



NAVIGATING FORWARD

Your Guide to Higher Education in Prison Glossary of Terms for Higher Education in Prison

Hello,

Your next steps start here.



GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

2+2

A **transfer** model that allows students to earn a **bachelor's degree** by earning an associate degree first, (or completing two years at a **community college**), then transferring to a four-year college or university for the remaining two years. The student completes freshman and sophomore years at the two-year school, and their junior and senior years at the four-year school. Many students enrolled in 2+2 **transfer pathways** may actually take classes **part-time**, which causes the programs to take longer than four years, but they are still considered 2+2.

504 Plan

An official written plan that outlines how a kindergarten-12th grade school or college will ensure a student with a **disability** receives appropriate accommodations and has access to the education and services that every student is entitled to.

Academic Advisor

College **faculty** member or administrator who supports and assists each student as they select and enroll in their courses, work to meet academic degree and major requirements, and plan for their future. Every student is assigned an academic advisor, usually within the department of a student's **major**. They are your main point of contact that can connect you to any support you may need at the college. In prison education programs, advisors may also select your courses and register you for classes each semester. They may also provide you with textbooks and school supplies.

Academic Calendar

A schedule of important school dates and deadlines that take place during the academic year. Such events can include semester start dates, holiday break periods, and final **exam** weeks. The calendar also includes important deadlines, like the last day to apply for financial aid, the last day to **withdraw** from a course without a penalty, or the first and last days you can register for courses (**enrollment** period).

Academic Catalog

A document that contains all of a school's academic policies, procedures, degree programs, and courses.





Academic Department

Colleges are divided into subsections based on specific academic disciplines or fields. These departments are a way of organizing and grouping together faculty, courses, offices, lab spaces, and other resources. Some examples of academic departments could be history and math departments, literature or English departments, psychology departments, law departments, business departments, etc. Departments typically have their own leadership structures, budgets, and ways of operating.

Academic Plan

A contract between the student and a school, documenting courses you will take in order to progress toward your degree. If your **SAP appeal** is granted, you may be required to follow this contract in order to continue receiving federal, state, and institutional financial aid at your school.

Academic Probation

A warning that a student's grades (academic performance) need to be improved. Students on academic probation often have a specific period (often one or two academic **terms**) to bring up their **GPA** to a satisfactory level. Each college will publish their policy and describe the specific circumstances that trigger academic probation and the steps a student must take to remedy it. If a student is unable to improve academic standing during the probationary window, that student may be forced to withdraw from the college, or they may lose access to financial aid. A school's academic probation policy may be different from the college's **Satisfactory Academic Progress** policy, or it could be the same.

Academic Standards

The minimum guidelines a student must meet through their academic performance in order to maintain satisfactory academic progress. Typically, those academic standards include maintaining at least a C average and completing a degree program within 150 percent of the expected timeframe. Many schools will also set a standard about your class completion rate.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Academic Year

The start of a school year begins at the end of summer -- not on January 1st like a calendar year does. In casual language, the academic year can refer to the window of time that students are taking classes. It typically begins in August or September and ends in May or June. For purposes of financial aid, the term "academic year" or "academic calendar" has a more specific meaning. In order to provide financial aid to students, a college must specify an academic year based on the number of weeks of instructional time required for each course. So a school may have an academic calendar that starts a week before classes for things like campus orientation or student retreats, but the academic year that is recognized by the Federal Student Aid Office doesn't start until classes formally start.

Accommodations

The **ADA** defines an accommodation as a change to a postsecondary institution's instructional setting or work environment that enables a student with a disability to have equal opportunities. At the college level, the goal of an accommodation is NOT to guarantee academic success, but instead to provide equal access to educational opportunities for all students. Every college will typically have an accommodations officer or department to help determine and implement possible accommodations on an individual basis.

Account Balance

The total amount remaining on a student's bill. This balance includes all unpaid **tuition and fees** after **financial aid** has been applied. A negative balance, or **credit balance** indicates that the school has received more money in payments than a student owes, and there is essentially money left over. If you are part of a prison education program, there will be specific state and federal policies that determine what a school must do with that extra balance. For example, with incarcerated students, colleges must return any remaining Pell Grant dollars to the Federal Government.

Accreditation

Accreditation is a process where **postsecondary** schools and programs are evaluated to confirm they meet certain standards, and their credits and degrees are valid. In the U.S., accreditors are private regulatory organizations that set minimum standards that schools have to meet in order to get their approval. Programs must be accredited in order to use federal **financial aid**.





Accredited

A term that designates a college that has gone through the evaluation process and met the necessary criteria to gain the approval of their regional and/or federal accrediting body. This term can also apply to schools that have previously met the accreditation requirements and have been found to still meet these requirements in reevaluation processes.

ACT Exam

A college entrance exam designed to test a student's aptitudes in four key areas (English, Math, Reading, and Science). This test is designed and administered by a private, for-profit company (ACT Inc.) but it is accepted by virtually all 4-year colleges in the United States.

Administrator

A **college** employee who is tasked with overseeing student services, academics, research, and/or daily operations of a college. Some college administrators are part of the **faculty** and oversee academic departments, student advising, research, or curricula. Other administrators are staff, meaning they do not teach, but instead support the faculty, students and daily operations of the college.

Admissions Counselor

Staff within the **admissions office** that are responsible for supporting students through the application process and helping students navigate next steps after acceptance.

Admissions

The process of applying to a school and the school's process for evaluating if students will be accepted to enroll. Colleges may evaluate prospective students using applications, past academic records, test scores, essays, extracurricular activities, interviews, or using an open-enrollment approach, which accepts all eligible students.

Admissions Office

The office within a school that is responsible for communicating with applicants and recruiting new students. They receive your **college** application, review it to determine whether you meet their acceptance criteria, and communicate next steps if you are accepted.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Alma Mater

A Latin term that refers to the college a person attended. The Latin literally means “nourishing or bountiful mother.”

Alumnus

Someone who graduated from or previously attended a particular school. Alumni is the plural word for when you are referring to more than one alumnus.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

A federal law passed in 1990 that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities. The ADA ensures equal opportunities in areas such as employment, education, transportation, and public accommodations. In a college setting, it requires institutions to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities, such as accessible facilities, support services, and modifications to programs or policies to ensure students have equal access to educational opportunities. Titles II and III of the law prohibit disability discrimination in public and private **colleges**, respectively.

Appeal Letter

Your written request to retain eligibility for financial aid, which often includes explanations of your circumstances and a plan for improvement in the future. A successful appeal letter will reinstate your financial aid eligibility.

Apprenticeship

A training program for people entering skilled trades to continue learning their craft on the job, outside of the classroom, while working under licensed tradespeople. Apprenticeships typically pay wages, like a job.

Articulation Agreements

An articulation agreement is an agreement between two colleges about how credits from one program will translate into another program when a student transfers from one to the other. Essentially these agreements are a promise between two colleges that courses taken in one program will be accepted by the other program when a student transfers over. This is common with community colleges and state universities who expect many students to complete an associate degree and decide to go on to complete a bachelor's degree. It is a way for colleges to simplify their transferring process and also allows for students to be able to plan their courses in advance.





Assistive Technology

Technological devices and services designed to assist students with **disabilities** in their learning.

Associate Degree

A degree that generally takes about two years, or 60 **credit hours**, to complete. You can earn an associate degree that will help you prepare for specific jobs or that will allow you to continue your education at a four-year **college**.

Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.)

An associate degree that places an emphasis on narrowly focused, specialized courses that are designed to prepare a student for immediate employment within a specific field or occupation.

Associate of Arts (A.A.)

An associate degree that reportedly places a higher emphasis on liberal arts and general education courses.

Associate of Science (A.S.)

An associate degree that typically includes general education, but places more of an emphasis on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) subjects or business, rather than on liberal arts.

Asynchronous

A type of **course** format where instructors do not **lecture** to their students live, but instead provide materials and/or recordings that students can access at their own pace and schedule.

Award Year

The specific academic year during which the financial aid you receive can be applied to your educational expenses, running from July 1st through June 30th. It will align with your **PEP** schedule and **Academic Year**.

Bachelor's degree

An **undergraduate degree** that usually takes about four years or 120-130 **credit hours** to complete. A bachelor's degree can prepare you for various careers or further **graduate** studies upon release. Some employers require that an applicant has completed a bachelor's degree as a job requirement during the hiring process.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Best Interest Determination (BID)

A mandatory standard that **PEPs** must meet to continue receiving **federal student aid** funds. The Best Interest Determination evaluates a PEP's performance through information about PEP instructors, transferability of credits, and academic or career advising. This evaluation may also include data about rates of recidivism, completion, continuing education post-release, earnings, and job placements.

Books and Supplies

Materials needed for your courses, such as textbooks and educational supplies. This is a common term in colleges because they include estimates for books and supplies into the cost of attendance. For incarcerated students, access to these materials may be provided through your prison education program coordinators, and for **approved PEPs**, these costs may be covered by financial aid like the **Pell Grant**.

