

# TRANSITION 101

COLLEGE READINESS · TRANSITION PREPARATION · RESOURCES · STUDENT SUCCESS

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## CFWV.COM

### Your guide to college and career planning

The College Foundation of West Virginia (CFWV) offers a website, [cfwv.com](http://cfwv.com), with free tools and information to help students like you 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.

[Cfwv.com](http://cfwv.com) offers you the opportunity to sign up to receive text messages, which serve as general college reminders and advice, to make sure you are transitioning well into college life.

# TRANSITION 101

Deciding to continue your education is a big step in preparing for the future. Starting your first year of training after high school, whether it is college, career and technical education or enlisting in the military, can feel overwhelming at first. Between meeting new people, navigating campus, classes and having more responsibilities, feeling overwhelmed or stressed is completely normal. To be successful, it is important to start preparing before the first day of class.

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.

This experience will help you learn about the world and yourself. It will open your mind to new ideas and is a doorway to new opportunities. And sooner than you think, you will be graduating and getting ready for the next chapter of your life. Remember to take it all in and enjoy the experience!

There are many people and resources to support you along the way. This guide provides tips for preparing for your educational pathway and staying on track. It will help you make the most out of your college experience.

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» **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, midterm 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.

» **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.

» **Associate's degree:** Associate's

degrees are typically two-year degrees, often from community or junior colleges.

» **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."

» **Bachelor's degree:** Bachelor's degrees are typically four-year degrees, but can be earned in as few as three years. Some students may take five or six years to complete their bachelor's degree. These degrees are sometimes referred to as baccalaureate or undergraduate degrees.

» **Community College:** Sometimes called a two-year college, students can take classes, and then transfer to a four-year school, or they can earn certificates, diplomas or associate's degrees from these schools.

» **Counseling services:** Counseling services at most institutions offer many options for students seeking help with coping with stress and mental health concerns. They may also offer individual short-term and group counseling for currently enrolled students.

» **Credit hour:** Credit hours are units of value given to classes. Some classes may be worth two or three credits, while others are worth four credits. Credits vary by class and by school. Many schools base tuition costs on the number of credit hours taken. Some charge a specific dollar amount per credit hour.

» **Deferment:** A deferment is an approved postponement in repaying a student loan. For example, students may seek a deferment on undergraduate loan payments while in graduate school.

»» **Deferred admission option:** Deferred admission allows students to take extra time between being accepted and beginning classes. Students choosing this option typically wait one school term or one calendar year before starting classes.

»» **Department of Education:** This government agency administers several federal student financial aid programs.

»» **Direct loan:** The U.S. Department of Education's loan program.

»» **Early admission:** Early admission allows students to enroll in college before completing high school, generally after their junior year.

»» **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.

»» **Federal work-study program:** A federally-funded, need-based program administered by each school, this program allows students to work on campus in exchange for a portion of their tuition.

»» **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 grants, scholarships various sources,

including the federal government. The financial aid office oversees the distribution of loans, 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 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.

»» **Grant:** A grant is money given to students for their education. Often based on need, grants may come from federal or state programs, or sometimes from private charitable organizations. It does not have to be repaid.

»» **Health and wellness center:** A center on campus that provides resources to promote healthy lifestyle choices. This center usually offers health education and programming for students.

»» **Health services:** This office provides health care services to students for acute illnesses. These offices can provide walk-in appointments but usually require an appointment. This is also the office where you will submit required medical forms to the institution.

»» **Independent student:** Independent students are self-supporting students who are not financially dependent on their parents.

»» **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.

»» **Orientation:** Events hosted by a college to help new students understand the enrollment process and become familiar with campus. During

orientation, students often learn how to register for classes; how to use the school library, cafeteria, fitness center, and other school services; how to pay tuition and fees; and how to take care of other important details.

» **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.

» **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.

» **ROTC:** Reserve Officers Training Corps. In this program, the military pays a student’s tuition or other expenses. The student takes part in summer training while in college, and commits to military service after college.

» **SAR: Student Aid Report:** This report summarizes the information entered on your FAFSA form, and shows the amount of your Expected Family Contribution.

» **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.

