



Engaging in higher education while incarcerated is rewarding but is not without its challenges. One of those challenges is being able to visualize the campus and understanding how the many departments and offices all work together. Use this resource to become more acquainted with the parts that make up a typical college.

## THE LANDSCAPE

### STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Campus services may help students with everything from academic assignments to medical care.

### STUDENT LIFE

This represents the various clubs and student groups that exist on campus.

### ADMISSIONS

This office is responsible for receiving, reviewing, and processing your application to be admitted to the school.



### FINANCIAL AID

This office is responsible for processing and communicating with you about your financial aid.

### REGISTRAR

This office is responsible for tracking all student academic data and transcripts.

### BURSAR

This office is responsible for processing any payments or charges to your student account.

### COLLEGE LEADERSHIP

Your college has many levels of leadership, including the college president, provost, deans, administration, and others.

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## STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES



**Career Services:** This office can be a source of information and support as you plan for employment before or after graduation. Career services staff often offer job workshops to connect students with potential employers and post job listings for positions that might be a good fit for students. They can offer feedback on application materials like a resume or cover letter, or even help you write them. They may also help you research career fields and apply for jobs you are interested in. Some prison education programs may have representatives from the career office visit facilities to offer workshops and answer questions, or they may have someone facilitate virtual meetings with incarcerated students. Ask your **PEP** what is possible from this office.

**Campus Mental Health Counselors:** Student mental health has become a priority for many colleges, and most offer mental health services or referrals to students that are confidential and low cost or even free. It's possible these services are not available while you are incarcerated, but talk to your program coordinators to find out for certain. During reentry, your college could be a helpful starting point for getting access to mental health services you could benefit from. Seeking mental health support as you navigate a challenging time in your life, like college or reentry, is very normal and should be encouraged.

**Campus Libraries:** Campus libraries are a valuable resource that you can take advantage of before and after release. Library staff are often willing to help students learn research skills and can connect students to other academic resources on campus. The inventory of your campus library is searchable online and called a library catalogue. This catalogue is how students can find books and resources they want to borrow. Some prison education programs allow students to borrow hard copy books from their library (by having a professor or aid bring the book inside and return them when the student is finished).

College libraries also provide students with access to a large collection of online databases with thousands of online publications. Your college pays for its students to have access to these databases. If your **PEP** allows some internet access, the campus library website could be a valuable way to find research material. If you don't have access to online databases, you may ask your program how they can support you in getting access to your campus libraries. JSTOR is one example of an online database that has worked hard to be accessible to incarcerated students, even at facilities without access to the internet.

**Student Health Services:** Some colleges have clinics on campus. They offer a wide range of services, from treating injuries and illnesses, to providing mental health support and guidance on nutrition, sexual health, and daily wellness practices. These services are not available to PEP students while they are incarcerated, but they could be a valuable resource in getting your health needs met after release.

**Academic Advisors:** Your advisor is a member of the college **faculty**, usually within the department of your **major**, who is tasked with supporting and assisting you while in school. They often start working with you as soon as you are admitted to the college and help with the course enrollment process. They are often the main point of contact who can connect you with the campus resources you may need. In a **prison education program (PEP)**, advisors may select your courses and register you for classes each semester. They may also provide your textbooks and school supplies.







## STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES - CONTINUED



**Testing Center:** Most campuses have a designated testing center on campus, which serves several functions. First, the testing center provides designated testing environments for students with disabilities who need to take an exam or complete other coursework under conditions that can't be as easily accommodated in a traditional classroom. These facilities can also be used for placement testing, allowing students to pass an exam in place of taking a course. These centers may also accommodate a range of other testing needs **faculty** and students have. Students who don't meet in person or who have tests that don't correspond to a specific class, like a graduation exit exam, can also make use of the secure environment offered at a testing center.

While you likely will not have access to a testing center while you are taking courses on the inside, these facilities may be important to your college life on the outside because they help meet a range of student needs, from helping students secure course credit to ensuring students with disabilities have adequate and accessible testing accommodations.

