

Glossary of Helpful College Terms

College Lingo for College Parents – Talk the Talk!

Every profession, activity, or area of interest has its own jargon or set of specialized vocabulary. College is no different. College administrators, faculty members and students develop a set of short-hand terms that can be confusing to those not familiar with them. As a college parent, you may be surprised at how quickly your college student will pick up the lingo.

If your college student slips into “college-speak” and you don’t understand what she is talking about – ask! And if you want to be able to at least begin to talk-the-talk, here is some vocabulary to get you started.

Please remember that there may be some variation in the use of these terms at various institutions.

Don’t be intimidated by college terminology or “lingo”. If you’re not sure what something means, ask! You’ll be “talking college” before you know it.

Academic Advisor

The student’s [Academic Advisor](#) is a faculty or staff member assigned to assist the student with her academic planning. This faculty or staff member can help the student navigate the often confusing requirements and procedures for completing her degree, registering for classes, choosing a major, and choosing appropriate courses. Students who work closely with their advisors often avoid costly mistakes. ([Read more about the role of the Academic Advisor.](#))

Academic Probation or Academic Warning

A student may be placed on Academic Warning or [Academic Probation](#) if his GPA (Grade Point

Average) falls below a certain level. These terms may be used interchangeably, or they may mean different things. A student who is placed on Probation or Warning will be expected to meet certain academic standards by the end of the probation semester. Sometimes students are required to participate in academic support programs or may be restricted in terms of Federal Work Study hours or athletic participation. Students who fail to raise the level of their academic work by the end of a probation semester may be subject to dismissal or suspension. ([Read more about Academic Probation.](#))

Add/Drop Period

Most institutions will have an [Add/Drop](#) or similar period at the beginning of the semester. This is a time period during which the student may make changes to his schedule without any academic or financial consequences. The period may be only a few days or may be as long as two weeks. Students may want to check with their academic advisor before making a major change to their schedule. Students should also be careful about adding a new course after too much time has passed and they may have missed vital material at the beginning of the course. ([Read more about Add/Drop.](#))

Admission Wait List

The [wait list](#) is a pool of qualified students from which the college will draw if accepted applicants choose to go somewhere else. Being placed on a wait list is not a rejection. The college has said that your student is qualified for admission, but that they do not currently have a space for him. Most students on the waitlist are fully qualified to attend the school. The waitlist becomes a safety net for the college if their “yield” (number of accepted students who make a deposit) is low. ([Read more about the Admission Wait List.](#))

Articulation Agreement

An [Articulation Agreement](#) is an officially approved agreement between two institutions, which allows a student to apply credits earned in specific programs at one institution toward advanced standing, entry or transfer into a specific program at the other institution. It matches coursework between schools and so helps students make a smooth transition from one institution to another by minimizing duplication of coursework. ([Read more about Articulation Agreements.](#))

Block Scheduling

An unusual approach to scheduling used by approximately a dozen or so colleges in the United States also sometimes called “One Course At A Time (OCAAT) Scheduling.” In [block scheduling](#), students take only one course at a time for approximately 3-4 weeks followed by a short break of a few days. Students then begin a new course. Courses meet daily for 3-5 hours at a time and cover the same amount of material as traditional semester courses. At the end of the year, students will have taken the same number of courses as those with more traditional schedules, but in short, intense units rather than juggling 4-5 courses at any given time. ([Read more about Block Schedules.](#))

Blue Light Phones

Many college and university campuses use a system of emergency assistance “blue light phones.” These phones, located throughout the campus, are marked by an easily seen blue light above them. These are emergency phones that usually connect to campus police or campus safety and students do not need to dial a number. When calls come from emergency phones, the dispatcher is generally able to see where the call is coming from. The dispatcher will send officers to the location for immediate assistance.

Clery Act

The Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act is named for Jeanne Clery, a nineteen year old freshman at Lehigh University who was raped and murdered in her residence hall in 1986. The law requires any college, either public or private, which receives federal financial aid, to keep and disclose crime statistics on and near campus. Amendments to the [Clery Act](#) passed in 2008 require institutions to include a campus emergency response plan in their reporting. Institutions are required to publish their report in the fall of each year, and it must contain information for the prior three years.

Co-Requisite

A co-requisite course is a course that may or must be taken at the same time as another course. Sometimes information in the two courses link and it is important that students take them together. Pre-requisites and co-requisites are usually listed in the course catalog or course registration materials.