Bursar's Office

The office within a school that is responsible for conducting and tracking all financial transactions related to student accounts. They track tuition and fees and oversee bills and payments. This is the office to reach out to if you have issues with tuition payments, refund checks, applying grants or scholarships to your tuition, or if you have a **financial transcript hold** from a previous college, or any other problems that concern your student account.

Capstone Projects

A final, comprehensive project or assignment typically completed toward the end of a degree program as a way to demonstrate your learning. Some undergraduate programs require a capstone project and others do not. Capstone projects are typically completed outside of classes and can include independent research or hands-on work experiences. Students are often required to conduct a public presentation on their Capstone Project.

Cashier's Office

Another term for **Bursar's Office**.





Career Technical Education (CTE)

Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, sometimes called trade or vocational programs, typically prepare students for immediate employment, and they offer education for specific skilled labor industries. CTE is the umbrella for all vocational learning. Technical programs focus on developing and applying real-world skills. Some CTE college programs may be designed to allow students to stack multiple credentials on top of each other, all within one program.

Certificate

An official document that recognizes the completion of a post-secondary educational program. This term often describes the credentials earned through a **CTE** program.

Certification

Certifications are professional credentials used to confirm a person's skill set and ability, typically earned by passing a test. A credential granted by private, professional organizations. If you enroll in a career and technical program, seeking certification may be part of your program, but it is different from the **certificate** or **diploma** you would earn from your college.

Clock Hours

Schools that use clock hours measure educational units based on how much time is actually spent in class, in other words, how much time is spent on instruction. Most **CTE** programs use clock hours.

Credit hours, which are a common measurement in undergraduate programs, are different from clock hours in that they measure the workload of a course, not just the time in class.

Co-requisites

These are **courses** and/or labs that must be taken at the same time. For example, a college might require you to take Biology 101 during the same semester as Biology 101 Lab.

College

Often used as a general term to describe education after high school - a school providing postsecondary education. The term can also specifically refer to a smaller type of postsecondary institution, typically without a research focus or graduate programs, and it may also refer to an individual school within a larger **university**.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Commencement Ceremony

An official ceremony that usually takes place once a year honoring all of the students who have successfully completed their requirements to graduate within the past year. This ceremony is also often referred to simply as “**graduation**,” but they are two different terms. Graduation relates to successfully completing the program and commencement is the event to symbolically celebrate the accomplishment and your transition into the next chapter. You can still be a graduate even if you don’t participate in a commencement ceremony.

Community College

Community Colleges are public **two-year colleges** offering certificate programs and **associate degree** programs, and they support students preparing for the workforce or transferring to a **four-year college**. Community colleges are often the least expensive and most accessible postsecondary option for local residents.

Completion Rate

The ratio of how many college courses you’ve completed compared to how many you have attempted. **SAP** guidelines typically have a minimum completion rate you must adhere to.

Concurrent Enrollment

A term that describes the status of a student who is enrolled in two different postsecondary programs at the same time. This status is important to avoid because federal student aid policies generally do not allow students to receive financial aid for two postsecondary institutions at the same time.

Contributor

This is the technical term for anyone who has to provide information on your **FAFSA** when you apply for financial aid. This includes you as the student. Depending on your situation, contributors could include your spouse (if you’re married and not separated) or parents (if you’re considered **dependent**). If you do have additional contributors on your FAFSA, you may need assistance from your college to gather the required information.





Cost of Attendance (COA)

An important financial aid term that is used to calculate financial aid eligibility. It estimates the total possible cost of enrolling in a specific program for a year, which includes direct costs, like payments to the school for tuition, and indirect costs, like textbooks, supplies, and living expenses. COA will change depending on your status as a full-time or part-time student, whether or not you take courses in the summer, and if you are enrolling in a **Prison Education Program (PEP)** or on a traditional campus. The financial aid office is responsible for calculating an estimated Cost of Attendance for each program, and usually COA is the maximum amount of financial aid that a student is eligible to receive each year.

Course

A college class that covers an individual subject and is completed within a single **term**. Courses typically include lectures, discussions, assignments, exams, and other activities designed to help students learn and master the subject matter. Courses typically count for a specific number of **credit hours** and are the primary way students meet their **degree program** requirements.

Course Catalog

This publication from your college provides a list of all of the courses your college is offering during a given **semester** or academic year. You can likely find this resource online or you can request a printed copy from your advisor or PEP program coordinator. Though you may not have as much flexibility when it comes to selecting courses while you are attending a **PEP**, the course catalog will be a helpful resource in planning your **degree map** with your advisor if you transfer to a traditional campus or pursue additional education after going home.

Course Codes

A way for colleges to name and categorize courses. You will often see course codes that are 3-4 letters followed by 3-4 numbers. You will typically be able to determine what **department** a course is from by the letters in the course code, and how advanced the course is by the numbers in the course code. Introductory courses will typically be 100 or 1000 level, and 400 or 4000 level or higher are advanced courses.

Coursework

All of the **lectures**, assignments, readings, **labs**, **exams**, and other tasks that are required for a specific **course**.

Credential

A term that refers to an earned and documented skill, program, or degree that is awarded by a postsecondary institution. Certificates, diplomas, and degrees can all be considered credentials, and many technical education programs allow you to stack multiple credentials on top of one another, all within the same program.

Credentialing Service

A term that is sometimes used to describe the private companies that facilitate transfer requests and provide other documentation to schools for a price.

Credit Balance

A balance in your student account that happens when the school has received more money in payments and financial aid than what a student owes, and there is essentially money left over. A negative balance means that money is owed back, either to the student or to the federal government. If you are part of a prison education program, there will be specific state and federal policies that determine what a school must do with that extra balance. For example, with incarcerated students, colleges must return any remaining Pell Grant dollars to the federal government.

Credit-Bearing

Courses that can earn a student college credit, be counted on their official transcript, and meet requirements towards their degree program. Some PEP programs may offer courses that are not credit-bearing, so it is important to talk to your advisor and make sure you know whether your potential courses can be used towards your degree.





Credit Hour

The individual units that measure **coursework** and act as the building blocks of your degree. Credit hours are used to measure the amount of coursework you devote to each component of your degree and the total amount of coursework needed for a particular **degree program**.

Credit Score

The number that will be used to determine if you can rent housing or borrow money for other needs like a home mortgage, a cell phone, or a car. Credit scores are determined by weighing several aspects of your credit history, including the debts you owe and your repayment history, and then assigning a number to represent your credit status. Credit scores range from 300-850, with higher numbers representing better credit.

CSS Profile

A financial aid application that some colleges and universities use to determine student's eligibility for institutional **grants** and **scholarships**. This form is primarily required by private colleges and universities. You should check with your college to see if this form is required for additional **financial aid** opportunities.

Cumulative Exam

An **exam** that covers all of the material learned in an entire **course** instead of just the new material learned in one chapter or since the last exam.

Cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA)

A **GPA** based on all **semesters** of post-secondary or **college** education, perhaps even ones that you completed years in the past and are not related to your current college program. Check your college's academic policies to see how your cumulative GPA will be calculated.

Curriculum

The set of courses, lessons, and materials that make up a student's program of study at a school or university. It includes both required and elective courses designed to help students gain the knowledge and skills they need to graduate and pursue their career or further studies.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Dean

An academic or administrative leader within a school. Deans are usually the head of a college **department** or the head of a particular **college** within a larger **university**.

Dean's List

A list of honors students that are recognized by their **deans** for their exceptional academic performance, typically awarded based on a student's GPA after each **semester**. The academic standards required to make this list will vary by college, so make sure you review your college's academic and grading policies to understand what you will need to qualify for this honor.

Default

A term used by lenders to describe someone who is delinquent or not current on their loan payments. For most federal loans, a person will be in default after 270 days without a payment. For private loans, the default window might be as short as 30 days.

Degree

A credential awarded to a student to signify the successful completion of a **college** education program.

Degree Map / Plan

A tool that students can use, often with the help of an academic **advisor**, to map out the number of courses required, the types of courses required, and the order those courses should be taken in, which will allow a student to complete the course requirements of their **degree program**. This is also sometimes called a degree plan.

Degree Program

An area of study for which a student can receive an academic **degree** and the plan or course map they must follow in order to obtain it. This is sometimes also known as your **Major**.

Department Chair

An academic officer assigned by a **dean** to lead a particular **academic department**. They are typically **faculty** members with high levels of experience and standing in their field.





Dependency Status

This status is given to college students who need to include their parent's financial information on their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (**FAFSA**). Dependency status on the FAFSA is different from tax filing status and legal adulthood -- it is primarily based on age. Students 24 years old and younger will be considered dependent, unless you meet any of the criteria to qualify as independent instead. Being incarcerated could be a factor in qualifying as independent, so talk to your financial aid office. Learn more about dependency status on *Navigating Forward* **FAFSA Overview** resource.

Dependent Student

A student who is required to provide parental information on the **FAFSA**.

Developmental Courses

Courses, which may also be called learning support or remedial courses, that are designed to strengthen a student's fundamental skills of reading, writing, and math to help prepare for college-level courses. In many programs, these learning support courses are not for credit, but they may still be required. Some programs allow students to "test out" of these courses by taking placement exams. If you are using financial aid to pay for developmental courses, talk with your advisor to find out if that may impact your eligibility for financial aid in the future.