» **Scholarships:** These funds are given to, or earned by, students and are to be used for tuition. There are numerous public and private sources for scholarships. Some are given based on need, some on merit or skill. Others have very specific stipulations on who can receive the scholarship.

» **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 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 or undecided 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.

» **Work-study:** This program allows students to defray part of their tuition and school expenses by working part time on campus.

College readiness means having the skill set and knowledge required to succeed during college. This includes being financially literate, knowing what types of financial aid are available, and taking the steps necessary to enroll as a college student. When we use the term college, we are referring to any form of training and education beyond high school.

## Financial Literacy

### What is Financial Literacy?

Financial literacy means having the ability to understand your personal finances, creating a budget and living within your means.

### Budgeting

When pursuing your educational pathway, setting up a budget is a must. Being able to set a budget for yourself and sticking to it is a valuable skill to learn, and one you will use for the rest of your life. A budget tells you how much money you are going to spend and what you are going to spend it on. Not sure where to start? Don't worry! Use these tips to learn how to budget.

### Fixed Expenses

Fixed expenses are expenses that you are required to pay on a recurring basis. Some examples of fixed expenses are:

- Tuition and fees, room and board or rent
- Monthly subscriptions: internet, cell phone
- Books, equipment, classroom supplies
- Car loan, insurance and health care
- Credit card accounts

### Flexible Expenses

Once you subtract your fixed costs from your total income, you will know how much disposable income you have left over for flexible costs. These types of cost include:

- Snacks, drinks, groceries, and eating out
- Social and recreation expenses, such as movies and sporting events
- Transportation, including car maintenance and parking fees
- Personal expenses, including laundry

### **QUICK TIP** OPEN A CHECKING ACCOUNT

In addition to developing a budget, you should open a checking account if you do not already have 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. Should you attend 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.

## Ways to Save Money in College

As a college student, you may find yourself living on a tight budget. Finding ways to save money while in school is always a plus. Students who elect to commute versus living on a college campus can often save on expenses. Here are some easy ways to save money during school.

- » **Take advantage of your meal plan:**  
If you live on campus, you are most likely required to have a meal plan. There are many different types of meal plans available, but most will give you a certain number of dining hall meals per week and the option of adding flex dollars (this might be called something different on your campus) that you can use at the campus food court or other locations. You should learn what is included with your meal plan, because you may be able to save money by opting for a less expensive meal plan. Most of your meals on campus are already paid for through your meal plan, so eat on campus as much as possible.
- » **Save your change:** For example, when you break a ten-dollar bill, take the change you received in coins and keep in a jar. At the end of the semester, you will be surprised at how much change you saved up!
- » **If you enjoy student leadership, consider becoming a Resident Assistant (RA):**  
At most colleges and universities these types of positions cover your housing cost.
- » **Take advantage of student discounts:** Many companies offer discounts with your student I.D. Here are few places that offer student discounts:
  - Amazon
  - Local and chain restaurants
  - Retail stores
  - AT&T
  - Movie Theaters
  - Museums
  - Spotify
  - Mega Bus and Amtrak
- » **Eat out only on special occasions:** You can save money by using your meal plan or eating at home. Try to use eating out as a reward. Your bank account will thank you. Most campuses have financial literacy offices or tools to help you manage your budget. Check out your college or university's website to see what they have available. Also, you can visit [makecentswv.org](http://makecentswv.org). Make Cents WV was created by a group of education and government partners working to help students make wise and informed financial decisions.

## Financial Aid

### What is Financial Aid?

Financial aid is money that the federal or state government or other organizations either give or loan you to help pay for your education. In order to receive financial aid, you must apply. Financial aid comes from a variety of sources, including state and federal governments, colleges, organizations, companies, and banks.



## What are the Types of Financial Aid?

**Grants:** free money, they do not have to be repaid; They are typically based on financial need. This means they are awarded based on your family's financial circumstances.

**Scholarships:** free money and do not have to be repaid in most cases; Scholarships may be awarded based on your financial need, academic achievement, community service, athletic talent and many other factors.

**Loans:** money that you borrow from a bank, government, or private lending company; **A loan must be paid back with interest.** Loans offered by the government often have lower interest rates and can be paid back over an extended period of time.

**Work study programs:** allow you to get paid through part-time employment while you are enrolled in college and can help you pay part of your college costs.