Course Catalog

The Course Catalog, sometimes called the [College Catalog](#), is an important tool for understanding the college’s course offerings and academic and administrative policies and procedures. The catalog may contain information about college offices, academic policies and procedures, college facilities, information about campus life, graduation requirements, majors, descriptions of courses, information about faculty members, and college contact information. There is a wealth of information available. Students are responsible for knowing and adhering to the policies and requirements in the catalog, so it is definitely worth spending some time with it. Students don’t, however, need to memorize every word immediately, but they should take time to become familiar with it and refer back

to it often. Many colleges now make their catalogs available on line. ([Read more about using the College Catalog.](#))

Course Registration

This is the process through which students sign up for their courses for the following semester. It will probably take place sometime after the midpoint of the current semester. Students are often asked, encouraged, or required to meet with their academic advisor before registering for courses to be sure that they understand their course requirements. Registration at many institutions now takes place on line. The period of time for signing up for classes may be a few weeks, or it may remain open to the student until the beginning of the semester. Students usually have a designated time, based on class seniority, when they may register for their classes. It is important to register early, as some classes fill. Students should have alternative classes in mind.

Course Wait List

A course wait list is a system for adding students to a class once it is full. If a student attempts to register for a class that is already at capacity, she may be allowed to add her name to a waitlist for that class. If another student later drops that class or is removed, the student on the waitlist will be added to the roster. Priority is usually given on a first come, first served basis. Schools have differing policies regarding waitlisting students and notifying waitlisted students. There are no guarantees given to students and there are often limitations and restrictions.

Credit Hour

A credit hour is equivalent to 1 hour of class time per week. Courses are usually measured in credit hours, with the average being three or four. Students may refer to how many credit

hours or credits they are carrying for a particular semester. Graduation requirements are usually measured in credit hours i.e. “120 credit hours required for graduation”. A general rule of thumb is that students should be averaging about 2 hours of work per week outside of class for each credit hour or hour of time spent in class.

Dean’s List

The Dean’s List (Provost’s list, Chancellor’s Award) is usually produced each semester, and is a list of those students who have high grades or meet a certain academic standard. It is the college equivalent of an honor roll. Each institution will set its own requirements for qualifying for the Dean’s List.

Defer Enrollment

Once a student has been accepted to a school, and has paid the required deposit, he may request to [defer or delay](#) his enrollment. This means that he is asking the college to hold his place for him for a semester or for an entire year. The student may be required to submit his request in writing by a certain deadline, and he may be asked to submit a plan for what he plans to do for the year. The student is then guaranteed a place in the next entering class. Policies vary by school. For many students, taking a year off, or a [gap year](#), may be very beneficial. ([Read more about deferring enrollment.](#))

Degree Audit

A [degree audit](#) is an analysis of your student’s academic progress toward a degree. It helps your student monitor where he is and what he still needs to do to complete his requirements. A degree audit is an advising document that maps out degree requirements and compares them against your student’s transcript. It is a vital tool for academic planning, course selection, and scheduling and

should be used in conjunction with consultation with the student's academic advisor. ([Read more about Degree Audits.](#))

Degree Map

A [degree map](#) is a semester by semester list of courses which a student needs to take in order to [graduate on time](#). Sometimes called a *major map*, it suggests courses to complete each semester in order to be "on track" to graduation by taking the right courses in the right order. ([Read more about Degree Maps.](#))

Dual or Double Major

A [dual or double major](#) is an undergraduate student who completes two sets of degree requirements in two distinct areas of study. Although the student may declare two separate majors, the student will receive one bachelor's degree listing both majors at time of completion. A double major may not be twice the work as some requirements may overlap. ([Read more about Double Majors.](#))

Elective courses

These are courses which are not required to fulfill any college requirement. Students will probably have certain all college required courses, certain courses required for their major or minor, and the remainder of their courses may be general elective courses. General elective courses are a great opportunity to explore new and interesting areas.

FAFSA

If your child is already in college, or has been accepted to college, you are probably already familiar with this term. It is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. This is the starting point for almost all financial aid. Even if you will not be applying for federal aid, most colleges require that you complete this form in order to

apply for any financial aid, scholarships, or grants.

FERPA

The [Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act](#) is a federal law which protects the privacy of student educational records. This gives parents certain rights regarding their child's educational records. It is important for parents to realize, however, that these rights transfer to the student once he turns eighteen or attends a school beyond high school. This means that, without written permission from your son or daughter, you will probably not have access to his academic records – including his grades. It also means that, without that written permission, faculty members and administrators of the college are legally prohibited from discussing your child's progress with you. ([Read more about FERPA.](#))

First Generation Students

This term is used to refer to students who are the first in their immediate family to attend college: students whose parents have not attended a post-secondary educational institution. Colleges understand that many first generation students may have particular issues in learning about and adjusting to the world of college. Some institutions develop special programs or even organizations for first-generation students. Many institutions provide extra support and guidance for these students.

