.

Master's Degree

A graduate degree, meaning it is typically earned after graduating from a bachelor's degree program (however, some can be earned simultaneously); usually takes two to three years to complete.

Doctoral Degree

A terminal degree, meaning it is the highest level of education that can be completed in a particular field of study; typically takes five to seven years to complete and requires intensive academic study and research. Many doctoral programs require students to complete a master's degree first. Ph.D. programs are a common type of doctoral program.

Professional Degree

A degree required to enter a specific profession; typically earned after completing a bachelor's degree program. For example, a Pharm.D. degree for pharmacy or a Jurisprudence Doctor (J.D.) for practicing law.

Terminal Degree

A general term, referring to the highest academic degree available in any particular field of study.

» **Academic advisor:** Your academic advisor is the person assigned to work with you on building your degree plan and planning your class schedule. Some academic advisors are professional advisors, meaning their primary job is to help students with academic planning. Others are faculty members who assist students in addition to teaching classes and conducting research. You should meet with your advisor at least once per semester during your school's planned academic advisement period.

» **Academic affairs:** The office on campus that oversees students' academic development and growth. Students may be required to meet with academic affairs representatives if they fall behind in their coursework or fail to adhere to academic standards (for example, by plagiarizing or cheating).

» **Academic calendar:** The academic calendar outlines important dates and deadlines for your college, including the first and last days of classes, the last day to add or drop a course, mid-term and final exam weeks, academic advisement periods and graduation.

» **Academic probation:** Students who are off track academically are given a warning and are put on probation for a period of time. Usually, students are put on academic probation because they have failed to maintain a minimum grade point average (GPA). However, sometimes students are put on probation for failing to make progress toward their chosen major. Students who are on probation are given a length of time, usually either a semester or a year, to improve their academic performance and complete steps outlined by the institution. For example, students who are on academic probation are often required

to attend tutoring sessions or meet with a counselor or their advisor. Students who fail to meet these requirements and improve their academic standing run the risk of being suspended from college.

» **Academic suspension:** Students who have not met a college's minimum academic standards are asked to leave the college for a period of time (usually either a semester or a year). Typically, students who are on suspension must apply for reinstatement if they wish to reenter the college after their suspension period ends. Academic suspension is a last resort for most colleges. Institutions usually give students a chance to correct issues by putting them on academic probation.

» **Add/drop periods:** Colleges typically allow a period of time (usually one week) at the beginning of each semester for students to finalize their schedules. During this time, students can add new classes or drop classes without receiving a "withdraw" mark on their academic transcript.

» **Admissions office:** The admissions office oversees your application to the college, determines whether or not you will be admitted and helps facilitate your transition into college.

» **Advanced Placement (AP) credits:** Refers to advanced classes taken in high school that allow students to earn early college credit by passing a final exam. Check with your college's admissions office to see if they accept these credits and if they count toward your degree.

» **Auditing a course:** You can attend a class for no grade or credit, if that grade is not needed for your degree program. Students may choose to audit a class

to learn more about a particular subject area outside their area of study. Many colleges require students to register to audit a class, and some colleges charge for audited classes. Audited classes may also show up on your transcript, although you will not receive a grade. If you are considering auditing a class, talk to your academic advisor.

» **Bursar's Office:** The office where you pay the balance of your student account, including tuition, fees, room and board. *Also known as the "Office of Student Accounts" or "Accounts Payable."*

» **Catalog:** A document containing rules and policies for your college. The catalog also often includes class offerings and descriptions, academic requirements for the college's various degree programs and information related to expenses.

» **College Level Examination Program (CLEP) credits:** Refers to college credit that is earned by taking an exam in a specific subject area. Students who pass the exam can earn credits without completing additional coursework. There often is a small fee to take CLEP exams. Check with your college's admissions office or your academic advisor to see if your college accepts these credits toward your degree.

» **Credit hours:** Units of value given to courses, which equate to academic credits toward your degree. Credit hours are loosely based on the number of hours you are expected to spend in a particular class each week (not counting homework or other out-of-class study time). Different courses are worth different credit hours, but the most common format is three credit hours per class. Most academic programs require students to complete

UNDERSTANDING COMMON COLLEGE TERMS AND PHRASES

a minimum number of credit hours for graduation. For example, most associate degree programs require 60 credit hours. Most bachelor's degree programs require 120.