Diploma

An official document awarded by a college, university, or educational institution that certifies a student has successfully completed a specific program of study. Diplomas are often associated with completing high school, but they can also be used for short-term technical educational programs that provide specialized knowledge or training in a particular field. Diploma programs are often longer and have more requirements than certificate programs, but shorter than **associate degree** programs. The term "diploma" can also mean the physical copy of the degree or certificate you earned.

Direct Costs

Charges that come directly from the college, including **tuition**, **fees**, housing, and meal plan. **Financial aid**, such as the **Pell Grant**, can be used to cover these costs. These costs are different from **indirect costs**, which are described below.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Direct Subsidized Loan

A low-interest federal **loan** that students who demonstrate financial need can borrow for college costs. The federal government pays the interest on the loan while students are attending college, reducing the total amount students will have to repay. As an incarcerated student, you are not eligible for this type of loan but may be eligible for it upon release.

Direct Unsubsidized Loan

A low-interest federal student **loan** available to undergraduate and graduate students, regardless of financial need. The borrower is responsible for paying interest while in school. As an incarcerated student, you are not eligible for this type of loan but may be eligible for it upon release.

Disability

The ADA (the law that governs public and private colleges) defines a disability as “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.” 42 U.S.C § 12102

Disability Services

Every college will have an office with staff who serve as a resource for students who might need physical **accommodations** or learning accommodations during their college experience. These offices can have slightly different names at each college (for example: Disability Services Office, Access Center, Student Disability Services, Student Accessibility Services, etc.), but their role is similar regardless of their specific name.

Disbursement

The payment of federal student aid funds (or money) by the college to a student's college account. Your college will likely issue disbursements at least twice a year.

Dissertation

Original research that you must conduct and then defend to a panel of experts as part of a doctoral program. Dissertations can take several years and are conducted under the supervision of a faculty member in the same field as the doctoral student.





Doctoral Degree

The highest level of education one can obtain in a given field. Doctoral programs can take several years to complete, and many different forms of doctoral degrees exist. Doctor of medicine, juris doctor and doctor of philosophy (PhDs) degrees are some of the most common types of doctoral programs.

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

The highest level of education for most academic fields. Typically characterized as a research degree, as opposed to professional degrees like a doctor of medicine or a *juris doctor*.

Documentation

For *SAP appeals*, proof that helps verify what you said in your appeal letter is factual.

Dual Enrollement Program

An academic program that allows students to enroll in a college and earn college credit while they are still enrolled in high school. Dual Enrollment students will be considered transfer students if they enroll at a new college after graduation.

Electives

Electives are essentially free spaces in a degree plan that a student can fill with courses of their choice, though elective options for students in prison education programs may be more limited than what's offered on a traditional campus. In most cases, even after you have completed requirements for *Gen. Ed.* and your major or area of focus, you will still need additional credit hours in order to earn your degree. These additional credits will be filled with elective courses.

Emancipated Minor

A minor who has been legally granted independence from their parents or guardians. If you are an emancipated minor, you will be considered independent on the *FAFSA* and parental information will not be required. This status isn't automatically granted, so if it hasn't been granted in a court, it probably doesn't apply to you.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Endowment

A collection of donated assets that a college uses to invest so that the funds grow over time and can provide long-term financial stability to the institution.

Enrollment

The process of officially becoming a member of a **college**, **degree program**, or **course**.

(Course) Enrollment Period

The set window of time during which a student must officially join a course they plan on taking for that **term**. This is often called registering. Enrollment periods typically take place before the term begins and some colleges may provide more senior students with earlier enrollment periods, which gives them priority in selecting their courses. **Colleges** also typically have a period of **open enrollment** in the beginning of each term, where students are free to add classes to or drop classes as they finalize their schedules. While you are incarcerated, your enrollment may be managed by your college program, but this is a time period and process you should be aware of if you are transferring to a traditional campus to finish your degree.

Enrollment Status

The number of credits a student is enrolled in per semester. It's reported by the school and can indicate whether a student is full-time, part-time, withdrawn, or graduated.

Entrance Loan Counseling

A process first-time federal student **loan** borrowers must complete before they receive their loan for college. Most students complete loan counseling online, and some students rush through it so quickly they don't remember participating. The purpose is to give students an understanding of their responsibilities and rights as a borrower. As an incarcerated student, you are not eligible for federal direct loans but may be eligible for them upon release.





Essential Course Activities (ADA)

In order for a student to qualify for **accommodations** on the basis of a **disability**, that student must be able to complete essential course activities. In other words, a student with an accommodation must be able to complete the required coursework; the accommodation simply makes it easier for that student to access course content. For example, a student with a visual impairment might need Braille textbooks or audiobooks to make course material accessible, but they have the skills and academic background to complete the essential course activities with these accommodations. However, other types of accommodations, such as lower academic expectations or fewer assignments, would be examples of accommodations that alter the essential course activities and therefore wouldn't be covered by disability protections.

Exam

A test that is used to measure the knowledge and skills a student has acquired, typically over a set period of time. For example, an exam might cover a specific unit of study or a set part of the semester, like a quarter or mid-point (often called a midterm). The term "exam" is often a signal that the test will be weighted more heavily (in other words, worth more points) than other assignments you complete for the course, but make sure you check your course **syllabus** to see how your final course grade will be determined. You might also take specific exams that are required when applying to certain types of **graduate schools**, like the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) for law students. After graduation, many types of professionals are required to pass specific exams before they are **licensed** to practice their trade in a state.

Extenuating Circumstance

In the context of **SAP** and SAP appeals, this term refers to the unexpected events, such as an illness, a death in the family, or a facility transfer, that impacted a student's ability to make **Satisfactory Academic Progress**. These will be the circumstances that you outline in your SAP appeal letter and need to provide supporting documents for if you hope to maintain your financial aid eligibility. For more information, see the resource **SAP and SAP Appeals**.

Extracurricular

Activities that add to one's learning or **college** experience but take place outside of the classroom setting and are not for course credit.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Faculty

The members of a **college's** staff who are responsible for academic activities like teaching and conducting research.

FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)

An application U.S. citizens and legal residents must complete to determine their eligibility for federal **financial aid** and other aid programs based on a person's income and need for financial assistance to pay for **college**. The **FAFSA** is always free to complete. It can be completed at FAFSA.gov or on paper. If you lack internet access, you will likely complete the FAFSA using the paper form with assistance from your college coordinator.

FAFSA Submission Summary

A form that will be provided to you after your FAFSA has been processed. It offers a summary of the information you provided on your **FAFSA**, including your **Student Aid Index (SAI)** and estimated federal aid eligibility. As an incarcerated student, you may receive this summary through your college coordinator or by mail. It is very important to keep this document for your records. You should review your FAFSA Submission Summary for accuracy and return corrections as instructed.

Family and Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

The Family and Educational Rights and Privacy Act is a federal law that protects the privacy of specific types of academic information and guarantees that families can access specific types of academic information during a student's elementary and secondary education. For purposes of these resources, FERPA dictates that once a student graduates from high school (or turns 18), that student gains sole ownership of their academic records going forward. In other words, no adult, including a parent or guardian, can access academic records that capture information from your academic life after the age of 18 without your permission. Because of these protections, academic information, which includes your college grades, when or for how long you were enrolled at a college, and any disability determinations that were made or **accommodations** that you received while in college, cannot be shared externally or made public without your permission. If you need to have academic information shared, for example in the form of an official **transcript** when applying to a new college program, you can sign a FERPA waiver that allows the institution to share the approved information with the individuals or institutions you have listed on the waiver form.





Federal Direct Loans

These are loans made by the federal government directly to college students or their parents. There are different types of Federal Direct Loans, but you can only be eligible for them after release.

Federal Student Aid Office (FSA)

This is the federal office within the U.S. Department of Education that manages the distribution and regulation of federal **financial aid**, including the **Pell Grant**.

Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG)

A **grant** for **undergraduate** students who demonstrate exceptional **financial need**. This grant is available at participating schools, and it is up to the college to determine how funds are distributed. Awards can range from \$100-\$4,000 and do not need to be repaid. As an incarcerated student, you are not eligible for this grant, but you may be eligible for it upon release. Unlike the **Pell Grant**, which is a source of funding that the federal government guarantees will be available to all qualifying students, FSEOG funds are distributed on a first-come basis, so once all of the funds have been given out to qualifying students, no more awards can be distributed to additional students, even if they qualify based on financial need. For that reason, you will want to complete the **FAFSA** as early as possible to apply for financial aid if you are continuing college coursework after you are released.

Financial Aid

Money to pay for college. It can include **grants, scholarships, loans**, and **work-study**. It is applied for through the **FAFSA, CSS Profile**, state aid applications, or outside scholarship applications. You should know that not all financial aid is free; student loans will need to be repaid. Be aware of this if you hear that financial aid will cover 100% of your educational expenses because it matters what type of aid you receive.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Financial Aid Award or Financial Aid Offer

Another term for **financial aid offer**, a financial aid award simply refers to the list of the specific types and amounts of institutional **financial aid** that a **college** is offering you for one year of school. The word “award” might seem to suggest that this is an honor, but in this case “award” just means the amount of money that you are eligible to receive to help you pay for college.

