

College Terms & Definitions

Source: College Parent Central <https://www.collegeparentcentral.com/glossary-of-helpful-college-terms/> (unless otherwise noted)

There are many terms that are frequently used that you may not be familiar with as a new college student. The following is a list of the most commonly used ones. Knowing these could help you.

TERM	OFFICIAL DEFINITION:	IN OTHER WORDS:
ARTICULATION AGREEMENT	An Articulation Agreement is an officially approved agreement between two institutions, which allows a student to apply credits earned in specific programs at one institution toward advanced standing, entry or transfer into a specific program at the other institution. It matches coursework between schools and so helps students make a smooth transition from one institution to another by minimizing duplication of coursework.	The credits you took at one school may count at a different school, too.
COURSE CATALOG	The Course Catalog, sometimes called the College Catalog is an important tool for understanding the college's course offerings and academic and administrative policies and procedures. The catalog may contain information about college offices, academic policies and procedures, college facilities, information about campus life, graduation requirements, majors, descriptions of courses, information about faculty members, and college contact information. There is a wealth of information available. Students are responsible for knowing and adhering to the policies and requirements in the catalog, so it is definitely worth spending some time with it. Students don't, however, need to memorize every word immediately, but they should take time to become familiar with it and refer back to it often.	The place that lists all the courses offered by a university, as well as a bunch of other important information. It is good to find this on the school website.

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COURSE REGISTRATION	<p>This is the process through which students sign up for their courses for the following semester. It will probably take place sometime after the midpoint of the period of time for signing up for classes may be a few weeks, or it may remain open to current semester. Students are often asked, encouraged, or required to meet with their academic advisor before registering for courses to be sure that they understand their course requirements. Registration at many institutions now takes place on line. Students usually have a designated time, based on class seniority, when they may register for their classes. It is important to register early, as some classes fill. Students should have alternative classes in mind.</p>	<p>This is how you get signed up for classes each semester.</p>
COURSE WAIT LIST	<p>A course wait list is a system for adding students to a class once it is full. If a student attempts to register for a class that is already at capacity, she may be allowed to add her name to a waitlist for that class. If another student later drops that class or is removed, the student on the waitlist will be added to the roster. Priority is usually given on a first come, first served basis. Schools have differing policies regarding wait listing students and notifying waitlisted students. There are no guarantees given to students and there are often limitations and restrictions.</p>	<p>A class is popular and you now have to wait to get into it.</p>
CREDIT HOUR	<p>A credit hour is equivalent to 1 hour of class time per week. Courses are usually measured in credit hours, with the average being three or four. Students may refer to how many credit hours or credits they are carrying for a particular semester. Graduation requirements are usually measured in credit hours i.e. "120 credit hours required for graduation". A general rule of thumb is that students should be averaging about 2 hours of work per week outside of class for each credit hour or hour of time spent in class.</p>	<p>If you are taking a 3 credit class, the expectation is that each week you spend 3 hours in class and 6 hours outside of class doing homework, reading, and studying.</p>

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DEAN'S LIST	The Dean's List (Provost's list, Chancellor's Award) is usually produced each semester, and is a list of those students who have high grades or meet a certain academic standard. It is the college equivalent of an honor roll. Each institution will set its own requirements for qualifying for the Dean's List.	Doing well get's you on this list.
DEGREE AUDIT	A degree audit is an analysis of your student's academic progress toward a degree. It helps your student monitor where he is and what he still needs to do to complete his requirements. A degree audit is an advising document that maps out degree requirements and compares them against your student's transcript. It is a vital tool for academic planning, course selection, and scheduling and should be used in conjunction with consultation with the student's academic advisor.	This is a sanity check to make sure you are on track to get your degree.
DEGREE MAP	A degree map is a semester by semester list of courses which a student needs to take in order to graduate on time. Sometimes called a major map, it suggests courses to complete each semester in order to be "on track" to graduation by taking the right courses in the right order.	If you know your major, a degree map can help you plan which classes to take each semester.
DUAL OR DOUBLE MAJOR	A dual or double major is an undergraduate student who completes two sets of degree requirements in two distinct areas of study. Although the student may declare two separate majors, the student will receive one bachelor's degree listing both majors at time of completion. A double major may not be twice the work as some requirements may overlap.	If you plan carefully, you can get more than one degree in the same amount of time.