» **Dean:** The leader of a college or school within a university or the leader of an office. For example, the Dean of the College of Education at a university, or the Dean of Student Affairs.

» **Department Chair:** The head of a program of study or department, for example the chair of mathematics.

» **Electives:** Each degree program allows students to take elective classes, or classes that are not required but still count toward the degree. Electives allow students to explore their unique interests and personalize their education.

» **Faculty:** The term used to describe staff members who teach classes or conduct research on behalf of the college. Sometimes this term is also used to include individuals serving in an advisory capacity.

» **Final exams:** Comprehensive tests that are given at the end of a semester. Often these exams are weighted more heavily than other tests.

» **Financial Aid Office:** The office that compiles all of your financial aid from various sources, including the federal government. The financial aid office oversees the distribution of loans, grants, scholarships and work-study stipends and can help you find ways to pay for your education.

» **Full-time:** Each college decides how many credit hours a student must take per semester to be considered

full-time. Whether or not a student is considered full-time or part-time affects the cost of tuition and the types and amount of financial aid a student can receive. Typically, schools consider 12 credit hours per semester to be “full-time.” However, it is important to remember earning only 12 credit hours per semester will **NOT** allow you to graduate “on-time.” A student seeking to complete a four-year degree in four years or a two-year degree in two years must complete, on average, **15 credit hours per semester**.

» **Major:** The subject or discipline in which a student chooses to specialize. Schools typically offer many different majors or programs of study. Students who are unsure about what field they wish to study can enter college as “undecided” and work to complete their general education requirements while they decide. Students also can change majors. However, changing majors or staying “undecided” too long can prevent students from graduating on time — so it is important to talk to an academic advisor when making decisions about academic majors or adjusting your program of study.

» **Midterm exams:** Comprehensive tests that are given midway through the semester. Often these exams are more heavily weighted than other tests.

» **Minor:** An additional area of focus or emphasis of study, often to provide students with secondary skills related to their major or to expand on a particular interest area. For example, a student might choose to major in graphic design with a minor in advertising. Minors require fewer credit hours to complete than majors.

» **Office hours:** Designated hours when a faculty member or assigned assistant for a course is available to meet with students to address concerns or provide advising. Faculty usually post their office hours on the syllabus for their class and indicate whether students need an appointment or can just “drop in.” Office hours are a great time to get to know your teachers and build a relationship with them.

» **Prerequisite:** A course that a student must successfully complete before enrolling in another class or a certain class rank (e.g. sophomore status) required to take a class. For example, English 101 may be a prerequisite for English 201. *Also known as “pre-req” or “pr.”*

» **Registrar's Office or Records Office:** The office that oversees your official college transcript. This office also often coordinates the course scheduling and class registration process.



QUICK TIP ADDRESSING FACULTY MEMBERS

Make a good impression on your college professors by paying attention to the way you address them. Some may wish to be called “professor,” while others may prefer “Mr.” or “Ms.” or using first names. You can refer to faculty members who have earned a doctorate as “Dr.” (ex: Dr. Smith). If in doubt, go with “professor.”

UNIVERSITIES, COLLEGES AND DEPARTMENTS

Universities are complex organizations made up of many layers. If you attend a university, you likely will be part of the university, a college and a department. Here's an example:



University

West Virginia University



College

WVU Eberly College of Arts and Sciences



Department

Mathematics Department

>> Remedial or Developmental Courses:

Courses that a student must complete (often without credit) to get ready for credit-bearing college classes. Whether a student must take remedial classes is often determined by a student's scores on college entrance exams.

>> Resident Advisor (RA) and Resident Director (RD):

An RA is a student who lives in the residence halls, maintains the rules and assists students. An RD is a professional staff member who oversees the residence hall, including all RAs.

>> Room and Board:

Refers to charges applied to a student's account for living on campus or eating in the dining halls. "Room" applies to the cost of housing (living in the dorms) and "board" refers to the cost of meal or dining plans.