Financial Aid Package

The total combination of **financial aid** resources being applied to your student account. This includes the **institutional financial aid** offered to you by the college, the state and federal aid you are eligible for, and any outside aid you have obtained, like private **scholarships**, private **loans**, or family and other individual contributions.

Financial Need

A calculation done by colleges when determining how much financial aid you are eligible for. Financial need is the difference between your **Student Aid Index (SAI)** and the **Cost of Attendance (COA)**. This number is not something you need to calculate yourself. SAI will be calculated by the Federal Student Aid Office (FSA) and COA will be calculated by your college.

Financial Transcript Hold

A restriction that a college places on a student that prevents them from accessing their official **transcripts** (which prohibits them from enrolling in new courses or applying to a new program or college) due to an unpaid debt to the school. To resolve a financial transcript hold, typically that student has to either enter a plan to repay the institutional debt they have or fully repay the institutional debt they have. These policies may vary slightly by school. Colleges can use financial transcript holds as leverage to force students to pay the money they owe, although a recent federal law limits this practice in some circumstances. If a college is refusing to release your transcripts because of money you owe to the school, please review the *Navigating Forward* **Institutional Debt and Financial Transcript Holds** resource for more detailed information and strategies.





For-Profit Colleges

Private businesses that offer college programs. These are also sometimes referred to as proprietary schools. They offer education, degrees, and the other things non-profit colleges generally offer, but they are generating a profit from tuition, fees, and sometimes private loans. You will want to be very careful about enrolling at a for-profit college because these programs can be more expensive, sometimes causing students to take on a large amount of debt in the form of **private loans**. Additionally, the credits earned at a for-profit college can be harder to transfer, leaving students in a large amount of debt but without making progress towards a recognized degree from an **accredited** college.

Four-Year Colleges

Universities and colleges offering bachelor's degree programs, which typically take four years of full-time enrollment to complete.

FSA ID

Your username and password for **Federal Student Aid** websites, which is an account that will follow you as long as you enroll in postsecondary education (and longer than that if you have outstanding student loans). FSA ID also functions like an online signature, so other people cannot log in for you. If you fill out the **FAFSA** online, you and all **contributors** will need to each create your own FSA ID to log in. If you do not have internet access, you may be unable to create an FSA ID. Instead, you may complete a paper FAFSA or seek assistance from your college coordinator.

Full-Time Enrollment

The status of someone who is taking enough **credit hours** in a **semester** to be considered a full-time student. Full time enrollment is generally classified as 12 or more credit hours per semester for undergraduate students and 9 or more credit hours per semester for graduate students.

Fundamentally Alter

This term, which is relevant to students seeking support from the **Disability Services** Office, describes the first part of the standard against which a requested **accommodation** will be measured. If a requested accommodation will, according to the professor or the college, significantly change the expectations or content of a course, it will not be approved. Examples of accommodations that might be considered to “fundamentally alter” a course include lowering academic performance standards or eliminating course assignments.

GED

The General Education Development Certification and Test, also known as a GED is a series of standardized tests that provide individuals who did not complete high school with the opportunity to earn a credential equivalent to a high school diploma. This category of documents is often referred to as a High School Equivalency.

General Education Requirements

Sometimes abbreviated as “Gen. Ed.”, this is the core **curriculum** that most undergraduate require. General Education. helps students develop a range of skills in writing, communication, critical thinking, and problem solving. This core curriculum usually includes a mix of English or literature, writing, math, science, and history courses. It typically accounts for about half of the **credit hours** of a **bachelor degree** program, with the other half generally being devoted to **majors** and **elective courses**. For **associate degrees**, general education requirements usually account for up to three quarters of a degree program’s required credit hours.





GPA Fresh Start

Academic or GPA Fresh Start programs are offered at some colleges to help students who may have previously struggled with academic performance improve their **GPA** when they return to school. Each school will have its own eligibility criteria, but at many colleges, if you are returning to school after a designated length of time (which is set by the college), you can apply to have your GPA wiped clean, meaning only the grades you earn from that point forward will count towards your **cumulative GPA**. These policies may have negative financial aid consequences for some students, so it is important to consider all tradeoffs. Visit the *Navigating Forward* resource on **Understanding GPA** to learn more.

Graduate/Post-Graduate Degree or School

Education programs that take place after a bachelor's degree are often called graduate or postgraduate programs. These programs are advanced degrees with a more specific, in-depth focus than undergraduate programs, providing students with professional expertise in a given field. Some professions require graduate level education, but many other valuable professions do not. Graduate degrees are most commonly **master's degrees** and **doctoral degrees**, although there are some professional degrees and graduate **certificate** programs that don't fit into these categories.

Grade Dispute Process

The formal policy and process for challenging grades you believe were mistakenly or unfairly assigned to you. Keep in mind that there may be informal ways to review your grades with a professor, and most colleges recommend that you try this route before going through a formal grade dispute process. Talk to your college advisor or visit your **academic catalog** for more information about what to do in that situation.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Grade Point Average (GPA)

Your Grade Point Average (GPA) is a number that measures your academic performance across all of the college coursework you have taken. The GPA scale usually runs from 0 at the lowest end to 4.0 at the highest end. If you have completed an associate degree and gone on to complete a bachelor's degree, all of this coursework will likely be included in your **cumulative GPA**.

However, once you enroll in a graduate program, your transcript will reflect a GPA for your undergraduate coursework and a separate GPA for your graduate work. For more information about calculating your GPA and how cumulative GPA policies may vary by school, visit the ***Understanding GPA and Reading a Transcript*** resource.

Grade Points

These are relevant when you are calculating your **GPA**. When you receive a letter grade for a course (A, B, C, etc.), each letter grade also has a number score associated with it. Most schools use a system that runs from 0-4. An A grade is worth 4 points, a B is worth 3 points, a C is 2 points, a D is 1 point and an F is zero points. This conversion shifts your grades from a letter grade to the grade points you will need for calculating your GPA.

Graded Credit Hours

Refers to courses that you take that are graded and included on your **transcript** for purposes of reporting your academic record and calculating your **GPA**.

Graduation

The process of successfully meeting all requirements of a **degree program** and officially completing it. This term is often used interchangeably with "**commencement**" to describe the ceremony devoted to celebrating recent graduates, but graduation refers to earning the credential and commencement refers to the ceremony ritual.

Graduation Requirements

The obligations that a student must successfully complete before earning their degree. The requirements will vary by school and degree program. For more information visit the *Navigating Forward* resource called ***Components of an Undergraduate Degree***.





Grant

A type of **financial aid** that is often based on financial need as determined by a government agency or a college. Students don't have to repay grants (the only exception could be if you do not successfully complete a course, you may end up needing to repay the college). This aid is often awarded based on financial need, like with the Federal Pell Grant. The **FAFSA** is the application for all federal financial aid, including grants. It also serves as the application for many state grants. Some grants may be available for incarcerated students and others may not.

High School Diploma

The credential provided to individuals who have completed a secondary education program in the United States. High school diplomas or their equivalents are typically required to enroll in college.

High School Equivalency Test (HiSET)

An alternative to the GED, it is also a test and credential used to prove that a person has obtained an education equivalent to the one they would have received by earning a **high school diploma**.

High School Transcript

A record of all of the courses a student took while in high school and the grades they earned in those courses. High school transcripts, or a **HiSET** or **GED**, are typically required when applying to **undergraduate** programs. For students who didn't complete high school, but earned their high school diploma equivalency, most colleges will require a passing HiSET or GED transcript in place of a high school transcript. Some colleges might require that you submit both documents when you apply.

Higher Education

Any formal education programs designed to be completed after high school or the satisfaction of a high school equivalency test, like the **GED** or **HiSET**. This term most commonly refers to degree programs offered at colleges and universities.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Higher Education Act (1965), Title IV

A key section of U.S. federal law that governs federal student financial aid programs. It was designed to make higher education more accessible and affordable for students. Institutions must meet certain requirements to be “Title IV-eligible,” allowing them to offer federal financial aid to their students.

Higher Education in Prison (HEP)

This is a general term used to describe college programs that operate inside prison. Leaders, students, and advocates of these programs often use the term “HEP programs” or the “HEP field” to describe all the many kinds of programs that fall under this broad umbrella. The term Prison Education Program (PEP) can be used to mean the same thing, but PEP can also be specifically referring to only the prison programs authorized to use federal financial aid. Those are sometimes called “approved PEPs.”

Historically Black College or University (HBCU)

A higher education institution established primarily to serve the educational needs of Black/African American students, though they are open to students of all backgrounds. Most HBCUs were founded before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, during a time when Black students were often denied access to mainstream colleges and universities due to segregation and discrimination. HBCUs are known for their rich cultural heritage, academic excellence, and supportive learning environments. They offer diverse programs in arts, sciences, business, engineering, and more.