**To receive financial aid:** You must apply. The most important application to fill out is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). All federal financial aid programs, most programs offered by the State of West Virginia, and many programs offered by colleges require you to submit the FAFSA. You can file the FAFSA for FREE at [fafsa.gov](http://fafsa.gov).

## Enrollment Checklist

You've graduated and you have been accepted into college. Now, that is exciting! With that said, don't let the summer heat drive away your decision to further your education! Use this checklist to help take the next steps in preparing for your life as a college student.

- » Review your admission offers and compare financial aid packages to determine which institution is the best fit.
- » You should notify all schools of your intent by May 1st if possible. Be sure to send your deposit to the school you wish to attend and ask your high school counselor to send your final transcripts to the institution in May or June.
- » Once you have accepted an offer from the college, university, or career and technical center you would like to attend, you should receive information from the institution about orientation sessions, course scheduling and required paperwork. If you have any questions during this process reach out to your institution's admissions office.
- » Set up your student account with the institution. These instructions are usually found in your letter of admissions. Once you have set up your student account, you will gain access to your college email. Through your college email, you will receive information regarding next steps.



### QUICK TIP YOU MUST COMPLETE YOUR FAFSA EACH SCHOOL YEAR

You must complete your FAFSA each school year to be eligible for financial aid for the following school year. Fill it out whether or not you think you qualify for financial aid. Be sure to fill out the form completely and double check your information. Use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool (DRT) to autopopulate important tax information. Sign up for text alerts at [cfwv.com](http://cfwv.com) to receive FREE financial aid reminders.

Check your email regularly so you do not miss any important deadlines like the examples listed below.

- » **Register for housing:** If you plan to live on campus, you will be required to sign up for on-campus housing. Some colleges require you to register for housing and pay the deposit before you are allowed to register for orientation. In addition, some institutions require first time freshmen to live on campus.
- » **Complete and submit your immunizations forms:** Most colleges require students to submit medical forms to be used in case of an emergency and most require students to have updated vaccinations. Usually these forms are submitted to the health services office. Talk to your admissions office if you're unsure about these requirements.
- » **Meet with the financial aid office:** When your financial aid packet arrives, schedule an appointment with the financial aid office. You can review the information together and decide if the packet suits your needs. Also, you can determine what steps that you need to take next.
- » **Sign up for New Student Orientation (NSO):** Once you submit your enrollment deposit, you will receive instructions on how to sign up for New Student Orientation. If you have already submitted your deposit and have not received instructions about NSO, contact your institution's admissions office for further information. Remember to check your college email before you contact the admissions office.
- » **Complete your loan entrance counseling:** If you decide to take out a student loan, the federal government requires you to complete entrance counseling to ensure you understand the responsibilities and obligations you are committing to by accepting loans. The counseling is a single session and usually takes 20 to 30 minutes to complete. To complete entrance counseling you will need a verified FSA ID, your school name, and details about your income, and financial and living expenses. 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.

## What is New Student Orientation?

Most traditional colleges and even career and technical education centers often require all first-year students to attend orientation. They are usually held early in early summer. Be sure to register as soon as possible to reserve your spot. During orientation, you will have the opportunity to hear an overview of what to expect during college, how to schedule classes, complete any required testing and learn about campus policies and resources. The information you will receive at orientation is important, so be sure to take notes.

Once you sign up for orientation you should receive additional information from your institution, so be sure to check your college email for specific details. If you have any questions, reach out to your college's admissions office.

Encourage your parents or guardians to attend orientation. Many colleges provide an orientation session for parents or guardians; the session will provide an opportunity for them to learn about campus life and academics. They will also provide information about cost and financial aid.







There is a lot of self-discovery during your first year of college, as well as your entire educational journey. You may discover a newfound independence or what you need to succeed in the learning environment around you. This section provides information to help guide you through the transition to and through your first semester of college.

## Navigating Your Independence

One adjustment you will find when pursuing your educational pathway is the independence it brings. Having this new independence makes it easy to forget about the responsibility that comes with it. An important part of this is learning about yourself and finding the tools that work best for you. Not sure where to start? Don't worry! Here are tips for starting your first year off right.