>> Satisfactory Academic Progress:

A set of minimum expectations established by your institution's financial aid office and the federal government that indicates a student is making sufficient progress toward earning their degree in a timely manner. If a student does not meet this minimum level of progress, he or she may lose eligibility to receive financial aid.

>> Semester:

A way of dividing the school year into two main sessions, usually fall and spring. Semesters can vary in length, but often are 16 weeks. Students usually complete classes within one semester — although some

courses may span multiple semesters. Also known as "terms."

>> Student level or rank:

Students are ranked as freshmen, sophomores, juniors, or seniors depending on how many credit hours they have earned. Rank can be used to determine when a student is allowed to register for classes or what classes a student may take.

>> Student affairs:

The office at the institution that helps students develop and grow through experiences outside the classroom. Student affairs offices often manage housing and residential facilities and activities, dining services, career services, student organizations, student life, wellness and recreation. Student affairs might also include the admissions and financial aid offices.

>> Syllabus:

A document provided by professors, usually on the first day of class, that sets forth the expectations for the semester and includes important details about the class. Syllabi often include a course schedule, grading policies, the professor's office hours and contact information, and required materials and textbooks.

>> Transcript:

The official record of college courses a student has completed and grades earned. Upon graduation, your transcript documents the title of the degree you completed and any academic honors you earned.

>> Transfer:

If you have completed college-level coursework at another institution, you may be able to transfer your credits to a new institution and count these credits toward your general education requirements or degree. However, it is up to your new college whether to accept transfer credits. Talk to your admissions counselor if you have credits you'd like to transfer.

>> Tuition and fees:

This refers to the cost of the education provided by an institution. It does not include other expenses, such as room and board or the purchase of books. Tuition and fees are typically paid by semester.

>> Undeclared/Undecided or General Studies Major:

Students who are unsure which degree program they wish to study can enroll in college and begin taking general education classes as an undeclared/undecided or general studies major. Students with undeclared majors may be required to take special classes or workshops aimed at helping them determine their career interests.

>> Withdraw:

You may withdraw from classes up until a certain point each semester. However, if you withdraw from a class after the "add/drop deadline" you will receive a "w" or withdraw mark on your transcript. Too many "w"s can impact your ability to meet the satisfactory academic progress requirements for receiving financial aid.



PLANNING TIMELINE

The homework starts now

To be successful in college, you need to start preparing well before the first day of classes. And your responsibilities don't end at the classroom door. Use this guide to get ready and adjust to your life as a college student.

- ▶ **Quick tip:** This guide is set up for students who are beginning college in the fall semester. If you're beginning in the spring, look to the dates in parentheses instead!

Summer (fall, for students who begin college in the spring semester)

notes...

- **Look for and read communication from your school or college!** Your school will begin contacting you, likely via email, about important tasks and deadlines. Your school might also have a web portal where they post announcements. Check your email and/or log in to your college's web portal **at least weekly**.
- **Submit any required medical forms and proof of required vaccinations.** Most colleges require students to submit medical forms to be used in case of an emergency and most require students to have updated vaccinations. Talk to your admissions office if you're unsure about these requirements.
- **Review your financial aid award package and accept/decline financial aid.** Your college will send you information about your financial aid award package, or the grants, scholarships and loans you are eligible to receive. You must review this information and then accept the aid you want to use and decline any available aid you don't want or need. For example, you may decide to accept available grants, but decline loans.
- **Complete student loan entrance counseling and sign and return any promissory notes.** If you accept any student loans from the federal government, you will have to complete entrance counseling and sign a promissory note. Entrance counseling can be done online. If your parents are helping you pay for college and decide to take out loans, such as Parent Plus loans, they also will have to complete these processes. Additionally, some scholarship programs might also require you to sign a promissory note, if your receipt of the scholarship is contingent on fulfilling a promise, such as working in a particular career field or geographic area.

- **Manage your scholarships from private sources.** Private scholarships include scholarships or grants from community organizations, companies, social groups — any organization other than your college or the state or federal government. If you received any private scholarships, contact the scholarship provider to find out if the money will be sent directly to you or to your school. If they are sending the funds to your school, contact the financial aid office to make sure they apply these external funds to your financial aid package.