**Student Writing Center:** A campus writing center provides a dedicated space where students can receive guidance, feedback, and assistance with their writing assignments, research papers, essays, and even resumes or cover letters. This support can be especially beneficial for students who struggle with writing or who haven't had access to opportunities for practicing their writing skills. Writing center tutors or consultants are often trained to work one-on-one with you, offering personalized attention and tailored advice. This individualized approach allows you to address specific writing challenges and receive customized strategies for improvement. Many PEPs have found creative ways to give incarcerated students access to this support on the inside. Ask your advisor or professors if this is a resource your program is able to access.

**Disability / Accessibility Services:** This office plays a crucial role in ensuring equal access to education for students with disabilities. This office provides support and **accommodations** to ensure that all students can fully participate in their academic courses. The disability services office also works to ensure that the campus environment is accessible to all students by making physical spaces, such as classrooms and residence halls, wheelchair-accessible, and by providing accessible transportation services. This office often collaborates with other campus departments and organizations to ensure that accessibility needs are considered in various campus initiatives and events.

For people coming out of prison, it can be hard to know whether you have a qualifying disability or what help may be available to you. Connecting with your disability or accessibility services office can be a key step in getting the support you may be entitled to.





## ADMISSIONS



This office is responsible for receiving, reviewing, and processing your application to be admitted to the school. They decide whether you meet the criteria for admission and whether to admit you. They will also provide you with information about the enrollment process if you are accepted.

You will interact with the admissions office:

- If you are applying to a program from the inside,
- If you are transferring to a new school on the inside,
- If you are transitioning to the main campus upon release,
- If you are transferring to a new school after release, and
- If you are starting a new degree program on the outside.

The admissions office is a great first contact as you are thinking about starting or continuing a college program. This office can help you figure out what documents you'll need, as well as help you begin to answer questions like what credits may transfer and what degree programs might make the most sense for you.

The college admissions process will vary by school, so talk to your college advisor about specifics. Generally speaking, these are the major steps for applying to a college:

- ☐ Complete the college's application, including any required essays or letters of recommendation
- ☐ Request your high school, HiSET, or GED transcript to be sent to the college
- ☐ Request official transcripts from all previous colleges you have attended
- ☐ Complete and submit the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)**
- ☐ Check your admissions status, your FAFSA **Submission Summary**, and your **Financial Aid Offer**
- ☐ Take your college placement tests (like Accuplacer, SAT or ACT) or send scores to the college
- ☐ There may be additional paperwork to complete, so check in with your college advisor often







## FINANCIAL AID

The financial aid office is responsible for calculating and communicating your **financial aid offer** to you (also called an award letter), as well as sharing any requirements you need to meet to stay eligible for the aid you receive. Financial aid administrators are experts on complicated processes and laws. Many of these policies can change from year to year, and it's the financial aid office's job to stay informed to help the college and its students comply with all the rules to remain eligible for financial aid. Your financial aid office can assist you in completing the **FAFSA**, understanding your **Submission Summary**, and making FAFSA corrections. They provide other important information such as what aid you are eligible for, what has already been applied to your **student balance**, and how much you still owe after aid, if any. You can reach out to your financial aid office for more information about the requirements to maintain eligibility every semester. They can also help you explore all of your options for paying for school and help you apply for more aid if needed.



Use this space to write down a few questions you might have for the financial aid office at your college:

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## REGISTRAR

The registrar's office is responsible for tracking all student academic data, and their behind-the-scenes record keeping and registration responsibilities will be important for you. The registrar's office processes your schedule and finalizes your enrollment into the classes you register for. The registrar is also responsible for evaluating your past college **transcripts** and deciding if and how your credits will **transfer**. The registrar's office keeps your official transcript, updates it every semester, and certifies the completion of your program when you graduate. Finally, this office also provides your transcript to future schools you may attend or to potential employers upon your request. If you have any questions related to your academic records, you should start by contacting this office.



Use this space to write down any questions you have when looking at your transcript or to make a list of any colleges you have attended in the past:

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## BURSAR

The bursar's office is responsible for processing any payments or charges to your student account, whether they be from government aid, private financial aid sources, or payments that come directly from you. They keep track of your student account balance, or the amount of money you owe the school each semester, and also process refund checks if your account has a **credit balance** (meaning the school has received more money for you than you actually owe them). This is the office to reach out to if you have questions about your bill or any other issues that concern your student account.



