

# Foster Care to Academic Success

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## The Basics – College ABCs

### The College ABCs

Academic Terms	Degree Types
Accreditation	Dropping a Class
Campus Resources	Extracurricular Activities
College Courses	Financial Aid
Course Load	Textbooks

### Academic Terms

- **Semester** – two terms during the school year and one during the summer
- **Quarter** – three terms during the school year and one during the summer
- 4.5 quarter credits equal 3 semester credits

### Accreditation

If your school is accredited, it has been approved by a regional or national association as following sound educational principles, hiring qualified instructors, and providing good instruction. If you go to an accredited school, you are eligible for federal funding including the Pell Grant, the ETV, and federal loans.

You can generally transfer credits between regionally accredited schools, such as from a community college to a university or from one college to another. If you go to a nationally accredited school, you usually cannot transfer credits to a regionally accredited institution or even to another nationally approved school. Colleges and universities tend to have regional accreditation; technical schools often have national accreditation.

***To find out how your school is accredited, search “accreditation” on the website or ask at the financial aid office.***

- **Regional accreditation** – the school has been approved by one of these six organizations:
  - Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools
  - New England Association of Schools and Colleges
  - North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
  - Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
  - Southern States Association of Colleges and Schools
  - Western Association of Colleges and Schools
- **National accreditation** – the school has been approved by a national agency, including:
  - Accrediting Commission on Career Schools and Colleges of Technology
  - The Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges

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- National Accrediting Commission of Cosmetology Arts and Sciences
- National League for Nursing Accreditation Commission

### Campus Resources

- **Advisor** – every student is assigned an advisor, to tell you about and help with
  - Rules for students
  - Procedures for registration
  - Adding and dropping classes
  - College life
- **Librarian** – college libraries are a wealth of information; books, magazines, newspapers, computers, quiet places to study ... and reference librarians. Librarians can help you find just about any information you need when you are writing a paper or researching a project.
- **Academic Help** – it might be called the Tutoring Service, the Math Lab, the Writing Center or the Learning Lab. Whatever they're called, use these services. ***You pay for them – use them!***
- **Career Center** – career center staff can relate the various majors that your school offers to specific jobs. They can talk to you about which majors match your interests and aptitudes and will prepare you for occupations in which you are interested. They can also help you find internships, create a resume, develop solid interviewing skills and find a job.
- **Your Professors** – Get to know your professors and let them get to know you. They meet with students regularly and they are sure to tell you their office hours. Schedule appointments to chat about your grades, get help if you are having difficulty, and get suggestions for improvement. If you make an appointment, ALWAYS keep it or let the professor know in advance that you won't be there.
- **Emotional support** – Many college students experience stress, anxiety or depression. If this happens to you, first of all know that what you're feeling is absolutely normal, and there is help at hand. Most colleges have a Counseling Center, and many also have chaplains who can help you through difficult times if you need spiritual support. Some schools have peer counselors or hotlines. Don't suffer in silence – help is available if you just ask for it.

### College Courses

- **Required courses** – also called general education courses; all students must take these classes in order to graduate. Required courses are different at each school, but for a Bachelor's degree, these may include six credits each of:
  - English language/composition
  - humanities (literature, history, art, music, religion etc.)
  - natural science

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- foreign language
- social science (economics, anthropology, geography, psychology, etc.)
- **Major Course of Studies** – the field in which you specialize. A major generally requires between 30 and 36 credit hours of study. If you don't know what to pick as a major, talk to your faculty advisor and visit the career center (see below). You do not have to choose a major until your junior year, so you have a little time before the choice becomes critical. Your first year is a good time to get many of your general education courses out of the way.
- **Major courses** – classes related to your major. Some major courses are required by all students in that major; others can be chosen for personal interest. For example, all Psychology majors need to take Introduction to Psychology, but they may be able to choose between Adolescent Psychology and Abnormal Psychology.
- **Elective courses** – these are any courses that interest you but do not fall into the categories above. They count towards the number of credits you need to graduate.

### Course Load

This is the number of credit hours you take each term. Most classes carry three semester or quarter credits, and full-time is considered between 12 and 15 credits.

When planning your class load, consider not only the number of credits, but how hard you will find each of the courses. It is very important to balance hard and easy classes so that you are not overwhelmed.