- **Make sure your final transcripts have been sent to your college.** Make sure your admissions office has a copy of your final high school transcript on file, along with transcripts for any college-level credits you may have earned through dual-credit programs, AP courses, CLEP examinations or previous college study. You might also want to bring a copy of any college-level transcripts to your orientation, so you can work with your advisor to see how these credits count toward your degree.

- **Pay all required deposits.** Make sure you've paid any required deposits by the deadline or in a timely manner. Colleges vary in what types of deposits they require, but common types include enrollment/academic, housing and orientation. If you're unsure if your college requires these, contact your admissions office.

- **Complete your admission acceptance form.** Some colleges require you to complete an admission acceptance form once you've been accepted and have decided to attend the school. Ask your admissions office if you're not sure about this process, and make sure to meet any deadlines for making your final decision.

- **Take out or update insurances.** Many colleges require you to submit proof that you are covered by health insurance. If you need health insurance, you may be able to take out a low-cost plan through your college. If you are moving to a new town to attend college, check to see which healthcare providers are covered by your policy. If you still live with your parents when you're not at college, you may want to contact their home insurance company to make sure your belongings are covered while you're at school. You also may want to consider renter's insurance.

- **Arrange housing and purchase meal plans.** Some colleges require you to live on campus for a certain amount of time, unless you're commuting from home. If you plan to commute, make sure you read the requirements carefully and submit any documentation your college needs. If you plan to live on campus, complete your application for housing and submit any required deposits. Students also can purchase meal plans to eat in their college's cafeteria. It may seem less expensive to cook on your own. But if this is the first time you'll be living on your own, consider that managing your time and money can be difficult. It may be easier and more cost effective to use a meal plan.



QUICK TIP RESIDENCE HALLS OFTEN ARE CLOSED DURING BREAKS

Students who live on campus in residence halls should keep in mind that the halls often are closed over school breaks, such as Thanksgiving break or spring break. You can leave your belongings in your room during these times, but you will not have access to them — so pack wisely before heading out. If you need a place to stay during a school break, talk to your resident advisor. Most colleges can arrange for you to stay in temporary housing, but you may have to pay an additional fee.

- **Make arrangements for parking and transportation.** Some colleges have rules about whether or not students can bring cars. Many schools charge for parking and require students to obtain a parking pass. Also consider other transportation that might be available to you, such as local bus systems. Some colleges also offer free or low-cost shuttles to popular locations or to help you get home during school breaks.

- **Communicate with your roommate.** If you will be living with a roommate, reach out during the summer. Get to know one another and make a plan for living together. It may be possible for you to share items, such as a refrigerator or microwave (if your residence hall allows you to bring these).

- **Sign up for orientation and/or scheduling.** Attending your college's scheduled orientation session is an important part of preparing for college. Most colleges conduct student scheduling during orientation, allowing you time to meet with an academic advisor and schedule your first semester of classes. Additionally, orientations provide you with tours of campus and important information about resources that are available to you. Many colleges also use this time to take care of logistics, such as issuing you a student ID and setting up your student account. Some schools also require students to take class placement exams during orientation days. If possible, your parents or spouse also should attend orientation. Most colleges offer information sessions for family members to help them learn about the college and how they can support you in your college career.

- **Manage personal finances.** If you do not already have a checking account, you should open one. Many colleges allow you to link your account to auto-withdraw payments or auto-deposit any refunds you might receive. If you decide to work while going to school, your employer may also prefer direct deposits. If you are attending college in a new town, you may want to make sure your bank has a branch in that area to avoid costly ATM bank transfer fees. If this is the first time you are living on your own, you should also develop a budget.

- **Make or schedule college payments.** Most colleges require that students pay their tuition/fee and room/board bills prior to classes starting or within the first week of the semester. If you cannot pay your bill, call your college's financial aid office to discuss your options. Some colleges also allow students to set up payment plans.