Home College

This refers to a student’s “main” college, which could mean the college that a student is currently enrolled in or the one they intend to graduate from. You may encounter this term when you are a transfer student, if you are **concurrently** enrolled, or if you are **reverse transferring** your credits from your current college back to your home college. You may also encounter this term within a **residency requirement** policy, which states that a student must complete at least a certain percentage of their credits at their home college in order to graduate from there.





Honor Society

A group or organization that recognizes its members for their personal and academic achievements. Membership is typically voluntary, and it can provide access to networking and financial aid opportunities. Students should conduct research before joining an honor society, especially if the membership requires payment. Unfortunately, some honor societies have been criticized for failing to provide the benefits they promise to potential members.

Humanities

An academic field that explores human culture, thought, and expression. It focuses on understanding the human experience through critical analysis, interpretation, and creativity. The humanities encompass a wide range of disciplines, including: Literature, Philosophy, History, Languages and Linguistics, Arts, and Cultural Studies. The humanities help students understand different perspectives, foster empathy, and cultivate skills in communication and critical thinking. For this reason, most **General Education** curricula will have a humanities requirement.

Hybrid Classes

Classes that use a mix of **remote** and in-person (or live and **asynchronous**) forms of instruction. For example, a hybrid class might meet once/week in person and the rest of the week's lessons are online. There are many different forms of hybrid classes.

In-State Tuition

Most public colleges and universities will offer a much cheaper (reduced) tuition rate for students who are considered to be legal and long-term residents of that state, and this rate is referred to as "in-state tuition." Colleges may evaluate residency differently than other government agencies do. For example, some colleges base your state of residency on where you lived a year prior to enrolling in that college.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Incomplete (Courses)

If you complete most of a class, but some extenuating circumstances keep you from finishing it, your college may grant you an incomplete, or “I.” You will have a certain time frame to complete all remaining requirements for the class, and once you do, the “Incomplete” gets replaced with your final grade. If you do not complete the requirements before the deadline, you may receive an F. An incomplete doesn’t hurt your GPA as long as you complete the course as required.

Independent Student

This is a status on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (**FAFSA**). It is a student who is not required to provide parental information on the FAFSA. To be considered independent, you must be one of the following: 1) at least 24 years old before January 1st of the award year, 2) married, 3) a graduate/professional student, 4) a veteran, 5) a member of the U.S. armed forces, 6) an orphan, 7) a ward of the court, 8) a current or former foster youth, 9) someone who is or was in legal guardianship, 10) someone with legal dependents (not a spouse), or 11) an **emancipated minor**, or someone who is or at risk of being homeless. If you do not meet one of these qualifications to be considered independent for purposes of completing the FAFSA, you will be considered a **dependent**, but you may still be able to file the FAFSA on your own, without information from parents or guardians (referred to as **contributors** on the FAFSA), if your college finds that your incarceration warrants an **unusual circumstances** determination. For more information about this, review the the *Navigating Forward* resource **FAFSA Overview**.

Independent Study

A research study that a student conducts for course credit, **thesis** or **dissertation** requirements, **capstone projects**, or other purposes. The project is completed on their own or with a group, and is independent from research being conducted by faculty members.





Indirect Expenses

Estimated costs of living as a college student separate from the **direct costs** of college like tuition and fees. These are the personal and educational expenses needed throughout the academic year that aren't listed on your college bill, such as books, course materials, supplies, or equipment.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The law that outlines the special education services that must be provided to students with **disabilities** between the ages of 3 and 21. For purposes of this resource, aspiring and current college students should know that IDEA *does not apply* to postsecondary (or college) education, and that the services that were offered under IDEA, like the ones listed in an **IEP**, may not be required at the college level.

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

A customized learning plan designed to meet the specific educational needs of a student with a documented disability. IEPs are typically created for students in K-12 schools outlining education goals, as well as accommodations and services the student will receive. IEPs may be helpful documentation to have as a college student when requesting accommodations for a disability, although a student does not need to have previously had an IEP in order to qualify for **accommodations** at the college level.

Industry Recognized Credential

A credential that recognizes a person's skills, knowledge, and training in a specific industry or occupation. These credentials are usually applied and recognized by third-party industry leaders and can be earned through CTE training programs.

Institute

Typically describes a small institution focused on one industry or a specific focus area. It's common for institutes to have direct ties to employers and industry professionals in a given specialty. Institutes may vary in the types of degrees that they offer, ranging from technical certificates to graduate degrees, and they may also focus on research in a very specific area.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Institutional Aid

A type of **financial aid** provided by your college, such as **grants** or **scholarships**. Incarcerated students may be eligible for institutional aid. Talk with your college coordinator, academic advisor, or financial aid officer to learn more about how your program will be paid for.

Institutional Debt

Money owed directly to a postsecondary institution as opposed to the federal government or a private individual or bank.

Institutional GPA

A **grade point average** that only uses the grades you've earned at your current institution, and excludes previous grades from before you transferred or before you took an extended break from college.

Internship

A learning experience that involves students spending time in a work environment learning new skills and applying knowledge they gained from their **coursework**. Internship experiences can last for one term or the entire school year. Internships can sometimes be completed for course credit (for graduate or undergraduate programs), but they are often unpaid. Students without the financial resources to afford taking on unpaid work should keep this in mind if your degree program requires an internship.

Interest Rate

The fee that is charged by a loan provider to the person receiving the loan; this fee is often a percentage of the total loan amount.

Juris Doctor

A professional **graduate degree** in law awarded by law schools in the United States and some other countries. It is the standard educational requirement to practice law in the U.S.

Lab Courses

Lab courses are educational courses that combine traditional classroom learning with hands-on laboratory sessions. These courses are designed to help students apply theoretical concepts in a practical setting through experiments, research, and observations. College labs are smaller, individual class units that are often paired with courses to supplement student learning and allow for more in-depth discussion or hands-on learning experiences. They are typically worth fewer credit hours than a traditional course and are most often attached to science courses like biology or chemistry.





Lab courses can also come in an online format, where students are required to complete activities and quizzes on the computer that simulate the laboratory experience.

Late-Withdrawal Request

A formal request submitted by a student to withdraw from a course after the official withdrawal deadline set by their college or university. This request is typically made due to unforeseen or extenuating circumstances that prevent you from proceeding with the course successfully. There may be a form you complete to initiate this process with your **advisor**.

Lecture

One of the most common forms of instruction in college settings, where an instructor speaks to the entire class at once and provides explanations of the course concepts and other information relevant to the course. Lectures are not typically back and forth conversation, and the instructor speaks for the majority of the time. However, there may be sections within a lecture where the instructor asks questions of the students or answers questions from the class.

Letter of Non-Enrollment

A letter from the registrar's office of a school that states that a student has never been enrolled, or is not currently enrolled, at that school. If you were admitted to a school but chose not to enroll, then you may need this letter to show that you do not have an official transcript from that school to submit to your receiving college.

Letter of Recommendation

Letters written by people who have a professional or personal relationship with a student, in which they describe the capabilities and personal qualities that make the student a strong candidate to consider for an opportunity. Letters of recommendation are often a requirement when applying to undergraduate and graduate education programs. The best recommendation letters will be based on demonstrated behavior that is relevant for the opportunity the student is seeking. For example, a student applying to **graduate school** could ask one of their professors who has witnessed their academic achievements and can speak with authority when it comes to evaluating whether a student has what it takes to succeed at the graduate school level.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Liberal Arts

Programs that emphasize broad knowledge across multiple disciplines, fostering critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills. The focus is on developing well-rounded individuals rather than training for a specific career. Examples of subjects that fall under the category of liberal arts term include literature, foreign languages, philosophy, and the social sciences, and more.

License and Licensure

A credential that allows a trained professional to legally practice their trade or profession within a certain jurisdiction, like a state or country. The licensure process usually requires proving your capabilities and knowledge, often through an exam. Licensure is not an educational credential that a school provides, but helping students become licensed may be one of your program's goals.

Lifetime Eligibility Used (LEU)

The sum of all annual Eligibility Used (EU) percentages for **Pell Grant**. The maximum Pell funding a student may receive is the equivalent of 12 full-time semesters (or 6 years of full-time enrollment). Everyone starts with an LEU of 0 before using any Pell funds, and you reach your limit if you get to 600%. Each time you use your Pell Grant, your LEU increases.

Lifetime Pell Limits

The amount of aid you are eligible to receive from the **Federal Pell Grant** program across a lifetime is limited to 6 years of full-time enrollment in undergraduate coursework. Once you have used up your Pell lifetime limits, you will no longer be able to use Pell dollars to pay for school, even if you have not completed a degree program and even if you would otherwise qualify based on your financial need.

Loan Origination Fee

A fee that a lender charges to cover the cost of making a **loan**, which is usually charged at the start of the loan, and it will be added on top of the overall amount that you borrow. The federal government charges origination fees on all federal **direct loans**. As an incarcerated student, you are not eligible for loans, and therefore would not be charged this fee, but it may be a term you encounter if you apply for loans on the outside.