### Tips for Success

- » Each time you miss class, you miss out on valuable content and class discussion, as well as knowing exactly what the professor expects from you. If you must miss class, be sure to notify your professor and ask one of your classmates for any notes or material you may have missed.
- » Office hours are designated hours when a faculty member or assigned assistant for a course is available to meet with students to address concerns or give advice. You can often find the times the faculty member holds office hours posted outside their office door or they will be listed on your course syllabus.
- » Tackle assignments right away and study for tests well in advance. Your syllabus is a useful tool used to prioritize your assignments and time.
- » Talk with an advisor, mentor or counselor when you need help. Remember you are not alone; there are people ready and willing to help you succeed. You simply have to ask.
- » Learn how to use Microsoft Office Suite. If you don't know how, teach yourself, or find a FREE online tutorial. Most of your work will require you to use the Microsoft Office Suite (e.g., Word, Excel, and PowerPoint). Tip: Many campuses may offer free or discounted software downloads through the IT office. The computers in the library and in the campus computer labs will have this software already installed on each computer that you can access while you are on campus.
- » Get in the habit of checking your email frequently. This is how professors, advisors and staff will communicate with you. Check your email at least once a day.
- » Learn how you study best. Do you prefer to study alone or in a group with others? Some people study best at the desk in their room, others in the lounge, and still others in the library. Consider completing the Learning Styles Inventory on [cfwv.com](http://cfwv.com) to learn more about how you study best.
- » Take notes in class. If you have trouble keeping up with ideas in a lecture, collaborate with classmates after class to be sure you understand the material. When in doubt, go to the tutoring center!
- » Practice time management by using a planner or calendar. Record due dates, reading assignments, and anything else you know about ahead of time. This will help you see how much "free time" you have. Remember to schedule time for meals, self-care and sleep.

## Purchasing Textbooks

One of the major expenses in college aside from the cost of tuition and room and board, will be your textbooks. Don't worry! Here are some useful tips on buying textbooks without breaking the bank.

- » Buying used books each semester could lower the cost significantly. If your professor has chosen a new edition of a textbook, however, you won't be able to buy a used copy.
- » Check out the renting options at your college or university bookstore. Renting your books can save you up to 50%.
- » When purchasing digital textbooks, remember that some textbooks may not be available in digital format.
- » Explore free options that may be available to you such as library copies and online PDF versions.

## Cultivating a Relationship with Your Advisor

Although you are responsible for making decisions throughout your educational career, your academic advisor is there to help you stay on track. To get the most out of your meetings with your advisor, you should come to the meeting with your needs and goals in mind. Advisors are there to help guide you through your academic choices. It is important that you remain active during this process and you are knowledgeable about your educational goals so you can receive the most out of your educational journey.

Advisors are a valuable resource, so get to know them! If you find yourself struggling with a course or a problem, seek out your advisor immediately so that you can get back on the right path quickly. Advisors are trained to connect you the resources you need. You should see your advisor:

- » Every semester prior to your registration date
- » To discuss academic progress
- » To find out more about a particular major or minor
- » To discuss any problems that might affect your academic performance
- » To discuss dropping a class, and the possible impact from your decision (financial aid, full-time status, etc.)
- » To discuss graduate and professional options and receive appropriate referrals
- » To monitor progress toward graduation

### **QUICK TIP** BUYING YOUR TEXTBOOKS

When buying your books, be sure to buy the correct edition of your textbook. Also, you may save money by shopping at the campus bookstore early. When you get a list of required books, buy the used copies available. You can also rent your textbooks or look for free downloads online.

## Registering for Classes

Most colleges require students to meet with their academic advisor before they allow you to register for classes. Before you meet with your advisor, you should create a mock schedule of the classes you would like to take. Be sure to consult your institution's academic or course catalog to be most informed about your degree and curriculum requirements. The catalog will provide you with a plan to help you stay on track and achieve your degree on time. Taking classes outside your curriculum requirements may end up costing you more money and time. When creating your class schedule, remember to schedule time for getting to each class and time for meals.

### When Can You Register?

At most institutions, students who are currently enrolled are eligible to register based on class level-priority. Registration for summer courses typically begins in late March; registration for the fall begins in early April; and, registration for spring begins in early November. Graduate students and seniors register first, then juniors, then sophomores and then freshmen. In addition, some students are eligible for advanced or early registration like veterans and active duty military students, student athletes, and select other groups of students. For career and technical education centers, there may be varying registration dates. Check with your CTE advisor early.

