



College Vocabulary

Academic Advisor	An academic mentor who guides the student through their degree. Advisors assist with course registration, make sure the student is taking the right courses in the right order, and help them make important academic decisions. Every first-year student is assigned an advisor. When a student declares a major, they receive a new advisor in that department.
Academic Probation	A status colleges give to students who are struggling to pass courses. Academic probation is used to warn students that they need to improve their performance. Students on academic probation may lose scholarships or become ineligible for university sports.
Associate's Degree	A degree you can earn in 2–3 years, typically from online or community colleges. The credits earned from this degree can usually be transferred to a 4-year bachelor's degree. Many states have (or are developing) direct pipelines to support the transfer of credits from CC's to 4-year state schools.
Audit	A way for a student to take a course they're interested in without earning credit, or without having the grade affect their GPA.
Bachelor's Degree	A 4-year degree, usually in the form of either a Bachelor of Arts (in a liberal arts program) or Bachelor of Science (in an applied learning program such as engineering).
Campus Visit	During a campus visit, students and family members can listen to a presentation by staff from the admission office and go on a tour with a student guide to see campus buildings and facilities. It's a chance to ask a lot of questions and get a feeling for the school's culture.
Career Services	Most colleges and universities have a career services department where your student can get career planning advice and help finding internships and beginning the job hunt. Career counselors can help undecided students choose a major and learn more about how their academic and personal interests line up with different kinds of careers.
Commencement	The word "commencement" is often used interchangeably with graduation, but it's not quite the same thing. At a college commencement ceremony, all the students who will graduate (earn their degree) during that academic year may participate even if they haven't officially completed their graduation requirements.
Common Application	The Common App allows high school seniors to apply to multiple colleges and universities with one online application. It helps gather all supporting materials including essays. There is a fee to submit to each college that can be waived for low-income students.
Community College	Community colleges are usually public institutions that focus on providing accessible, flexible courses. Although some CCs have dorms, most CC students commute from home and many are working full or part-time. Students can take one-off courses or pursue 2-year associate's degrees or professional certifications. Often, credits from a community college can be transferred to a 4-year university. Some community colleges now offer 4-year degrees.
Credit Hour	Each course is assigned a certain number of credit hours, usually corresponding to how often class occurs and how long classes are, as well as the course difficulty. Many classes earn a student 3 to 4 credit hours. To be considered full-time, a student must be taking at least 12 credits per semester.
Dean	A dean is the head of a particular academic or administrative department at a college or university, for example, Dean of Admissions, Dean of Faculty, Dean of Student Affairs, etc.
Dean's List	A regularly issued list of students who have achieved high academic excellence. Qualification for the Dean's List varies from school to school.

Degree	A degree is the final result of a college education. It's awarded when a student earns a certain number of qualifying credit hours. Examples of degrees include Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Arts, Master of Business Administration, a PhD, Associate's, and more.
Department	Refers to a certain section of a university. Departments are usually aligned with degrees or areas of study within a college, such as the engineering department, English department, etc.
Dormitory	A dorm or residence hall is an on-campus student living facility. At some schools, only first-year students are required to live on campus, but at many smaller colleges students live in dorms all four years. Most dorm living is connected with a meal plan, and is covered by a room and board payment.
Drop	When a student leaves a course during the add/drop grace period, it's referred to as dropping. There is no financial or academic penalty for dropping a course during the add/drop period. Students may drop a class because they feel their course load will be too heavy or they may want to switch to a different class. This is different from withdrawing (see below), which happens after the add/drop period is over.
Electives	Most bachelor's degrees require a student to complete a combination of specific courses and electives. Electives are courses the student chooses to take from a list of offerings that fulfill general education requirements, or any courses outside the student's major.
Faculty	The staff of professors and instructors at a university.
FAFSA	This stands for Free Application for Federal Student Aid . Completing this online form is the first step in applying for financial aid. All colleges require students who'd like to be considered for financial aid to complete the FAFSA every year.
FERPA	This stands for Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act. This law protects the privacy of educational records and transfers from parents to the students themselves when they turn 18 or start college. FERPA covers all school-related records, including your student's grades, information from the campus health center, disciplinary records, and more. If students want to give a parent or another third party access, they may complete a FERPA waiver. There is an exception: If the college feels there is a need to protect the health and safety of your student or others, they may disclose information.
Finals	Exams at the end of a semester or quarter that test a student's knowledge on everything covered in a course. In some courses, the grade on the final exam will be the biggest factor determining the student final grade in the course. Sometimes instead of an exam, the final will be a paper or big project.
Financial Aid	Refers to any type of student loan, scholarship, or grant your student receives to help pay for college. Incoming first-year students receive a financial aid award along with their offer of admission. Work-Study is another form of financial aid. Financial aid can be need-based (based on student and family income and what the family can afford to contribute) or merit-based (based on a student's GPA, test scores, etc.).
Financial Need	This is determined by the difference between the total cost of attendance at a college and the amount the student and their family is expected to contribute (Expected Family Contribution).
Fraternity	A social organization for college men. Many fraternities operate their own houses where members live and host events.
Full-Time College Student	A student who is taking a full course load, typically 12 or more credits.
Gap Year	A year-long break between high school and college, or a semester or year taken off at some point along the way to earning a college degree.
General Education Requirements	Most 4-year college programs come with a set of general education requirements, intended to ensure all students receive a broad education, with knowledge of topics outside of their chosen field of study.
GPA	Stands for grade point average. This is a reflection of your academic achievement at school. The GPA is updated after each term's grades are finalized and reported. A low GPA can lead to academic probation and can jeopardize financial aid.