Loan Consolidation

A process in which one or more federal student loans are grouped under a new loan, which may simplify, reduce, and extend the window for your loan payments, allowing borrowers to more easily get out of default.

Loan Rehabilitation

A process to get out of default on a loan by making a certain number of small, on-time, consecutive payments. The amount you pay will be determined on an individual basis.

Loans

Loans are money people borrow that they must repay with interest (a fee that grows over time). When a student receives their **financial aid offer**, that student may find out that they are eligible for loans. Students can decline student loans, or they can accept a smaller amount than they are offered, which is something a person may want to do to limit their debt and the amount of interest they will owe. To figure out the full cost of borrowing a loan, you can use an online loan calculator. As an incarcerated student, you are not eligible for federal loans, but you may be eligible for them upon release.

Lower Division Courses

Introductory college courses. They are typically given lower numbers in their course codes and are designed to be taken before a student may enroll in more advanced courses within that department.

Main Campus

If a school has multiple campuses, the main campus is typically the largest one, and most of the students, staff, and offices affiliated with the college are usually located there. Main campuses are typically the first campus the school established. You may hear this term if you are enrolled in a prison education program that operates as a satellite campus away from the main campus.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Major

Major is a college student's chosen area of study. The degree requirements for a major determine what courses a student must take to successfully complete that degree. Major requirements typically account for about half of a **bachelor's degree** student's total courses, but a major will be a much smaller portion of an **associate degree** program. For more information on this, see the *Navigating Forward* resource on the **Components of an Undergraduate Degree**.

Marital Status

The designation that is applied to your legal relationship status as it concerns your and any legally married partner's FAFSA obligations. Depending on your marital status, any partner you have may be obligated to submit their information on your **FAFSA** form as well, which can influence your financial aid outcomes.

Master's Degree

A **graduate** level degree, typically viewed as the next possible level of academic study after a **bachelor's degree**. In some fields, the master's degree is the highest level of education you can obtain, but many other fields offer further education through **doctoral degree programs**.

Merit Scholarships

Merit **scholarships** are a form of **financial aid** that students can receive based on their exceptional academic performance or other achievement, and often without having to demonstrate financial need. Students typically must apply for merit scholarships and prove they meet the criteria of the scholarship by submitting essays, letters of recommendation, application forms, or other required documents.





Minor

A minor is an optional additional area of focus within a student's **degree plan**. Most minors require between 15-21 **credit hours**. Instead of taking unrelated **electives**, if students select courses that satisfy the requirements of a minor, they can complete their degree with an added area of emphasis. Some students select a minor because it may make them more marketable in their career, but adding a minor may require taking extra classes, which could add extra time and cost. Many prison education programs do not have the option to include a minor, but this may be an option if you transfer to a **traditional campus**. Additionally, minors are not typically an option in an associate degree program.

National Student Clearinghouse Transcript Services

This is one of the largest **transcript** processing companies, which colleges will use to distribute transcripts to students when a student needs to purchase copies of their transcript in the future. They are a common partner with colleges, and many students must work with them to obtain past transcripts and submit them to their new school.

Need-Based Scholarships

A form of financial aid awarded based on demonstrated financial need. While a student may have to apply for need-based scholarships, eligibility requirements center on an inability to pay for school, not on exceptional academic achievements.

Non-Credit Courses

Courses that do not count towards your progress in completing a degree program.

Non-Degree Programs

Some programs do not give students credit for college courses they are taking in prison. These students are not able to count the courses they take toward a degree. Schools may make the decision to offer non-credit college programs due to limitations in funding, barriers within the college institution, or other policies. Talk to your program advisor to understand if the courses you are taking are credit-bearing and the reasons for that decision.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Non-Degree-Seeking (NDS)

A term that describes a student who isn't enrolled in a formal degree of study but enrolls in courses to gain knowledge (not to pursue a degree). These students are not eligible for federal financial aid. Some programs allow you to enroll NDS and later convert to degree-seeking status. Colleges that are not accredited to offer degrees at your facility may begin enrolling students NDS until their accreditation is approved and then convert students to degree-seeking. NDS can also allow students to begin taking courses without previous transcripts if those are difficult to find. Some colleges do not allow converting from NDS to degree-seeking, so be sure to speak with your program in advance. Your transcript will state if you are "NDS" or "Non-degree-seeking."

Non-Traditional Student

A term used to describe college or university students who do not follow the traditional path of enrolling in higher education immediately after high school. These students often have unique life experiences and responsibilities and enter college after a gap in their education. Non-traditional students may have a different set of needs and priorities from traditional students. Non-traditional students are typically only defined as such during their **undergraduate** years. **Graduate** students vary widely in age and are much more likely to be returning to school after several years. This term "non-traditional" does not show up on a **transcript** or any official school documents; it is typically just used as a way for colleges to know how to support students differently.

Notarized

A document is notarized when a certified official called a notary public, authenticates it and verifies the authenticity of the signatures on it for legal purposes. You may encounter this if the college needs proof of ID with a signature for some official document and you are unable to present one while you are incarcerated.

Open Admissions

A practice whereby a college accepts all applicants who meet the eligibility requirement for admission, usually having a **high school diploma** or the equivalent (like a **GED** or **HiSET**). Many community colleges are open admissions schools.





Open Enrollment

A period of time at the beginning of each **semester** where all students are able to add and drop classes freely, regardless of their year or degree requirements. Most students finalize their schedules during this period. Students may drop extra classes they were undecided about and add classes they were unable to join during the initial **enrollment** period. Most **PEP** students and other students who are attending college while incarcerated will not have access to an open enrollment period because your degree course path is typically fairly set, but this is a practice you should be aware of if you are planning to transfer to a **traditional campus** after your release.

Out-of-Pocket Costs

The definition of this term may vary per college. At many colleges, it refers to the amount left for you to pay after **grants**, **scholarships**, waivers, and **loans** are applied. If you encounter this term, check the definition at your college.

Pace

A limit on the timeframe you have to complete your degree. A student is typically required to complete their degree in 150% of the expected timeframe. **PEPs** may have different time frames than traditional college models, so it is important to speak with your advisor and understand the specific policies for your program and how they might influence things like SAP guidelines.

Parchment (credentialling service)

A private credentialling service company. They partner with many colleges, and many students will have to go through them to obtain past transcripts and submit them to their new schools.

Part-Time Enrollment

Students are considered to be part-time when they are enrolled in less than the minimum number of credit hours for **full-time enrollment** (which means less than 12 credit hours for **undergraduate** students or less than 9 credit hours for **graduate** students). Part-time enrollment can sometimes make you ineligible for certain **grants** and **scholarships**. Part-time enrollment may also impact the amount of financial aid you are eligible to receive. Many working adults who attend college choose to enroll part-time in order to balance full-time employment.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Pell Grant

The Pell Grant is a form of federal financial aid designed to help **undergraduate** students with exceptional **financial need** pursue higher education. Unlike student loans, Pell Grants typically do not require repayment, making them a valuable resource for those seeking to further their education. The amount received is based on need as determined by the **Student Aid Index (SAI)**, a number that is provided after completing the **FAFSA**. To use the Pell Grant for a prison college program, the program must be an **approved PEP**. Learn more about the Pell Grant, including general eligibility criteria and what the Pell Grant can pay for, by reviewing the *Navigating Forward* resource called **Pell Grant Overview**.

Pell Reinstatement

A change in federal law reinstated incarcerated college student's ability to access the Pell Grant, which had been prohibited for 30 years. Eligible incarcerated students in approved **prison education programs** can now use **Pell Grants** to pay for undergraduate programs while they are incarcerated. This change was part of the **FAFSA** Simplification Act of 2020 and went into effect in the summer of 2023. To learn more about how colleges can become approved so their students can become Pell eligible, look for additional *Navigating Forward* resources on Pell Reinstatement.

Positive Balance

A positive number in your account balance that reflects the amount of money you owe a school.

Postsecondary

The umbrella term for all higher education after high school. There are two common types of postsecondary institutions - colleges and universities. You may also encounter the term "institute," which is sometimes thought of as a third type of postsecondary institution.

Prerequisite

A class that must be completed before a student is eligible to take a certain higher level class or set of classes. For example, a Spanish II class requires the prerequisite of Spanish I to be completed first. As another example, many colleges require students to complete one writing course before they are allowed to take any other courses that require writing.





Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)

A Prior Learning Assessment (or PLA) is a way for students to get college credit for past experiences, like past employment or military experience, if a student can demonstrate that this experience provided similar knowledge and skills when compared to what they might have learned in a related college course. The exact name for this type of credit, as well as what is required to qualify for this type of credit, will vary by college and by state, but it's worth checking with an academic advisor to see if you might have experience that would qualify because this can be a cheaper way for some students to meet the credit requirements for a degree.