### LEARN MORE

Here are a few questions you might have for the bursar's office:

- Do I have a current balance? If so, what is it?
- How can I set up a payment plan?
- What happens if I miss a payment deadline?
- How can I resolve a financial hold on my account?

For more information about financial transcript holds, see the *Navigating Forward* resource ***Institutional Debt and Financial Transcript Holds***.





## COLLEGE LEADERSHIP



**University President:** Sometimes called a chancellor, this person is the highest ranking administrative official at a university or college. They serve as the chief executive officer and play a crucial role in the overall leadership and management of the institution. The university president has a leading role in deciding the long-term goals and vision of an institution and forming the strategic plans to guide the school. They work with academic officers, faculty, and other staff to ensure the quality and integrity of their programs. They oversee new major academic appointments and the hiring of important new faculty. They play a key role in deciding how the school uses its funding, and in securing new funding for the school. They serve as the public face of an institution to the outside world, as well as to the larger student population. University presidents are often responsible for communicating significant events to the student body and public. They are also expected to take charge and guide schools through times of emergency or great tragedy.

**Provost:** The senior academic officer of a college or university. This role is typically the second highest ranking position within a college, behind only the president or chancellor. They are typically in charge of all academic programs and policies at a college or university. They will help shape the direction of the various academic departments and communicate with deans and faculty in order to ensure that all academic policies are being followed. The provost is not likely interact with students directly on a regular basis, but they do make decisions that will shape your academic experience at the college.

**Dean:** College deans are academic officers that are usually the head of a particular department or an individual college within a larger university. Deans are usually expected to represent their department to the leaders of your school. They are expected to advocate for their department and students, oversee budgets, communicate policies and changes to their faculty, and work to support student wellbeing. Even though you will not likely spend much time, if any, directly interacting with your dean, they may play a role in addressing problems that arise within a college, especially if it affects people within their department.

**Dean of Students:** Often the dean of students is a leadership role that falls outside of the president's office, the provost's office, and the academic departments. However, this person works closely with all of these offices, as well as other student resources staff, to ensure that the college is providing needed support to students. More specifically, the dean of students is responsible for supporting students through personal or financial crises, coordinating programming and events to enrich campus culture, developing and enforcing policies around student discipline, and providing leadership and support to student-led organizations, including the student council.







## COLLEGE LEADERSHIP - CONTINUED



**Faculty:** These are the people at the college who are responsible for the academic activities of the college, like teaching and researching. You may know them as professors. They typically have multiple degrees in their field, often a Ph.D. or its equivalent.

Faculty who teach your classes may have office hours that allow you to spend individual time addressing questions you have concerning the course. If you don't have any opportunity to meet with your **PEP** professors outside of class time, you might ask if there is a way for them to set up virtual or in-person office hours for their incarcerated students, although this can be logistically challenging and is not always possible. Faculty members who have the opportunity to get to know you as a student can also help later in your academic journey when you are needing letters of recommendation or looking for research opportunities.

**Academic Departments:** 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 include history and math departments, literature or English departments, psychology departments, business departments, etc. Departments typically have their own leadership structures, budgets, and policies for operating. The department you have the most interactions with probably be your **major**. For example, if you plan to major in psychology, a large number of professors, advisors, and courses you will be assigned will be within the psychology department. This doesn't mean that you will not have opportunities to interact or conduct research with faculty in other departments; it just means that the school is organized in a way that is intended to connect you with like-minded people who have the most to offer for your specific educational goals.

**Department Chairs:** These are **faculty** members who have been appointed to leadership roles within their specific academic department, usually by the dean of their school. They are responsible for overseeing the department's priorities, operations and finances, and act as it's advocate and liaison with the dean. They also provide faculty evaluations, support other faculty members reach their research and instructional goals, and may oversee course scheduling and planning. Department chairs will typically also teach, so you might have a department chair as a professor.

**Student Government:** Many colleges have officially recognized and elected student leaders that advocate on behalf of their peers. These groups are generally organized as the student government, but they may also be known by other names, such as the student union or student council. This group voices student concerns to the administration and other decision-making bodies. They advocate for solutions to student problems and act as the student voice in many decision-making processes and policy changes. They organize campus-wide initiatives and events, usually related to student wellbeing or in response to major developments that affect the student population. They can also influence administrative policy decisions and work with college staff to ensure that students have access to resources and other opportunities that will benefit them.