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ELECTIVE COURSES	These are courses which are not required to fulfill any college requirement. Students will probably have certain all college required courses, certain courses required for their major or minor, and the remainder of their courses may be general elective courses. General elective courses are a great opportunity to explore new and interesting areas.	If you have extra time and your schedule allows it, you can take extra classes just for fun.
FAFSA	It is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. This is the starting point for almost all financial aid. Even if you will not be applying for federal aid, most colleges require that you complete this form in order to apply for any financial aid, scholarships, or grants.	This form is how you get your financial aid. Make sure to note the due date for completion each year so that you don't miss the deadline.
FERPA	The Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act is a federal law which protects the privacy of student educational records. This gives parents certain rights regarding their child's educational records. It is important for parents to realize, however, that these rights transfer to the student once he turns eighteen or attends a school beyond high school. This means that, without written permission from a student, a parent or anyone else will probably not have access to his academic records. It also means that, without that written permission, faculty members and administrators of the college are legally prohibited from discussing a student's progress.	Your data is protected and your privacy is important.
FIRST GENERATION STUDENTS	This term is used to refer to students who are the first in their immediate family to attend college: students whose parents have not attended a post-secondary educational institution. Colleges understand that many first generation students may have particular issues in learning about and adjusting to the world of college. Some institutions develop special programs or even organizations for first-generation students. Many institutions provide extra support and guidance for these students.	Because you are the first in your family to go to college, they may not understand how to most effectively support you in your college career, which is completely normal. There are resources to help and you should make sure to be familiar with those resources.

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GEN ED REQUIREMENTS	This is short-hand for General Education Requirements. They may also be referred to by other names, such as Liberal Arts Requirements, Liberal Studies Requirements, Core Curriculum Requirements, Distribution Requirements, etc. These are requirements designed to help your college student receive a broad education with at least a general background in several areas. Students are often required to take one or two courses in several different departments outside of their major.	These are classes you have to take to graduate and may not be directly related to your major.
GPA	Sometimes referred to as the Cumulative Grade Point Average (sometimes also called a “cum”), this is a way of calculating the college student’s overall grade average. Most often, colleges will calculate grades on a 4 point scale with 4 being equal to an A. Therefore, a 4.0 is an A+, a 3.5 a B+, 3.0 a B and so forth.	Keep an eye on this. Depending on the type of financial aid you have, your GPA could affect whether or not you get to continue receiving it.
LIBERAL ARTS	A Liberal Arts education is one that provides an overview of the arts, humanities, social sciences, mathematics and natural sciences. Studying liberal arts encourages students to see connections across many disciplines and is a holistic approach to education. It is intended to provide students with general knowledge and to develop reason and judgment as opposed to professional or vocational skills.	
MAJOR	An academic major is a discipline or area of study in which a student chooses to specialize. A student needs to complete the courses required for that major to complete a degree. Most schools require students to choose a major to complete their degree, and many schools require that students declare a major by the end of their first or second year of college. Typically, approximately one third to one half of a student’s courses in college will be related to a major. A specific major may	

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	lead to many careers, and several majors may lead to the same career.	
MINOR	A minor is a secondary field of interest after a student's major. Minors usually require several courses in an area, but fewer courses than a major. A minor is usually optional. A minor can provide a student with a certain set of skills, feed a student's passion, or complement the major by providing additional depth or breadth to the student's background. If carefully planned, adding a minor usually does not require any additional time to the student's college career.	
MWF AND TR	Course catalogues often use single-letter abbreviations to indicate which days of the week a class meets on (MWF or TR). "R" means "Thursday," and T means Tuesday (EAB.com)	MWF = Monday, Wednesday, Friday. TR = Tuesday, Thursday.
OFFICE HOURS	Office hours are a way for professor and student to communicate outside of the pressure and sometimes hurried nature of a class. To persuade students to come to office hours, professors can invite students genuinely, and also post their office hours in a way that students can easily sign up. (Harvard Gazette)	The hours that your professor is available to meet outside of class.

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PASS/FAIL	<p>In many colleges, students may have an option to take a certain number of courses as Pass/Fail courses. This means that the student will not receive a letter grade for the course, but she will receive either a “P” for Pass or an “F” if she fails. This option is often intended to encourage some students to experiment and explore in a course that may be beyond their comfort zone. She might be interested in taking an exploratory course in science, for instance, but worry that she will not do well and that the grade may harm her GPA. The P/F option will allow her to take the course, but not receive a letter grade to be calculated in her GPA. Students are generally limited to a certain number of P/F courses – either per semester or overall.</p>	
PLACEMENT EXAMS	<p>Placement Exams or tests are given to students, usually after they have been accepted to the college, to determine how ready students are for college level work in basic core courses. They are most often given in subjects such as English and math. Students cannot “pass” or “fail” placement tests since they simply measure a level or readiness in a subject. They are used for placing the student in the appropriate level class. It is important that students understand that the results of their placement exams are important, but cannot affect their acceptance to the college; they are not linked to admission. Placement exams determine the starting point of their education. They do not measure intelligence or ability, but the student’s academic experience. Students whose tests indicate deficiencies may be required to take a class to “come up to speed” in that subject area.</p>	
PRE-REQUISITE	<p>Pre-requisites are courses that students are required to take prior to registering for an upper level course. Some courses may have no pre-requisites and some courses may have several introductory level courses</p>	