Prison Education Program (PEP)

This term can be used broadly to refer to college programs operating inside prisons (also called **HEP** or Higher Education in Prison programs), but due to federal legislation, the term PEP can also specifically refer to only the programs that are approved to use federal student aid inside prisons. These are also sometimes referred to as “approved PEPs.” Incarcerated students are only eligible to use the Federal Pell Grant if they are enrolling in an “approved PEP”. To be approved, a college must receive three authorizations: first from the department of correction that oversees the facility, next from the college's regional **accreditor**, and lastly from the Federal Department of Education. The PEP must also satisfy a **Best Interest Determination**. This approval and review process is in place to ensure that PEP programs are serving the “best interests” or needs of their incarcerated students. Once a college program has been designated as an approved PEP, its students will be eligible to receive Pell.

Private Colleges or University

Colleges and universities are either public or private. Private colleges are controlled by non-governmental organizations, like a board of trustees or a religious organization. Private colleges and universities receive most of their funding from private or non-governmental sources, like donors, foundations, and tuition. These types of colleges are generally able to operate with greater independence and flexibility when compared to public colleges.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Private Loan

A loan from a non-government organization, usually a bank, that a student or parent borrows from to pay college costs. Private loans must be applied for and eligibility is based on the applicant's credit. They have higher interest rates and less flexible repayment plans than federal **loans**. Be aware that many private loan companies are predatory and accepting these loans may hurt your long-term financial health.

Proprietary Schools

Another term for a for-profit college. These are private businesses that offer college programs. They offer education, degrees, and the other things non-profit colleges generally offer, but they are generating a profit from tuition, fees, and sometimes private loans. You will want to be very careful about enrolling at a for-profit college because these programs can be more expensive, sometimes causing students to take on a large amount of debt in the form of private loans. Additionally, the credits earned at a for-profit college can be harder to transfer, leaving students in a large amount of debt but without making progress towards a recognized degree from an accredited college.

Provost

The senior academic officer of a college or university - the person who oversees all academics, faculty, policies, **curriculum**, budgets, and student outcomes. This role is typically the second highest ranking position of a college, behind only the president or chancellor.

Public Institution

A school that is governed and regulated by a government body and funded through public dollars. Public colleges and universities are often part of a larger network or system of state schools and typically offer lower tuition to residents of their state than to anyone who isn't a long term legal resident.

Quality Points

A number that can be calculated for each graded course on your transcript by multiplying the grade point you earned by the number of graded credit hours for that course. Calculating quality points is part of the process of calculating a **GPA**.





Receiving College

When a student **transfers** from one college to another, receiving college refers to the college that is receiving the transfer credits from the other school. It is the receiving college that will determine how a student's transfer credits will be interpreted at the new school.

Records Release Form

A legal form that gives organizations permission to release your protected information or documents to a designated third party. These forms will likely be necessary if a third party is helping you to obtain transcripts or other documents you cannot easily access while incarcerated.

Registrar and Registrar's Office

The office within a school that is responsible for processing student schedules and storing all student records, including **transcripts**. They are the office responsible for determining how your transfer credits will translate at your new school and ensuring that all of your degree requirements are met when you graduate.

Remote Classes

Classes that students do not have to attend in-person. Remote classes are typically offered online either through a digital learning platform, or through video conferencing, which are sometimes referred to by the brand names "Zoom" or "Teams". Remote classes can either be designed as synchronous or asynchronous. Synchronous means that course time is happening all the same time -- like a virtual lecture where all students are on camera listening and participating live. Asynchronous means that students are all learning and doing their assignments at different times -- like a computer program that each student completes alone, or pre-recorded videos that students watch at their own time.

Replacement Credit/Course

Sometimes your college will allow you to retake a course in order to earn a higher grade and replace the old grade on your **transcript**. Typically, colleges only allow replacement courses under specific circumstances, so you will need to research your college's policies to see whether you have the option to replace a course for a new grade. Be sure to also ask your advisor about any possible consequences. For example, many colleges will require you to keep the new grade even if you do worse on the second attempt. Also, taking a replacement course could impact your **financial aid**, so make sure you check in with the financial aid office.

Residency Requirement

The residency requirement is different from what colleges use to determine where you live. The residency requirement is a graduation requirement that establishes how many credits you have to take from your "home college" in order to graduate from there. You should expect, for example, not to be able to transfer in 75% of your degree, completing only 25% at your new college, and then graduating from there. The residency requirement is one of the reasons that transfer students may end up having to retake courses. If you are running into problems with the residency requirement, ask your school if **reverse transferring** may be an option for you.

Residency Status

On the **FAFSA**, this refers to your state of legal residence and can determine your eligibility for state **financial aid** and the cost of your **tuition**. For incarcerated students, if you are a U.S. citizen or legal resident, your state of legal residence could be the state where your prison facility is located; however, some colleges may look back to your residency prior to incarceration in order to establish your current residency. Residency status is also important for determining if you are eligible for discounted tuition at state colleges.





Reverse Transfer

When a college student enrolls in a course at a college but then transfers the credit back to their previous college (typically to complete a degree from the previous school). This is most commonly done with students in a **2+2** model who transfer from an associate program to a bachelor's program but reverse transfer a few credits from the bachelor's program to their first college in order to finish the associate degree. Students who have enrolled in prison education programs can also benefit from reverse transferring in situations where they are transferred to a new location or leave prison and need to complete only a few remaining credits at a new school.

SAT Exam

An entrance exam designed to measure a student's academic readiness for college. The SAT is broken into two sections; the Evidence Based Reading and Writing Section, and the Math Section. The SAT is designed by the College Board, a nonprofit organization, and administered by Educational Testing Services, another nonprofit organization. Virtually all four-year colleges who require an entrance exam score as part of their admissions process accept the SAT.

Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)

Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) is a policy that colleges are required to have to ensure that students are keeping up with academic standards and progressing to graduation within a reasonable time frame. If a student is not meeting SAP, they will lose financial aid eligibility, and will need to pay for school **out of pocket** until they meet the requirements. Students may also be able to file a **SAP appeal** if they are able to show a compelling reason for not meeting SAP. For more information, check out the *Navigating Forward* resource called **Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)**.

SAP Appeal

This is a formal request for the school to reconsider your **financial aid** eligibility when you are not meeting **Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)** requirements. Your college should provide information to you about how to appeal the determination that you are not meeting SAP requirements, and this appeal should be filed as soon as possible after you are notified of your SAP status. If successful, an appeal can reinstate your **financial aid**.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Scheduled Award

The maximum grant amount you are eligible to receive for the award year if you are enrolled full-time for the full school year. This amount is calculated from the information you (and your family) provided when you filed your FAFSA form.

Scholarship

Financial awards intended to help cover educational expenses such as tuition, books, and living costs. Students don't have to repay scholarships. **Merit**-based scholarships are awarded based on certain accomplishments, like athletics or maintaining a high GPA. Need-based scholarships are awarded based on income and financial need. Outside scholarships can be awarded by an organization or business other than a college or a government agency. Some scholarships are renewable and others are awarded on a one-time basis. Your college program coordinator or financial aid officer might be aware of scholarships that you can apply for, so check with them when you are applying to your degree program.

Section 504 (Rehabilitation Act)

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (commonly referred to as just Section 504) protects qualified students from discrimination on the basis of **disability**. In other words, if a student is able, with reasonable **accommodations**, to meet the admissions and academic requirements of a school, that school cannot discriminate against that student because of their disability. Section 504 applies to all programs that receive federal funding, which includes k-12 public schools and most **colleges**.

Semester

An academic **term** that is typically about 15 weeks long. For schools that use semesters, the school year is divided into Fall (August through December) and Spring (January through May) Semesters, with a third optional semester usually taking place over Summer (May through July). The quarter system is an alternative calendar system that breaks the year into four terms about 10 weeks long.





Social Science

A broad field of academic study focused on understanding human behavior, relationships, and societies. It uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze how individuals, groups, and institutions interact and influence each other. Social sciences include disciplines like economics, psychology, political science, anthropology, and public health.

Social Security Number

A nine-digit number issued to U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and temporary (working) residents. Applicants submitting a FAFSA must have a valid Social Security Number.

Stackable Credentials

Industry-recognized credentials that can be earned independently, but whose coursework and experience can be applied to higher-level credential programs in the same field.

Standardized Test (for example the ACT or SAT)

A test or exam which has been formatted and administered to all test takers in the same way, regardless of where the exam is taken. The grading criteria will also be “standard” across all completed tests. Many college course exams will be individually designed by the professor and shaped to specific concepts they choose to focus on, and will therefore not be standardized. However, many college admissions exams and other supplementary exams, like licensure exams or college exit exams, will be standardized.

Student Aid Index (SAI)

A number that indicates your eligibility for **financial aid**. It is calculated based on the information you provided on your **FAFSA**. The lower your **SAI**, the more financial aid you may be eligible for.

Student Balance

The amount of money, if any, that a student owes their school each semester.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Student Billing Office

Another term for *Bursar's Office*.

Student Code of Conduct

The expectations that a college has for student behavior, as well as the disciplinary process that follows if those expectations are not met. Codes of conduct may cover substance use on campus, bullying or harassment, sexual harassment or assault, academic dishonesty, threats to safety, or other behaviors that could disrupt or cause harm on a campus.