Graduate School	Some professions require students to continue their education beyond college graduation. There are graduate programs in almost every academic area. A master's degree typically takes two years while a doctorate takes four or more. Law, medicine and business have separate graduate schools.
Independent Study	A type of non-traditional course that allows students to work outside of the classroom. The student develops the topic they wish to pursue and must have it approved by one or more academic departments. They'll be assigned a faculty supervisor, but will direct their own learning goals and outcomes.
In-State Student	A status conferred on students who live (or have established residency) in the same state as the college or university they attend. At public universities, in-state students pay much less in tuition than non-resident students.
Internship	An internship is a short-term job, usually for the summer or a semester, that your student takes to get experience in their field of interest. Internships may be paid or unpaid; sometimes students can earn course credit for them. In some academic programs, an internship may be required to graduate.
Lecture	The term for a large class that does not entail lab work. The professor may expect student participation but this is not a discussion-based class.
Letter of Recommendation	Letters of recommendation are part of college and scholarship applications, and also often required to apply for internships, jobs and graduate school. Students ask people who know them well (teachers and professors, employers, coaches, advisors and mentors) to write the letters for the purpose of explaining why they are a strong match for a college, job or other opportunity.
Liberal Arts	Refers to non-technical fields of study, including literature, art, mathematics, philosophy, and social and natural sciences. Students at liberal arts colleges can major in math, science and computer science but may not have access to the same range of offerings available at research universities.
Major	The primary focus of study in a 4-year degree. For example, your student might major in history, business or aerospace engineering. Some students start college with a declared major and others choose a major after a year or so of academic exploration.
Master's Degree	A degree received in graduate school, post-undergrad. Master's degrees usually take two years to complete.
MBA	Stands for Master of Business Administration. An MBA is a type of master's degree, and typically requires a bachelor's degree to pursue.
Meal Plan	The meal plan dictates how many meals a student can eat at on-campus dining facilities. Most students living in campus housing will have a meal plan, but off-campus students can often purchase a full or partial plan. Some meal plans include funds that can be used as cash at campus restaurants or snack shops.
Midterms	Exams that occur in the middle of a quarter or semester to test a student's grasp of topics covered in a course up to that point. Midterms are typically weighted more heavily than other tests and coursework, but not as heavily as finals.
Minor	A secondary focus of study, typically earned in tandem with a major. Your student, for example, might graduate with a major in biology and a minor in psychology. It takes fewer course credits to complete a minor, and the minor might complement the major area of study or be something a student pursues just because they love the subject.
Nonresident	Status applied to students who don't live in the same state as the university they're attending. At public institutions, nonresident, out-of-state students usually pay much higher tuition than in-state students.
Off-Campus Living	Off-campus living refers to any housing arrangement not facilitated by the college. It could be in a rented house, apartment, or at home with you. Some schools only guarantee or require on-campus housing for first-year students.
Orientation	Incoming first-year college students are usually required to take part in orientation, either on campus or virtually. Orientation programs may be offered over the summer or may take place during welcome week and move-in. During orientation, students learn about campus resources, the student code of conduct, and may meet with their academic advisor to select fall classes.

