

GETTING READY TO GO TO COLLEGE: A CHECKLIST

It can be overwhelming to prepare for going or returning to college, but also very exciting! This checklist is to help you prepare for college. This resource should be helpful for all students, but is tailored specifically for students experiencing homelessness.

Prior to the start of classes:

- Make a list of the items you plan to bring with you.** Most colleges will have a list of items that are not allowed in the residence halls and may also have a suggested packing list. You also can find suggested packing lists like the one found here. If you are struggling to get the necessary items like bedding, toiletries, or school supplies, consider reaching out to the student support office on your campus via email to see if they have any resources. If you have a roommate, coordinate with them to see what they are bringing.
- Identify the dates for move-in and move-out if you're living in the residence halls.** See if the residence halls close during winter, spring, or summer, or if you can stay year round. If the residence halls close during breaks, reach out to the Housing office to see if you can secure housing during this time. Some colleges will make exceptions for students experiencing homelessness.
- Review your financial aid award.** Often, your financial aid counselor will do this with you, if you request an appointment. To finalize your aid, check to see if the financial aid office needs any additional information or documentation; make sure you have accepted aid that was offered to you; complete entrance loan counseling; and sign your master promissory note if you intend to borrow federal student loans. If you have more aid than you need, make sure that your college has your bank information or address, so that you can be sent a refund.
- Check your school email daily.** Any communication from your school will be sent here (including from offices such as Financial Aid, Academic Advising, Housing, Registrar, and your professors), library, student health services, and other amenities.

- **Pick your meal plan.** Often, first-year students are required to have a meal plan. Identify where the dining halls are located, the hours of operation, and how long it takes to walk there in between classes. If you can afford it, it is recommended to have at least two dining hall meals per day to ensure that you will have enough food throughout the semester. If you are unable to afford a meal plan, reach out to the support offices on your campus to see what resources (food pantry, local food bank, SNAP eligibility) are available.
- **Review your class schedule and confirm you have registered for the correct number of credit hours.** If you need to make changes to your schedule, do so by your institution's set deadlines for adding, dropping, or swapping classes. Contact your academic advisor if you need assistance with making changes to your class schedule. If you aren't sure who your academic advisor is, reach out to someone within your major or the person that helped you register for classes.
- **Log into your school portal including your student account, and the learning system your institution uses (ex. Canvas, D2L, Blackboard, etc).** Your professors may use this to post announcements, send messages, and post the course syllabus and required textbooks and class materials.
- **Get your textbooks.** You can either rent or buy your textbooks depending on the books you need. First, visit your campus bookstore online or in-person and see what the cost is to rent or buy your books from them. You can then compare those prices to other online textbook services like Chegg, Amazon, and other used bookstores. Things to consider: Do you need an online access code? Used books will typically not come with these. When do you need your textbooks? If you are ordering your books from online sources like Chegg or Amazon, you will need to take shipping time into consideration.
- **Explore your campus.** Walk through your class schedule so that you're able to easily find your classes on the first day. You can also locate other resources on campus including the student union, the library, student health services, and other amenities.

During your first week of classes:

- **See if you are comfortable with your course load and schedule.** Do you need to swap classes due to a timing conflict, unanticipated course load or the desire to have a different professor? Review your institution's add/drop/swap policy and speak with your academic advisor and the financial aid office to discuss repercussions of making changes to your schedule.

- Become familiar with your school's tutoring and other support services.** Determine if you may benefit from tutoring and know the process for signing up for tutoring or other support services.
- Become familiar with your professors' office hours and preferred method(s) of communication.** They may communicate this directly during class or specify in the course syllabus.
- Attend events offered specifically for first year students, such as Welcome Week.** This is a great way to make new friends and meet staff at your school. Are you living on campus? Your Residential Assistant (RA) may host events periodically for other residents in your community.
- Attend other events hosted by your school, like a student activities fair, to learn how to get involved, or a job fair if you are in need of student employment.** Job fairs may include on-campus, off-campus, and federal work-study jobs.

During the midpoint of the term:

- Reflect on how your classes are going.** Do you need to withdraw from a class or multiple classes? Before making the decision to withdraw, speak with your professor on the likelihood of passing the course, and then speak with your academic advisor and the financial aid office regarding repercussions for withdrawing.
- Plan for housing over winter break (if necessary).** Your campus might keep some of the residence halls open over the break, but they might require you to fill out a form or application to stay there. Keep an eye out for an email from Housing.
- Fill out the FAFSA starting on October 1st.** The earlier you fill it out, the more aid you can get! Review this page for information on the FAFSA process for youth experiencing homelessness.

During the end of the term:

- Prepare for housing for the following year.** Can you remain on-campus? What is the application process like? If you're planning on moving off-campus, make sure you understand your lease and have the necessary dates.

- ❑ **Reflect on your classes and grades.** If you are receiving financial aid, make sure that you are meeting your school's Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) and you remain eligible for financial aid. If you do not meet SAP, file an appeal and see if your situation can be an extenuating circumstance.

- ❑ **Plan for housing over summer break (if necessary).** Your campus might keep some of the residence halls open over the summer that might require you to fill out a form or application. Keep an eye out for an email from Housing.

- ❑ **Develop a plan for the summer.** Are you taking summer classes, working, or doing an internship? Start planning and preparing for the summer now. Often, summer residential jobs start hiring prior to the end of the semester.