### Degree Types

- **Associate Degree** – 60 credits or two years, offered at a community college
- **Baccalaureate Degree** – 120 credits or four years, offered at a four-year college or university and commonly called a Bachelor's Degree, B.A. (Bachelor of Arts) or B.S. (Bachelor of Science)
- **Certification** – technical certificates or diplomas in career fields, offered at a community college or specialized school

### Dropping a Class

If you decide that you must drop a class, you need to formally withdraw through your college registrar's office. There are usually several "Add/Drop" dates – a deadline early in the semester when you get a total refund, a deadline a little later when you get a partial refund, and a final deadline (usually around the time of mid-terms) that you have to meet in order to withdraw without academic penalty. If you drop a course after that date, you will automatically get an "F" grade for the course which will pull down your

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GPA forever. Your academic advisor can tell you the deadlines, or you can find them in the calendar on your college website.

### Extracurricular Activities

Colleges offer a wide variety of extracurricular activity: fraternities and sororities, clubs, student government, newspaper and yearbook production and organized sports are only a few examples. These programs are very enriching and can be very tempting.

**Remember, however, that your primary job while in college is to be a good student and get good grades.** Your family and job may also be top priorities. Keep your life in balance.

### Financial Aid

### Textbooks

Aside from college tuition costs, one of your biggest college expenses is paying for textbooks. Here are a few tips that can stretch your textbook budget.

- **Your college bookstore probably sells used books are a lot cheaper than new ones.** Many students look for used books, though, so get to the bookstore as soon as you can.
- **Book stores are not the only place to find used text books.** Check the bulletin boards in dormitories, the student union, fraternity and sorority houses, and other campus sites. These books, unlike the ones you find in the book store, may have notes in the margins or contain underlining which you may consider to be a bonus.
- **You may want to go online to see if you can find your books at better prices.** Be sure to order early so that you have them by the time classes start! Compare prices at some of these websites:

[www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

[www.bookleberry.com](http://www.bookleberry.com)

[www.abe.com](http://www.abe.com)

[www.dealoz.com](http://www.dealoz.com)

[www.allbookstores.com](http://www.allbookstores.com)

[www.ecampus.com](http://www.ecampus.com)

[www.barnesandnoble.com](http://www.barnesandnoble.com)

[www.half.com](http://www.half.com)

[www.bestbookbuys.com](http://www.bestbookbuys.com)

[www.superbookdeals.com](http://www.superbookdeals.com)

[www.bigwords.com](http://www.bigwords.com)

Make sure you order the correct edition of the text you are looking for; your professor will include this information on his/her book list or syllabus.

- **Consider renting your textbooks from [www.chegg.com](http://www.chegg.com).** College Algebra, by Robert Blitzer (just as an example) costs \$143 new and \$104 used at the Northern Virginia Community College and \$11.99 for a semester through Chegg. You do have to pay shipping but you still save some \$100 over a new and \$60 over a used textbook.

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- **See if you can get the online versions of your textbooks.** Ask your professors, or ask at the bookstore. Textbooks may be available on line for half the price.
- **In the meantime...**
  - If you are really broke, check your campus library. Most school libraries have textbooks on their shelves and they may be borrowed for limited periods of time.
  - See if your professor can lend you a copy of the book, even if you have to read it in the departmental office.
  - Ask one of your classmates if you can borrow their book. Of course, you'll have to use it when they don't need it which may not be convenient to you, but at least you will keep up on the reading.
- **Many bookstores buy back textbooks at the end of the semester.** While you have to come up with the full amount at the beginning of the term, you'll get some of it back if your books are in good condition when you resell them. Make sure you fully understand the book store rules for returning books before you make your purchase. If you can't sell the books back to the book store, you can still sell them yourself – just put a notice on a bulletin board in the student union or in a dorm. And here's a further good tip – use the money you get back from last semester's textbooks towards next semester's!

Text books are an important part of your success. You will be tested on material found in them whether or not it's been covered in class. Not getting assigned text books is not an option; you are set up for failure if you don't have them.

**Good luck this semester! Remember, your ETV coordinator, Academic Success advisor and everyone at OFA is here to support you. Just ask.**