### Take "15 to Finish"

If you attend a community and technical college or a four-year college or university, 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. Experts think it's because students who take 15 credits 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. Be sure the classes you are taking meet your degree requirements. It will save you time and money — and increase your likelihood of graduating.

### Committing to a Major

Many students apply for college not knowing what they want to pursue as a career, and many feel pressure to decide on a major early on. If selecting a focus has you stressed out, relax. You do have some time to explore. Majors play two important roles in every college career. First, your major offers you a clear course of study. Second, if you choose wisely, you'll remain excited about your classes.

Most students don't need to select a major until well into their sophomore year of college. You can investigate your options before deciding on a focus of study. (And if you change your mind later on, you're hardly alone: 80 percent of college students will change their major at least once.) Just ask several successful people you know what they majored in when they were in college. You might be surprised by how many wound up working in unrelated fields, in careers that interest them and suit them very well.

Regardless of whether you have a definite goal or whether you plan to explore some options, keep in mind that your education will not end when you get your degree.



# STUDENT SUCCESS

Adjusting to and completing your chosen career pathway may take some getting use to, but it is certainly worth it. As a 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 resources available to support you on your way. Although your academics are the single most important part of this experience, they are not the only opportunity to grow. Remember to take advantage of opportunities outside the classroom.

## Academic Success

No matter your education pathway, you will be academically challenged. The courses you take and experiences you seek will allow you to further your personal and professional development. These pathways require different skills, so don't feel bad if you need a little help getting on the right path for success. You may feel the need to seek assistance at times. Campuses offer many different resources to help provide academic support, such as tutoring, writing centers and student success workshops. It is important to take advantage of these academic resources early. They are necessary for your success.

## Benefits of Having a Mentor

One of the great aspects of attending an institution of higher education is that you are surrounded by many professionals with different experiences and backgrounds.

Developing professional relationships with individuals who already are established in your intended field can give you a major advantage. A mentor can make an impact in many aspects of your life, both professionally and personally. They can also offer a more informed perspective when it comes to making career-related decision, such as what opportunities you should take advantage of in your field of interest. Having a mentor will provide you access to a person who has a wealth of knowledge regarding your career path, and more.

There is no one way a mentoring relationship should look. A mentor can be a sounding board, support system, voice of clarity, or a person who gives you an extra boost of confidence when you need it. Professors, advisors, campus staff, coaches, business leaders, and even other students are all possible mentors.

## Campus Involvement

Research shows that students who become involved in activities on campus are more likely to do well in school. Not only can they meet new people, they feel part of a community. Campus involvement helps students refine skills valued by employers.

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### 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!

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### Lecture and speaker series

Institutions often bring in internationally acclaimed speakers to discuss topics of interest — and tickets are usually free for students!

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### The arts

Most campuses host plays, concerts and art shows, sometimes with famous artists or performers!

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### Athletics

Many campuses offer free access to gym or athletic facilities. You can often get free or discounted tickets to attend college sporting events.



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## 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.

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## Study abroad

Institutions often 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.

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## Clubs and organizations

Universities often offer dozens, if not hundreds, of clubs and organizations. You can continue to pursue a passion or completely reinvent yourself and try something new. Don't miss out on these fun opportunities.

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## Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy is knowing when to speak up for yourself. A large part of self-advocacy is understanding your strengths and weaknesses, goal development and making decisions. As a self-advocate, you should create goals for yourself and know how to achieve them. The ability to advocate for yourself is important during college because you must communicate your needs in order to receive the support necessary to succeed during your educational career.

- » Ask yourself: What activities can I participate in to practice being a self-advocate?
- » Ask your support system to help you with your goals.
- » Communicate what you want and defend how you will accomplish it.
- » Ask for advice but remember, all the final decisions are up to you.

To learn more about self-advocacy check out this link: <https://www.heath.gwu.edu/self-advocacy>



### QUICK TIP GET A COPY OF YOUR CAMPUS'S RESOURCE HANDBOOK

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Typically, institutions have a resource handbook for the academic year that provides useful resources located on and off campus. They also inform you of all official college policies. Search for resource handbook on your institution's webpage to learn more.