August (January, for spring students)

- **Purchase books and supplies.** Colleges require that you purchase your own textbooks and many of your classroom supplies. Once you have your class schedule, contact your campus's bookstore for a list of required books and supplies. Your college may also include this information on their website. If you choose to buy your books from an online source, make sure to check their refund policy. Professors may choose to change their reading list at the last minute. Some students prefer to wait until the first week of classes to purchase books, as professors will provide a final list on the syllabus. This approach is typically fine. However, if you go this route, make sure you can get your books quickly (within a day or two) and are prepared to play "catch up." Homework usually begins on the first day of class!
- **Read school handbooks and policies.** Your school's catalog will outline the rules for your campus and provide information on academic regulations. If you are living on campus, read the residence hall policy guidebook as well.
- **Move in.** If you are living on campus, your college will contact you to let you know the move-in date. Freshman are often allowed to move in a day or two earlier than upperclassmen, to give them time to adjust to campus. Your college also will likely send you a list of recommended items to bring, as well as a list of what NOT to bring. Check this list carefully.
- **Explore campus.** You'll be spending a lot of time on campus over the next few years. Get to know your surroundings, scout out a study spot and look for flyers and signs to learn about co-curricular opportunities.
- **Read the syllabus and make a plan.** On the first day of class, your professors will provide you with syllabi outlining your courses. Read these documents carefully and make note of any important deadlines or tasks you need to complete. Work backward from deadlines to decide when you need to start on major projects to stay on track. Smart planning at the beginning of the semester will save you a lot of frustration later on!



QUICK TIP

KEEP TRACK OF YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS ON CFWV.COM

CFWV.com, the state's free college- and career-planning web portal, offers students the ability to create secure, personalized portfolios. Make it a habit to document your accomplishments within your portfolio. Include any work experience, membership in student or professional organizations, awards you've won and even classes you've completed. Keeping this information up-to-date and on file will make it easy to compile your résumé or complete applications for a job, scholarship or advanced study program such as graduate school.

September (February, for spring students)

- **Schedule tutoring and visit academic resource centers.** Now that you have a better feel for your classes, seek assistance in those subjects that you think will be a challenge for you. Most colleges offer free tutoring and assistance through academic resource or student services centers. You also can talk to your professors or academic advisor.
- **Get to know your professors.** Take time to stop by your professors' offices during their scheduled office hours — even if you feel comfortable with the material being covered in class. It is important to develop professional relationships during your time in college. Faculty members often can serve as mentors to guide you in your learning and, ultimately, in your career.
- **Know where to go for counseling and help.** Most colleges offer free counseling to help you address issues such as stress, managing your time or money, homesickness or relationship problems. Additionally, colleges offer assistance for students with physical or learning disabilities.

October (March, for spring students)

- **Prepare for mid-terms.** Mid-term exams are typically comprehensive, covering everything you've learned up to this point. They also are often heavily weighted. Do not take them lightly!
- **Meet with your academic advisor.** At most colleges, scheduling for spring semester begins in late October or early November. Many colleges will place an "academic advising hold" on your account, preventing you from registering for spring classes until you meet with your advisor.

HOW IT WORKS

MAKING A PLAN AND STAYING ON TRACK

Learning to manage your time and new responsibilities is one of the most challenging aspects of starting college. It is important to take time to plan and track your progress. Follow the steps outlined below, and you'll start each week with a game plan to stay on track!

Plan

At the beginning of each semester, use the information on your syllabi to create a master "to do" list with deadlines, including time to study. For major projects, don't forget to allow time for research, drafting, review and revision.

Review

As you progress through the semester, take 30 minutes at the end of each week to review the status of your projects, add any new commitments and adjust your timeline and "to do" list as necessary.

Plan again

During your weekly review, budget your time for next week and outline the specific things you want or need to accomplish. Review your calendar and make note of any upcoming time commitments, meetings or events.

- **Apply for financial aid.** You must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for every year you plan to attend college. For example, the FAFSA for fall semester of your sophomore year will become available in October of your freshman year.

November (April, for spring students)

- **Schedule classes for next semester.** Register for your classes for next semester. The date that you are allowed access to scheduling often depends on your class rank.
- **Take care of payment for next semester.** Your bill for next semester will arrive around this time. Take care of payment or make a plan for paying.

December (May, for spring students)

- **Prepare for finals.** Final exams are typically comprehensive, covering everything you've learned up to this point. They also are often heavily weighted. Do not take them lightly!
- **Pack up for break.** Residence halls are usually closed during breaks.
- **Check your grades.** Your grades will likely be available online within two weeks following the end of term.