Part-Time College Student	A student who does not have a full course load. A student taking fewer than 12 credit hours in any given semester is typically considered a part time college student.
Pass/Fail Course	A class in which no grade is given; a student simply passes or fails. A pass has no impact on GPA but a failing grade is calculated as a 0.0. Colleges limit how many (if any) classes a student can take pass/fail, and typically students may not opt for pass/fail in required general education or major classes.
Prerequisite	Many college classes must be taken sequentially — in a certain order, from lower to higher level. A prerequisite is a course a student must complete before taking another specific course. For example, Calculus 1 is a prerequisite to Calculus 2 — a student can't take the latter without having passed the former.
Quarter	Some colleges and universities operate on the quarter system with the academic year divided into four terms: fall, winter, spring and summer. Students usually need to be enrolled for three out of four quarters. Because quarters are shorter than semesters, classes taught on the quarter system may be more fast-paced.
Registration	The period during which a student can sign up for the classes they wish to take in the following quarter or semester.
Resident Assistant RA	An older student, usually a sophomore or junior, who lives in a section or floor of a dormitory and oversees student relations. RAs are often expected to be mentors and advisors, and they also organize events and activities for dorm residents.
Room and Board	The price paid to cover on-campus living and meal plan expenses, usually billed for a semester or year at a time. When figuring out the cost of a year of college for a student living on campus, room and board is included in the total cost of attendance.
Roommate	Most dorm rooms and suites are shared by two or more students. Roommates are the other people your student will live with in the residence hall. Some colleges assign roommates to first-year students and others let incoming first-years choose their own roommates. After the first year, students choose their own roommates or may opt to live alone on or off campus.
SAT	The Scholastic Aptitude Test, known as the SAT, is used by many colleges to determine a prospective student's ability to succeed academically at the school. Like the ACT, the SAT is usually taken in the spring semester of the junior year of high school, and can be retaken in the fall of the senior year.
Scholarship	A financial award to help your student pay for college. Scholarships can come from the institution (the college or university) or from outside groups and organizations. Unlike student loans, this is gift money that does not need to be paid back.
Semester	A half year of college. There is a fall semester and a spring semester. Most courses are one semester long.
Sorority	A social organization for college women. Some sororities operate their own houses where members live and host events.
Student Essay	A personal essay submitted as part of a college application. The Common Application gives seven different essay prompts for students to choose from. In addition, many schools require supplemental essays that may ask the student to say why they feel they will thrive at the school and what they will contribute to the community.
STEM	STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics and is used to refer to classes or programs in these areas.
Study Abroad	Most colleges and universities run programs that give students a chance to live and take classes in another country for a quarter, semester or year.
Syllabus	A general summary of a course handed out to students at the beginning of the term (and also available electronically). The syllabus includes required textbooks and other study materials along with dates of assignments, papers and exams. The professor's contact information and office hours will also be listed. Reading and following the syllabus is a key success tool for college students!
Teaching Assistant (TA)	Many large classes employ teaching assistants to help the professor. A TA may lead a small discussion section, help with labs in science courses, run study sessions and hold their own office hours.

Test-Optional Admission	When applying to a college or university with test-optional admissions, applicants don't have to submit an SAT or ACT score. If they want to submit a score, the admission committee will consider it, but not submitting a score won't count against them.
Thesis	In college, a senior who wants to do an in-depth study of a topic may choose to write a thesis. (Some colleges require all seniors to write a thesis or do a capstone project.) A thesis requires extended research that results in a long paper summarizing the student's findings. Students who complete a thesis may graduate with honors: cum laude (with distinction), magna cum laude (with great distinction), or summa cum laude (with highest distinction).
Transcript	A transcript is an overview of a student's academic progress — it includes names and grades for all completed courses, their GPA and their total credit hours.
Transfer Credits	Credits that can be transferred from one school and applied toward a degree at another.
Tuition	The amount paid to attend a college. Tuition is only part of the bill: students also pay fees, and room and board is extra.
Undergraduate	An undergraduate is any student pursuing a 4-year bachelor's degree.
Virtual Tour	When you can't do a campus visit, a virtual tour is often an option. This is a tour hosted online, either through an interactive website or as part of a live video stream presented by the university.
Wait List	A list of applicants who have not been offered admission to a university, but could still be in the coming months. Being offered a spot on a wait list is a way for a school to tell a student that they meet admission requirements and will be invited to join the first-year class if space permits. Many schools only admit a small percentage of waitlisted students.
Withdraw	Withdrawing is when a student leaves a course after the add/drop period is over. While withdrawing from a class does not affect a student's GPA, it is shown on their transcript as a "W." Withdrawing can also refer to a student withdrawing from their academic program entirely.
Work-Study	A federal program which gives colleges and universities funding to hire students for part-time jobs. Federal Work-Study is part of a student's financial aid package but instead of being money a student receives outright, it comes in the form of employment and students may use their income to cover any expenses they want. Students are responsible for applying for available work-study positions; receiving Work-Study doesn't guarantee them a job.