## Caring for Your Mental Health During Your Transition to College

Heading off to college is exciting--new experiences, new friends and independence. However, there can also be challenges--new social pressures, academic demands, missing home and financial strains that can cause stress and impact mental health. In fact, 30 percent of students have felt so down at some point in the first year that they struggled to function. Chances are someone in your class feels lonely or overwhelmed too. If sad feelings don't go away or last for weeks, you have drastic mood changes, you're not eating, or you can't concentrate, this could be a mental health issue. Mental health conditions are common. Talk with someone you trust about it and mention if you've received mental health care before. If you're thinking about self-harm, get help right away. You are not alone. Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.

### Talk it Out

Before college, you should make a plan not only if you have an existing mental health condition, but also so you know where to turn if you develop one. Have a conversation about mental health with your parents or a trusted adult. On campus, check out your counseling options. Talking about your feelings and asking for help are signs of strength, so don't be afraid to speak up. If you know someone who may be struggling, talk with them and tell them you support them in getting the help they need. Check out the free helplines listed on page 19.

### Make a Plan

Once you turn 18 your school may not be allowed to share information about your mental health unless there is an emergency. For your parents or a trusted adult to have access to your records, you need to fill out an authorization form each year. Talk with your family or a trusted adult about completing the forms together before you head to college and decide what information will be most important to share. For the form and for more on managing your mental health at school, visit [Nami.org/college](http://Nami.org/college) guide. (Quoted from *Starting the Conversation: College and Your Mental Health*, 2016.)

## Helplines: Reach Out and Talk to Someone

As soon as you start to feel like you are in crisis, you can reach out to a helpline for support. Trauma, depression, substance abuse, difficulties with family and relationships and high stress are all valid reasons to reach out. Your problem is never too small or insignificant. You won't be judged for the problems you are dealing with. A crisis counselor's goal is to help you make healthy decisions and feel safe. You will be asked some questions about your feelings, social situation, safety, and any thoughts of suicide that you or the person you are calling about might be having. Answering truthfully will help the crisis counselor connect you to the resources you need. (adapted from [Activeminds.org](http://Activeminds.org))

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## TIPS FOR OVERALL GOOD HEALTH AND MENTAL WELLNESS

- 1 Practice mindfulness
  - 2 Get organized
  - 3 Exercise regularly
  - 4 Avoid drugs and alcohol
  - 5 Take time for self-care
  - 6 Get enough sleep
  - 7 Get involved in campus activities
  - 8 Find out about wellness programs available on campus
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### CRISIS TEXT LINE

Free, 24/7 support for those in crisis. Text START to 741741 from anywhere in the US to text with a trained crisis counselor.

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### NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24/7.

Call 1-800-273-8255

Chat at [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

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### HELP4WV

Immediate help for any West Virginian struggling with an addiction or mental health issue. The helpline staff offers confidential support and resource referrals. The helpline provides assistance for those who need help themselves, and guidance for those seeking help for loved ones.

Text 844-435-7498

Call 844-HELP4WV or 304-356-5840

Chat online at [www.help4wv.com](http://www.help4wv.com)

Email [HELP4WV@1STCHS.COM](mailto:HELP4WV@1STCHS.COM)

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### VETERANS CRISIS LINE

The Veterans Crisis Line is a 24/7 crisis resource available to any Service member, including members of the National Guard and Reserve, and any Veteran, even if you're not registered with VA or enrolled in VA health care.

Call 1-800-273-8255

Text 838255

Chat at [veteranscrisisline.net](http://veteranscrisisline.net)

### THE TREVOR PROJECT

The leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer & questioning (LGBTQ) young people under 25.

Call 1-866-488-7386

Text START to 678678

Chat at [thetrevorproject.org/get-help-now](http://thetrevorproject.org/get-help-now)

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### TRANS LIFELINE

Peer support service run by trans people, for trans and questioning callers. If you are in crisis or just need someone to talk to, even if it's just about whether or not you're trans, please call for support and resources.

Call 1-877-565-8860

Online resources at [Translifeline.org](http://Translifeline.org)

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**You can also contact campus security or dial 911 for emergencies.**



# 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](http://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.