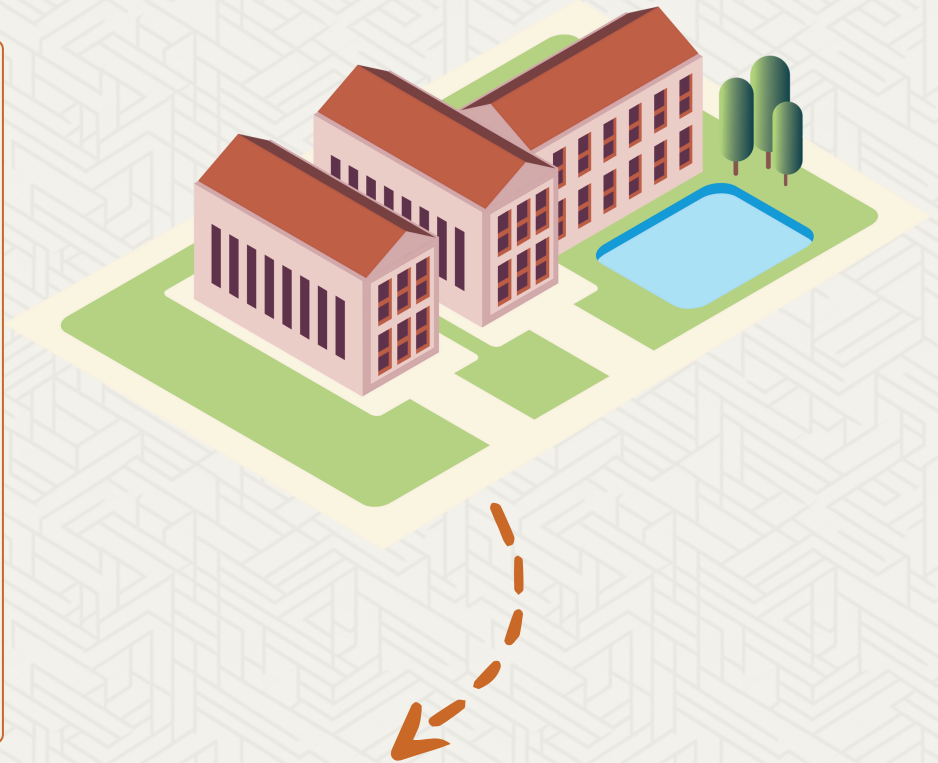




## STUDENT LIFE

### **Student-Led Organizations and Clubs:**

Colleges often have a number of student-led organizations and clubs that students can join. Each group will have its own purpose and focus, ranging from political activism to sports clubs. You might also find organizations that offer opportunities to build your resume, like student government, volunteer clubs, or honor societies. Whether it's through joining existing organizations or starting their own, many prison education programs have found creative ways for incarcerated students to participate in some organizations or clubs. These can be excellent opportunities to develop valuable skills and experience. Talk to your program representatives about what might be possible.



**Campus Safety and Police:** Offices of campus safety and security exist primarily for the purpose of keeping students, faculty, and staff safe. They will issue emergency warnings to students and the larger community, and prepare evacuation plans and other emergency responses. Many colleges also have their own independent police force. Some campus police forces function like private security guards, while others operate in much the same way as any city police force, with sworn officers who are able to carry firearms and make arrests.