Beyond the first semester

- **Register for summer classes.** If you plan to take summer classes at your institution, you generally will register for these in mid-spring (around the same time as registration for fall). If you plan to take classes at another institution during the summer, work with your academic advisor and the admissions office at the campus you'll attend. Your advisor will likely have to send paperwork to your temporary institution, and, likewise, your summer institution will have to send paperwork to your advisor. Your advisor should be able to help you avoid paying admissions fees at the other institution, since you'll be a "visiting" or "transient" student.
- **Make arrangements for housing.** You will need to make arrangements for housing each year. Before you sign a lease, make sure you (and any roommates you may be considering) are on track academically to return to college next year.



ON-TIME GRADUATION

5 tips for staying on track for graduation

1 Plan your schedule as a freshman: During your freshman year, work with your advisor to map out a basic class schedule for your entire college career. Creating a game plan will help you stay on track and avoid scheduling problems that could delay your graduation. Some classes require a prerequisite, meaning you can't enroll until after you've completed another requirement (usually another class). For example, you may have to take biology 101 before enrolling in biology 201. Also, colleges don't offer every class every semester — so it's important to build your schedule around when classes will be available. You must take a proactive approach to managing your education — your success is your responsibility!

2 Take “15 to Finish”: To complete a four-year degree in four years or a two-year degree in two years, you must earn an average of 15 credit hours per semester. Research shows that students who take at least 15 credit hours are far more likely to graduate than those who take fewer than 15. And it may sound surprising, but students who take 15 credits tend to do better academically than those who don't. Experts think it's because students who take 15 are able to use their time more efficiently and make more connections on campus through the increased class time. So when you build your schedule, make sure you're taking at least 15 credit hours toward your degree. It will save you time and money — and increase your likelihood of graduating.

3 Get to know your advisor and professors: Academic advisors are your advocates — so get to know them! Academic advisors can help you...

- » manage your class load and create a balanced schedule
- » get back on track if you have challenges
- » select or change majors or minors
- » accommodate special class credits, such as credits earned during study abroad or from another college
- » find internship or co-curricular opportunities

Your professors also are valuable supporters who can help you make connections on campus, catch up when you get off track and learn more about areas that interest you. But keep in mind, your advisors and professors are busy people who may have many responsibilities on campus. Make use of their scheduled office hours to be mindful of their time.

4 Study hard: Experts suggest that you spend two to three hours per week studying (outside of class) for every hour you're in class. Here's an example:

$$15 \text{ (hours in class)} + 15 \times 2 \text{ (study time)} = 45 \text{ hours per week committed to your education}$$

5 Manage your personal health and wellbeing: One of the most important, but often overlooked, parts of transitioning to college is learning to take an active approach to managing your health and well-being. Enrolling in college can be stressful, and navigating your new environment and responsibilities will require physical and mental energy. To make sure you're functioning at your best, take time to exercise, eat healthy and get some fresh air. Try to get at least eight hours of sleep every night. Investing a little time in taking care of yourself will pay off through increased focus and efficiency!

15 to Finish is a registered trademark of the University of Hawaii System and is being used by West Virginia with permission through the Complete College America initiative.



THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

Co-curricular activities

Studies show that students who work while in college or participate in co-curricular activities have higher GPAs than those who do not. Your success in college will depend on learning time management, creating meaningful learning experiences and fostering your own personal growth. Getting involved on campus and in the community will help you develop all of these skills and build personal connections that will aid you in your career and in life.

Volunteering for a cause, joining a campus organization or working or interning with a business will help you hone your time and project management skills, grow your leadership abilities and understand how classroom learning can be applied in the “real world.” These experiences often lead to friendships that will last a lifetime and can help you find mentors who will guide you in achieving your personal and career goals. Plus, participating in a range of co-curricular activities will help you build a strong résumé and demonstrate your commitment to learning to potential employers.

Campus activities

Colleges provide a wide range of out-of-class activities to promote learning and personal growth. It’s unlikely that you’ll ever have access to so many free resources again, so take advantage while you’re enrolled!