Gen Ed Requirements

This is short-hand for [General Education Requirements](#). They may also be referred to by other names, such as Liberal Arts Requirements, Liberal Studies Requirements, Core Curriculum Requirements, Distribution Requirements, etc. These are requirements designed to help your college student receive a broad education with at least a general background in several areas. Students are often required to take one

or two courses in several different departments outside of their major. ([Read more about General Education.](#))

GPA

Sometimes referred to as the Cumulative Grade Point Average (sometimes also called a “cum”), this is a way of calculating the college student’s overall grade average. Most often, colleges will calculate grades on a 4 point scale with 4 being equal to an A. Therefore, a 4.0 is an A+, a 3.5 a B+, 3.0 a B and so forth.

Liberal Arts

A Liberal Arts education is one that provides an overview of the arts, humanities, social sciences, mathematics and natural sciences. Studying liberal arts encourages students to see connections across many disciplines and is a holistic approach to education. It is intended to provide students with general knowledge and to develop reason and judgment as opposed to professional or vocational skills.

Major

An academic major is a discipline or area of study in which a student chooses to specialize. A student needs to complete the courses required for that major to complete a degree. Most schools require students to choose a major to complete their degree, and many schools require that students declare a major by the end of their first or second year of college. Typically, approximately one third to one half of a student’s courses in college will be related to a major. A specific major may lead to many careers, and several majors may lead to the same career. ([Read more about majors.](#))

Matriculated/Non-matriculated students

Matriculated students are students who have applied for admission and been accepted to a degree program at the college. Non-

matriculated students may register for courses on a semester by semester or course by course basis. They generally do not receive financial aid and are not enrolled in a degree program. These students may be taking courses for personal enrichment, improved job skills, or to transfer credits to another institution.

Meal Plan

A [meal plan](#) is a pre-paid account for your meals while you are at college. Prior to the beginning of the semester, students select the meal plan that they prefer. Policies vary at different colleges, but students can often choose the number of meals per week that they wish to eat in the dining facility. They are then billed for the appropriate amount at the beginning of the semester. Each time a student eats a meal, a designated amount is deducted from the account. Students can often change plans if they discover that their needs are greater than what they had planned. Some meal plans may charge students “a la carte” depending on the items that they choose. ([Read more about meal plans.](#))

Minor

A [minor](#) is a secondary field of interest after a student’s major. Minors usually require several courses in an area, but fewer courses than a major. A minor is usually optional. A minor can provide a student with a certain set of skills, feed a student’s passion, or complement the major by providing additional depth or breadth to the student’s background. If carefully planned, adding a minor usually does not require any additional time to the student’s college career. ([Read more about Minors.](#))

Open Admission

[Open Admission](#), also called Open Enrollment or Inclusive Admission, generally means that the admission process is unselective and non-competitive. The only criteria for admission is a

high school diploma or GED certificate. Open Admission is most often found in community colleges. Although Open Admission is non-competitive, students still need to apply and should pay close attention to admission deadlines. There may be more applicants than space available. Open Admission should not be confused with an Open Door policy which usually admits anyone who applies, regardless of educational background. [Read more about Open Admission](#)(.)

Parental Notification

[Parental Notification](#) laws, or Parental Notification Policies, allow a college or university to notify parents if their underage student violates alcohol or drug policies of the institution. Many argue that parental notification, allowable under the FERPA health and safety exception, allows parents to become part of the solution to underage drinking. Parental notification policies vary from school to school. The federal law allows a college, but does not require a college, to notify parents of student rule infractions. [Read more about Parental Notification](#)(.)

Pass/Fail

In many colleges, students may have an option to take a certain number of courses as Pass/Fail courses. This means that the student will not receive a letter grade for the course, but she will receive either a “P” for Pass or an “F” if she fails. This option is often intended to encourage some students to experiment and explore in a course that may be beyond their comfort zone. She might be interested in taking an exploratory course in science, for instance, but worry that she will not do well and that the grade may harm her GPA. The P/F option will allow her to take the course, but not receive a letter grade to be calculated in her GPA. Students are generally limited to a certain

number of P/F courses – either per semester or overall.

Placement Exams

[Placement exams or tests](#) are given to students, usually after they have been accepted to the college, to determine how ready students are for college level work in basic core courses. They are most often given in subjects such as English and math. Students cannot “pass” or “fail” placement tests since they simply measure a level or readiness in a subject. They are used for placing the student in the appropriate level class. It is important that students understand that the results of their placement exams are important, but cannot affect their acceptance to the college; they are not linked to admission. Placement exams determine the starting point of their education. They do not measure intelligence or ability, but the student’s academic experience. Students whose tests indicate deficiencies may be required to take a class to “come up to speed” in that subject area. [Read more about Placement Exams](#)(.)

Priority Registration

The term priority registration is sometimes used synonymously with registration ranking. Registration ranking is the order in which students may register for classes. This is usually based upon number of credits or units earned. *Priority registration* also refers to the permission for specialized groups of students to register in advance of other students. Priority registration policies may vary greatly across colleges. This early registration is sometimes provided for groups of students with special circumstances that impact their ability to choose the appropriate classes to attain a degree such as students with disability related needs, or students in state mandated special programs. It is also sometimes afforded to veterans, athletes, or honors students.