After leaving prison, if you are transitioning to taking in-person classes on the traditional campus, it may be helpful to gather some additional information about campus safety. Here are questions you might want to ask the dean of students, your **advisor**, your parole officer, or another trusted resource:

- *Do I need to register or notify this office if I am coming to campus while I am on the registry?*
- *Do I need to notify this office if I am a student on parole? Will I have any obligations based on my parole or registry status?*
- *If I need help on campus, who should I contact?*
- *What jurisdiction do the campus police operate under? Are they part of a larger police force?*
- *What response options do campus police have? Do they make arrests and operate like normal law enforcement, or does your school have alternative disciplinary procedures?*
- *If I ever feel afraid of or mistreated by campus police, what can I do for help?*
- *Do you offer any other services or programs to help me feel safe on campus? Are there any specific safety concerns that I should be aware of while visiting campus?*



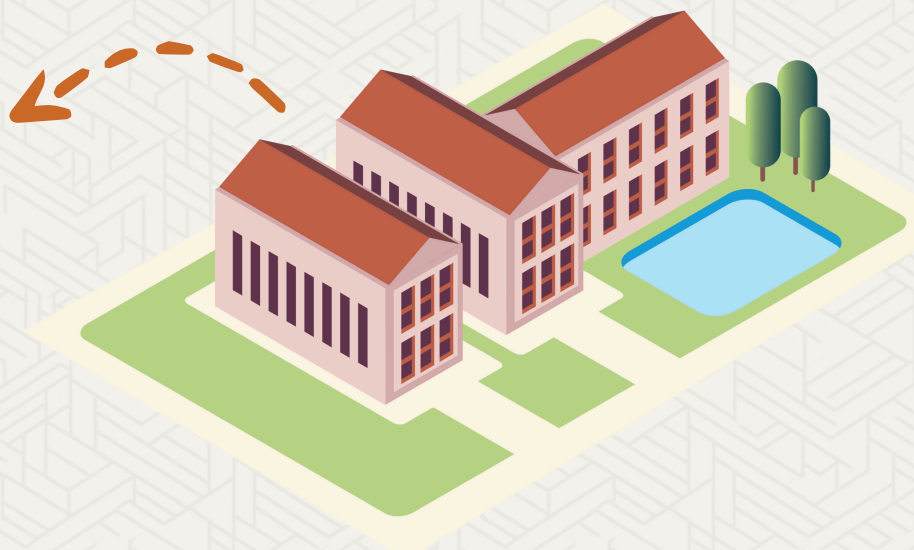




## STUDENT LIFE - CONTINUED

### Campus Housing or Residential Life:

Many colleges offer campus housing as an option for their students. Some colleges may not offer housing to adult learners and non-traditional students, or they may restrict access based on a person's conviction history. If you can access campus housing, you may find that it is helpful or you may actually find it to actually be more expensive than other off-campus housing nearby the campus. Gather as much information as possible about housing options before making a decision about where to live after release.



**Dining Services:** Student dining centers meet most of the dietary needs of students living on campus and also offer a place to socialize. Students who live on campus or spend a lot of time there might benefit from looking at meal plans, which offer set rates for the meals students can receive at the dining centers. Students without meal plans can usually eat there too, although they will have to pay for each individual meal instead of receiving one large meal plan charge on their student bill, which covers meals for the entire semester. Students who reside off campus can also access campus dining halls, which provide a convenient meal source or simply a place to spend time socializing with classmates and friends. Finally, many students work, through both Work-Study positions and regular employment, at student dining centers.

**Religious Life:** Your faith and spirituality might be an important part of your life already or it may be something you are hoping to explore further. Many colleges and universities offer services to a wide range of religious faiths and denominations. If your college is a religious institution, you may even have graduation requirements related to this office. There may be a physical center with offices for campus ministry staff and spaces for people to gather, or there may not. Campus ministries support students through activities like counseling, the study of scripture, social justice initiatives, or helping students meet basic needs like food and clothing. Students can also use these spaces and ministries to find opportunities to volunteer in ways that align with their faith. Many campus ministry programs will plan events for the major holidays in their faith traditions, and these can be a good place for students to connect with others who practice the same faith traditions.

**Recreation Centers/Gyms:** Many campuses have athletic training and gym spaces that are available to all students, (although some gyms and recreation centers may be reserved exclusively for school sports teams). These facilities can offer different fitness equipment and machines, such as treadmills, weight machines, and yoga mats. They might also offer fitness classes and groups that center around certain physical activities like running clubs or yoga classes. Some schools might have intramural and club sports that organize in the rec centers for regular games and meetings. Students might also be able to seek employment at their rec centers, if they are interested. If this is something that your school has, your student ID card may provide you with free access to these facilities on the traditional campus.





# **NAVIGATING FORWARD**

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