- » **Lecture and speaker series:** Colleges often bring in internationally acclaimed speakers to discuss topics of interest — and tickets are usually free for students!
- » **The arts:** Most campuses host plays, concerts and art shows — sometimes with famous artists or performers!
- » **Athletics:** Many campuses offer free access to gym or athletic facilities and some colleges organize intramural sports. Students also can often get free tickets to attend college sporting events.
- » **Community/service learning:** Most campuses have student organizations dedicated to community service. Participating in these organizations is a great way to get to know your fellow students and learn more about the local community.
- » **Study abroad:** Many colleges offer study abroad opportunities, allowing students to earn credits toward their degree by taking classes at colleges in other countries either during the summer or for a semester. Some colleges also have agreements with other colleges across the United States, allowing you to spend a semester on another campus without paying out-of-state tuition.

Academic honors

Colleges recognize academic excellence in a variety of ways. Earning these honors can be a valuable addition to your résumé, demonstrating to employers your commitment to learning and your ability to work hard.

- » **Dean’s or President’s lists:** These honors are typically given at the end of each semester to students who earn a certain GPA.
- » **Latin honors:** At graduation, students are given various honors based on their GPA. Graduating “summa cum laude” is the highest honor, followed by “magna cum laude” and then “cum laude.”
- » **Honoraries:** Colleges often award various honoraries for class rank or for excellence in certain disciplines or subjects. Additionally, at universities, individual colleges or departments may have established awards.

Career development

Most colleges have a career services office or department that can assist students in preparing for a career and obtaining temporary, part-time or full-time employment. In your early years of college, career services offices can help you start building a résumé, find a part-time job or internship or network with alumni or area business professionals in your intended career field. When it comes time to graduate, career service staff can help you polish your résumé, prepare for interviews and find your first job. Many career service offices also offer job fairs on campus.

Networking

College is a great time to make connections that will aid you throughout your life and career. In fact, many students say that the relationships they develop are the most valuable part of the college experience. Take time to get to know your classmates, professors, advisors and college staff. Meeting new people can expand your horizons, give you insight into other viewpoints and beliefs and give you access to resources and ideas outside of your own social circle.

Finding mentors and developing a mentor/mentee relationship is very important to professional and personal growth. No one succeeds on their own, and it is important to build a strong and diverse support network. Developing professional relationships with individuals who already are established in your intended field can give you a major advantage. Professors, advisors, campus staff, coaches, business leaders and even other students are all possible mentors. Mentors can provide you with support and motivation, offer advice for career decisions, share their personal experiences and life lessons and connect you to others in your industry.

Like any important relationship, mentor/mentee relationships require attention and nurturing. Touch base regularly with individuals whom you consider to be mentors, and find ways to connect with them through shared interests or experiences. Always be sure to express your gratitude to those who help you along the way. A handwritten note or a quick phone call to say “thanks,” will make a lasting impression and mean a lot to the recipient.

HOW IT WORKS

NETWORKING AND BUILDING PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Networking and building professional relationships are an important part of succeeding in college and, ultimately, in your career. But initiating these interactions can be intimidating. Use these tips to get started.

1 Start in a structured environment

Pick a time or location where interaction is expected or natural. For example, stop by a professor’s office during her/his scheduled office hours or attend an open meeting for an organization or club.

2 Share something, ask something

For example:

Share: “I really enjoyed your lecture on expanding voter participation. I’m very interested in political reform.”

Ask: “How can I learn more about this topic? Are any campus organizations working on this issue?”

3 Follow up

Follow up after your initial conversation. For example, if your professor recommended a book for you to read, let her/him know your thoughts and if you enjoyed it. If you attended a club meeting, ask how you can get more involved.



PARENTAL SUPPORT

A guide for parents of college students

Many students who enroll in college are heading out on their own for the first time. In those situations, the college experience can be as daunting for parents as it is for students. If you are a parent sending a student off to college, it is important to think about how you will support and encourage your child while s/he is in college. Equally important, you should make a plan for helping your student take charge of her/his future. Remember, ultimately, your student's success in college is her/his responsibility.