Student Government

Officially recognized and elected student group that advocate on behalf of their student peers. These groups can also be known as the student union or student council. This group voices student concerns to the school administration and other decision-making groups, and lead community service initiatives and projects. They often organize campus-wide initiatives and events, usually related to student wellbeing or in response to major academic and political developments that affect the student population. It serves as a liaison between students, faculty, and administration and plays a role in enhancing campus life.

Student ID

An identification number that is given to each student when they are first admitted to a school. After release, this term can also mean a physical identification card given to a student that acts as proof of their membership at their school and can potentially also act as an electronic key that gives students access to buildings on their campus.

Syllabus

An outline of an entire college course and the policies of the instructor who teaches it. A syllabus will typically include every assignment that the student will have to complete during the course, the office hours of the instructors, the required texts and other course materials, grading policies for the course, attendance policies, academic dishonesty policies, and various other important pieces of information about the course.





Tenure

A permanent position awarded to certain **faculty** members who have achieved high standing within their fields and institutions, usually after several years of employment. Faculty with tenure have their position for life and cannot be terminated without cause.

Term

The unit of time that a college uses for dividing up the school year. Many colleges in the U.S. divide their school years into **semesters**, but some may use quarterly terms or trimesters. Most college courses will be structured to begin and end inside one academic term. Financial aid also runs according to the school's academic calendar and terms.

Testing Site

A designated center on a college campus is used to conduct exams outside of a classroom setting. A testing site can meet several types of testing needs. It can be used as part of **accommodations** for someone with a disability. It can also be used for exams that are not part of a specific course curriculum, like CLEP exams or college exit exams.

Thesis

A document that is the culmination of months or years of research conducted by a student, most commonly during a graduate program. **Master's** level graduate students are sometimes required to complete a thesis, while **doctoral** students are required to complete an even longer and more complex research project known as a dissertation. You may also hear the term "thesis" used to refer to the main argument of an essay.

Third Party

A person or organization other than yourself or your school that plays a role in any college process. Those roles may include but are not limited to, assisting students with obtaining records, providing legal protections or guidance to students, advocating on behalf of students to their colleges, investigating claims of misconduct, etc.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Title IV

Title IV of the Higher Education Act (1965) creates rules for all colleges that accept federal financial aid on behalf of students. Almost every college in the United States is governed by Title IV. Title IV is also a term used to mean “federal financial aid.”

Trade Union

A united, organized group of workers in a specific field who work together to improve their working conditions, protect their members, and train new members in their field. Many trade unions will partner with **CTE** Institutions to provide **apprenticeships**, recruit new tradespeople immediately after graduation and assist in their job training and **licensing** requirements.

Traditional Campus

A college campus that operates how colleges traditionally and historically have, with in-person students and facilities. Examples of non-traditional campuses include online programs and prison education programs. Students without access to the resources on the traditional campus may need additional or different support and resources from their colleges, which are responsible for making sure all students have access to what they need to be successful.

Transcript

A record of your academic history that shows the classes you've taken, your grades in those classes, and your **GPA**. A complete college transcript includes all of the college courses you've attempted or completed at every college you have attended. Undergraduate colleges typically require a high school transcript (or **GED** or **HiSET** transcript) for admission, and college transcripts are required whenever you **transfer** colleges or apply to a graduate school. Some employers might also request to see a college transcript during the hiring process.

Transcript Code

The letters, numbers, symbols, and terms used to classify and display information throughout your **transcript**. Transcript codes can vary between schools, so it is important that you use the key your school provides to analyze your transcripts. A transcript key should be available in your **academic catalog** or from your **registrar**.





Transfer

The process of leaving one college and enrolling in another before finishing a degree program. Transferring credits involves taking a class at one college and then seeking to get credit for it when you switch to a different school. If you are finishing an associate degree and continuing on to a bachelor's degree program, you are a transfer student. If you are switching schools or jumping from one prison education program to another, you are most likely a transfer student.

Transfer Credits

Credits earned at one college that are used at a new college or in a different program. Transfer credits are always evaluated by the receiving college, and each school gets to decide how they will accept your old credits. Sometimes transfer credits will come in as a specific course, and sometimes they may be accepted as just generic transfer credits. Every college will have an official policy for when and how you should request that your old transcripts get evaluated, and how the **registrar's** office must handle those requests. You may be able to advocate for yourself better if you know your rights and responsibilities as a transfer student. If you are switching schools or jumping from one prison education program to another, but you aren't sure if your old courses have been accepted by your new program, ask your college advisor if your transcripts have been evaluated and for a copy of your Transfer Credit Report. If they have not yet been evaluated, you could ask for the official transcript credit evaluation policy.

Transfer Credit Report

A document overviewing the courses you have submitted for transfer credit. This document will inform you what courses have been accepted for transfer credit, and what requirements that credit has been applied to.

Transfer Pathways

Colleges sometimes work together to establish a clean path for students to follow for transferring from one program straight into the other without losing any of their credits. These are **articulation agreements** between colleges that establish how your credits will translate from one program into the next. Transfer pathways are usually set up between **community colleges** and four-year institutions so that colleges can streamline their process and students can plan ahead.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Tuition and Fees

The direct costs associated with attending a college or university, which get paid to the college. These are typically the primary expenses that students need to pay for their education. Colleges can charge on a per **credit hour** or per **semester** basis. Fees will typically include things related to maintenance of facilities, like a technology fee or library fee.

Tuition Refund Committee

An appeals committee that evaluates a student's request for a tuition refund outside of typical refund periods and approves or denies it. Tuition Refund Committees will often evaluate the extenuating circumstances surrounding a student's specific appeal and determine whether they meet the criteria to warrant a tuition refund.

Tuition Waiver

A financial benefit where a college waives the cost of tuition. This is different from financial aid, which pays a student's bill. A waiver, on the other hand, just erases the bill. Colleges that accept federal financial aid are not allowed to charge students different amounts for the same program, so tuition waivers can only be given under specific guidelines and restrictions.

Two-Year Colleges

Sometimes called "junior colleges," these schools offer associate degree programs that can be completed in two years of full-time enrollment.

Undergraduate Degree

A term that usually refers to higher education programs that students can take after completing high school, which includes associate and bachelor's degrees. Most undergraduate programs offer opportunities to develop analytical, critical thinking, and writing skills, with an emphasis on **General Education**. There are also some technical degrees that are considered undergraduate programs, and these have less general education and more hands-on skill-building.





Undue Burden (ADA)

This term may be relevant to students seeking support from the **Disability Services** Office. When a college is deciding whether or not to approve an accommodation, if a college shows that an accommodation would be unreasonably expensive or very difficult to administer logistically, it can be denied. One example of an accommodation that might be considered to cause an “undue burden” is restructuring a college’s **academic calendar** to meet the transportation needs of one student.

University

The largest type of **higher education** institution. Universities are often composed of several distinct **undergraduate** colleges and **graduate** schools. They typically have large campuses, large student bodies, and offer the largest number of **degree programs** when compared to other higher education institutions.

Unusual Circumstance

Circumstances that will allow a student to be designated as **independent** when they otherwise wouldn’t be. Your incarcerated status may count as one of these unusual circumstances, according to the Federal Student Aid Office.

Upper Division Courses

A term that may be used to refer to advanced or upper level courses. In a bachelor’s degree program, these courses will typically be completed in the second two years of full-time enrollment in a **four-year** program.

Verification

The process students must complete confirming financial or household information they have submitted on the **FAFSA**. If selected, your college will provide information on how to complete verification.

Waivers (Financial Aid and Tuition Waivers)

Financial support provided by the college or state that can remove costs from the bill; waivers can only be applied to specific costs such as **tuition**. Also, some colleges are not able to provide waivers because of federal regulations. Students don’t have to repay waivers.

GLOSSARY of TERMS for HIGHER EDUCATION in PRISON

Withdrawal and Withdrawal Policy

Did you know that you can't just drop a class at any point in the semester? If you need to drop a class or leave your program before completing it, you should know the policies that spell out how a withdrawal will affect your academic standing, **financial aid** eligibility, and **GPA**. Withdrawal policies will vary by college, so review your **academic catalog** and talk with an advisor before withdrawing.

Work-Study Program

A federal **financial aid** program that provides the opportunity for students to work part-time and earn a wage. After securing a work-study job through the college, students are eligible to earn up to the amount listed under work-study on their financial aid offer. The money earned is not typically available to pay part of the college bill at the start of a semester. Instead, students will be paid directly through regular paychecks for the hours they work throughout the semester or year.

Writing Center

A dedicated resource at a college where students can receive guidance, feedback, and assistance with their writing assignments, research papers, essays, and even job application materials. Writing centers will often be part of an academic support center, a student services office, or a library program. Has your prison education program tried to find ways to give students access to this additional support?

Writing Sample

A writing sample is a piece of original writing (written by you) that may be required as part of the college admissions process, a scholarship application, or a job application. Typically when you are asked to share a writing sample, you will be given instructions about formatting, length limitations, the submission process, and perhaps even the topic to be addressed.



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Notes

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Tennessee Higher Education Initiative
www.thei.org

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