Pre-Requisite

Pre-requisites are courses that students are required to take prior to registering for an upper level course. Some courses may have no pre-requisites and some courses may have several introductory level courses required before the student may take them.

Resident Assistant or RA

[Resident Assistants](#) are generally student employees who are responsible for students' life in the Residence Halls. Resident Assistants are usually trained student leaders responsible for supervising a group of students. They can assist with questions, social issues, roommate issues, or other problems that might arise. They are also responsible for enforcing college policy and rules. Residence Assistants are, in some ways, the college representatives who will get to know your college student best outside of the classroom. [Read more about Resident Assistants](#)(.)

Residence Director or Community Director

A Residence Director is a professional, specially trained college or university employee responsible for the management and daily operations of campus residence halls. Resident Directors are usually college graduates, sometimes graduate students, who oversee the Resident Assistants and are responsible for managing the overall wellbeing of the Residence Hall. Residence Directors often live in the hall or a separate adjoining apartment. They also tend to be on call 24 hours a day and are generally called by their RAs if problems arise needing attention.

Registrar

The college Registrar is the person or office ultimately responsible for maintaining the permanent academic record for each student. In addition to maintaining student

records, this office is often also responsible for scheduling of classes, registering students in classes, maintaining class lists and recording student grades. Remember that, without the student's written permission, the Registrar will not be able to discuss your student's grades or academic progress with you because of FERPA restrictions.

Room Selection

Room Selection for current students is the process of choosing living arrangements for the following academic year. It is a highly charged and stressful time for students. Each institution handles Room Selection differently, but because it is such an important issue for students, the Room Selection process is usually very carefully organized and publicized in order to make it as fair as possible for everyone. Room Selection usually requires that students have paid a Housing Deposit for the following year, and is based on a Housing Lottery. The Lottery gives priority to upperclass students and then randomly sorts students within a class level. A low Housing Lottery number is a prized thing! Students who are new to a college are generally assigned their housing over the summer and do not participate in Room Selection.

Satisfactory Academic Progress

[Satisfactory Academic Progress \(SAP\)](#) is defined by the federal government as successful completion of coursework to maintain eligibility for financial aid. The federal government requires that schools establish, publish and apply standards to monitor progress toward completion. These standards apply both to grade point average (GPA) and to progress toward degree completion. Students must maintain the standard minimum GPA established by their school and must complete the required number of credits for graduation within a maximum number of attempted credits

– 150% of credits required. (For instance, students who are required to complete 120 credits for graduation must do so within 180 attempted credits.) ([Read more about Satisfactory Academic Progress.](#))

Sophomore Slump

[Sophomore slump](#) refers to the phenomenon in which a second effort fails to live up to the quality of a first effort. The term is also used in sports (for second year players) and in music (for second recordings by an artist). At college, students in their second, or sophomore, year often experience both a let down and a decrease in their grades. There are several things which occur during the second year of college which can contribute to the slump that sophomores encounter. These are especially troubling if the student is unprepared for the differences that happen during this year of college. ([Read more about Sophomore Slump.](#))

Syllabus

The [syllabus](#) is an outline or overview of the course handed out by the instructor at the beginning of the course. The syllabus contains a wealth of information about the course which often includes requirements, expectations, textbook information, contact information for the instructor, objectives, assignments, and often a daily schedule of assignments and topics. Students are always encouraged to read the syllabus carefully and refer to it often throughout the course. ([Read more about how to use the syllabus.](#))

Teaching Assistant

A Teaching Assistant (TA) is an individual who assists an instructor or professor with teaching duties. At many universities, Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA) are qualified graduate students employed by the university on a temporary contract. They may help a professor conduct lab or study groups, grade

papers, or prepare lectures. They are often the sole instructor of a course section under the supervision of a professor.

Transcript

A student's college transcript is the official, permanent record of the courses taken, grades earned, honors earned and degrees conferred by the institution. The task of maintaining transcripts falls to the Office of the Registrar. Students may obtain official transcripts of the college record by requesting it from the appropriate office. There may be a fee, or a fee for multiple copies. Students need transcripts for transfer to another institution or sometimes for a potential employer.

Work Study

The [Federal Work Study](#) portion of the financial aid package is the portion of the financial aid package that a student can earn through a part-time job on campus. Funds are provided to the college by the federal government to be distributed to students who have jobs on campus. Federal Work Study jobs are based on financial need and are a part of the student's financial aid package. This is a reimbursement program. Students work part time jobs on campus and are paid, usually at minimum wage. ([Read more about Federal Work Study.](#))