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	<p>required before the student may take them.</p>	
<p>PRIORITY REGISTRATION</p>	<p>The term priority registration is sometimes used synonymously with registration ranking. Registration ranking is the order in which students may register for classes. This is usually based upon number of credits or units earned. Priority registration also refers to the permission for specialized groups of students to register in advance of other students. Priority registration policies may vary greatly across colleges. This early registration is sometimes provided for groups of students with special circumstances that impact their ability to choose the appropriate classes to attain a degree such as students with disability related needs, or students in state mandated special programs. It is also sometimes afforded to veterans, athletes, or honors students.</p>	
<p>REGISTRAR</p>	<p>The college Registrar is the person or office ultimately responsible for maintaining the permanent academic record for each student. In addition to maintaining student records, this office is often also responsible for scheduling of classes, registering students in classes, maintaining class lists and recording student grades. Remember that, without the student's written permission, the Registrar will not be able to discuss your student's grades or academic progress with you because of FERPA restrictions.</p>	

TERM	OFFICIAL DEFINITION:	IN OTHER WORDS:
RESIDENCE DIRECTOR OR COMMUNITY DIRECTOR	<p>A Residence Director is a professional, specially trained college or university employee responsible for the overall wellbeing of the Residence Hall. Residence Directors often live in the hall or a management and daily operations of campus residence halls. Resident Directors are usually college graduates, sometimes graduate students, who oversee the Resident Assistants and are responsible for managing the separate adjoining apartment. They also tend to be on call 24 hours a day and are generally called by their RAs if problems arise needing attention.</p>	
RESIDENT ASSISTANT OR RA	<p>Resident Assistants are generally student employees who are responsible for students' life in the Residence Halls. Resident Assistants are usually trained student leaders responsible for supervising a group of students. They can assist with questions, social issues, roommate issues, or other problems that might arise. They are also responsible for enforcing college policy and rules. Residence Assistants are, in some ways, the college representatives who will get to know your college student best outside of the classroom.</p>	

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SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS (SAP)	Satisfactory Academic Progress or SAP is defined by the federal government as successful completion of coursework to maintain eligibility for financial aid. The federal government requires that schools establish, publish and apply standards to monitor progress toward completion. These standards apply both to grade point average (GPA) and to progress toward degree completion. Students must maintain the standard and to progress toward degree completion. Students must maintain the standard minimum GPA established by their school and must complete the required number of credits for graduation within a maximum number of attempted credits – 150% of credits required. (For instance, students who are required to complete 120 credits for graduation must do so within 180 attempted credits.)	
SYLLABUS	The syllabus is an outline or overview of the course handed out by the instructor at the beginning of the course. The syllabus contains a wealth of information about the course which often includes requirements, expectations, textbook information, contact information for the instructor, objectives, assignments, and often a daily schedule of assignments and topics. Students are always encouraged to read the syllabus carefully and refer to it often throughout the course.	An important document that your instructors will expect you to read. Read it and make sure to ask any questions you have.
TEACHING ASSISTANT (TA)	A Teaching Assistant (TA) is an individual who assists an instructor or professor with teaching duties. At many universities, Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA) are qualified graduate students employed by the university on a temporary contract. They may help a professor conduct lab or study groups, grade papers, or prepare lectures. They are often the sole instructor of a course section under the supervision of a professor.	If your class has a TA or GTA, introduce yourself and know who they are because they may be your best source of help with the course material if you have questions.

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TRANSCRIPT	<p>A student’s college transcript is the official, permanent record of the courses taken, grades earned, honors earned and degrees conferred by the institution. The task of maintaining transcripts falls to the Office of the Registrar. Students may obtain official transcripts of the college record by requesting it from the appropriate office. There may be a fee, or a fee for multiple copies. Students need transcripts for transfer to another institution or sometimes for a potential employer.</p>	<p>The document that has all of your classes and grades on it.</p>
WORK STUDY	<p>The Federal Work Study portion of the financial aid package is the portion that a student can earn through a part-time job on campus. Funds are provided to the college by the federal government to be distributed to students who have jobs on campus. Federal Work Study jobs are based on financial need and are a part of the student’s financial aid package. This is a reimbursement program. Students work part time jobs on campus and are paid, usually at minimum wage.</p>	<p>A job at your school that you get as part of your financial aid.</p>