Discuss responsibilities

As a parent, you are likely used to caring for and watching over your child. Sending her/him off to college and letting go of some control can be scary. But remember, allowing your child to make her/his own choices — and even some mistakes — is a necessary part of helping her/him grow. Before your child leaves home, discuss your expectations for her/him and some situations s/he may encounter. Some topics to discuss are:

Academics

- balancing social and academic pursuits
- managing time and tasks
- your expectations for achievement
- _____
- _____
- _____

Finances

- financial responsibilities and obligations (What must your student pay for? What will you pay for?)
- budgeting and making smart financial choices
- understanding and avoiding credit card debt
- _____
- _____
- _____

Health and happiness

- managing personal health and wellbeing
- maintaining personal relationships
- avoiding and/or ending unhealthy relationships
- working through interpersonal problems, such as problems with a roommate
- avoiding alcohol and drug abuse
- handling emergencies
- maintaining personal safety
- managing day-to-day tasks, such as laundry or vehicle maintenance
- _____
- _____
- _____

Assist with finances

Discussing financial aid and options for paying for college can be confusing. And students who are living on their own for the first time often struggle to maintain budgets and navigate financial paperwork such as bills, leases and loans. Though it is very important for students to learn these skills and be involved in these processes, parents often can lend insight and ask questions students may not consider. Work together with your student to build a financial plan for college. If you encounter questions or challenges in paying for college, be sure to consult the college's financial aid office for assistance.

Understand privacy rules

Up until this point in your child's education, you've had access to her/his academic records. However, once your child becomes a legal adult (age 18), her/his school records are considered private and are available only to her/him. The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), or the Buckley Act, is the federal law that requires colleges to keep students' records confidential. This means that your child's college cannot provide you with information about her/his grades, transcripts or the payment of fees, unless your student signs a waiver allowing you to have access.

Discuss failure

No student or parent wants to consider the possibility of failure. However, students will undoubtedly face challenges as they pursue their degrees and careers and learn to navigate adulthood. Fortunately, college is a relatively safe environment that is designed to help students learn and grow. As a parent, you should be prepared to allow your child to make mistakes and learn from them. Try to avoid stepping in to fix your student's problems. Instead, offer her/him guidance and advice while allowing her/him to work through and resolve the issue. These experiences will help her/him develop confidence, independence and grit.

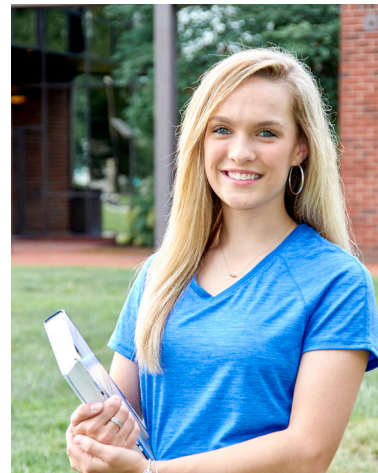
Before your student leaves home, talk about the possibility of failure and how to respond to challenges. Help her/him build a plan for adapting when challenges occur, and talk about the importance of persistence. It is important for your student to know that challenges and difficulties are a regular and expected part of life. In other words, *experiencing* failure is not the same as *being* a failure. Remind your student that you will be there to support her/him and that you are proud of her/his efforts.

Join the club

Many colleges offer "parents clubs" or other family organizations to help family members learn more about the college and provide support to students. Joining a family organization can help you meet other parents, get to know college staff and foster a stronger campus community. Ask your student's admissions officer about these opportunities.

TAKE “15 TO FINISH”

To complete a four-year degree in four years or a two-year degree in two years, you must earn an average of 15 credit hours per semester. Research shows that students who take at least 15 credit hours are far more likely to graduate than those who take fewer than 15. And it may sound surprising, but students who take 15 credits tend to do better academically than those who don't. Experts think it's because students who take 15 are able to use their time more efficiently and make more connections on campus through the increased class time. So when you build your schedule, make sure you're taking at least 15 credit hours toward your degree. It will save you time and money — and increase your likelihood of graduating.



About the College Foundation of West Virginia:

The College Foundation of West Virginia (CFWV) offers free college- and career-planning resources, including cfwv.com, a free website to help students and families plan, apply, and pay for education and training beyond high school. CFWV is coordinated by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission in conjunction with the West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education and the West Virginia Department of Education.

