

# TEXAS HIGHER EDUCATION

*Re-entry*  
HANDBOOK

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# GLOSSARY

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These are commonly used terms that you may hear in association to college. Some of these terms will be referred to throughout this handbook. Inside this handbook, you will notice that some words or phrases are highlighted in blue. This means that you can click on those words or phrases and you will be taken to a website.

**Application Fee Waiver:** Most college applications require a fee in order to successfully submit the application, but this fee can be avoided if you are able to get an application fee waiver. Some colleges will give waivers to anyone who can demonstrate financial need, while others might have other ways to obtain waivers, like visiting the campus. These requirements will typically be listed in the application section of a college's website, but you can also call the admissions office for more information.

**Apply Texas:** A common online application used for colleges and universities in Texas. Apply Texas requirements include: a completed application form; your high school and/or college transcripts (if applicable); ACT/SAT scores; extracurricular, volunteer, and employment information; an application fee or application fee waiver; school-specific requirements such as essays, and TOEFL or IELTS scores (these are standardized tests) if you are not a native English speaker.

**Blackboard/Canvas/D2L:** These are examples of learning management systems (LMS), which are computer programs that help professors communicate with students and teach more effectively. Generally, LMS will allow the professor to share files with you, allows for communication between you and the professor (usually through direct messages), allows for you to turn in work and take quizzes or exams, and allows you to see your grades.

**Certificate:** A certificate is given to a student after they have completed some type of education or training on a specific topic. For example, a student might complete a set number of courses in order to complete a certificate in "Leadership in Healthcare." College certificate programs typically focus on very specialized areas and can be a great method of demonstrating your knowledge of a certain subject.

**Common Application ([Common App](#)):** This application is the most frequently used college application program. You will be applying to most colleges, especially ones outside of Texas, through the Common App website. The Common App also has some standard essays that each college uses, but each individual college will typically ask for a unique supplement for that school that has questions or essays.

**Credits:** Having credit for a course means that the school has accepted that you have passed that specific course. Each major requires that you have credits for certain courses. For example, if your major is sociology, you may be required to have 2 credits in criminology in order to graduate. You can ask your college advisor for a degree plan to see which specific credits are needed for your major.

**Credit Hours:** Credit hours are a rough measure of how much time a class takes as well as how much material it will cover. Typically, one credit hour is roughly equal to one hour of lecture per week. Most courses required for your degree will be 3 credit hours. To prevent students from overburdening themselves, there is a limit on how many credit hours a student can take each semester. This limit is usually around 17 credit hours, but if you think you can successfully take more, you can appeal this decision by talking to your advisor.

You will need a certain number of total credit hours to graduate, usually 120 credit hours for a bachelor's degree, as well as a certain number of credit hours in classes that are relevant to your major.

# GLOSSARY

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**Curve:** Sometimes, professors will “grade on a curve” for a certain assignment or for the whole class. Usually, a professor will grade on a curve only if the majority of students did poor on an assignment. For example, if the average grade on an exam is 60% with very few students receiving As or Bs, the professor may “curve” the grade to give students a better grade by raising everyone’s grades by a certain percentage or point amount.

**Degree:** A certification by a college that you have completed a certain amount of education in a specific field of study. There are various types of degrees that differ in the amount of schooling required and the level of mastery obtained during your education. An undergraduate degree is the most common type of college degree. The two types of undergraduate degrees are Associate’s degrees, which usually take two years to complete, and Bachelor’s degrees, which usually take four years to complete.

**Degree Requirements/Checklist:** The document that tells you exactly what courses you need to take for your specific major and how many hours you need to graduate. It is common for a degree checklist to also come with a degree plan, which lays out how a typical student will complete their degree, such as which courses to take in each semester.

**Discussion Section:** In many courses, part of your grade will be based on your participation in class discussions. In some cases, a discussion section will be one hour a week outside of your normal class time where you meet with other students and a teaching assistant to discuss class material. In other cases, the discussion section may be completed online during your own time. Your professor will let you know if you must complete a discussion section.

**Early Application vs. Early Decision:** When applying to college, each school has an application deadline, typically either in late fall or in winter. However, some colleges will have an earlier deadline, which can either be for early application or early decision. Early application is exactly like a normal application, just completed sooner. When you apply to a college with an early decision application, you are committing to attend that university if you are accepted. If you plan to apply with an early decision, it is best to ensure you are confident that it is your top choice school.

**Electives:** Any course that is not a core course and does not serve to fulfill a specific requirement on your degree plan. Most majors will tell you the amount of elective credit hours you can take. Sometimes your college will limit the electives you can take so that they are related in some way to your major.

**External Transfer:** A student who has completed college-level courses at one institution and transfers to another university/college.

**Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA):** The form needed to receive any financial aid from the government to help pay for college, including grants and loans.

**First Generation College Student:** A student attending college whose parents did not attend college.

**Four-year university:** A college that offers both Bachelor’s and graduate degree programs. Universities tend to recruit students from all around the country, or even internationally.

**General Curriculum:** Classes that everyone needs to take to graduate, regardless of what major they are in. These classes are often referred to as “gen ed” classes and they generally include one or two classes from every broad subject area, such as science, math, history, and art.

# GLOSSARY

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**GPA:** Grade Point Average. GPA is a measure of your grades in school. Each graded (not pass/fail) course gives you a letter grade based on how well you did in the class. This is determined by your instructor. Each letter grade is worth a specific number of grade points. Most colleges will follow a grading scale where an A is a 4.0, a B is a 3.0, and so on, but some colleges may vary. At the end of each semester, your college will calculate your GPA for that semester and put it on your transcript. Your transcript will also show your cumulative GPA, which is your GPA for all of the classes you have taken over each semester. Depending on your major, you may be required to maintain a certain GPA (usually a 2.5 or 3.0) in order to graduate.

**Graduate Degrees:** An advanced degree, typically in a specialized field, that is usually obtained after receiving a Bachelor's degree. Someone with many years of professional experience may be able to join a graduate degree program without doing an undergraduate degree, but this is not common. The types of graduate degrees are: a Master's degree (typically takes 2-3 years), a Ph. D. (typically takes 4-6 years to complete), a J.D. (obtained after going to law school; typically takes 3 years), and an M.D. (obtained after going through medical school; takes around 4 years).

**Internal Transfer:** A student at a university that transfers into another major at that same university.

**Major:** The subject that you are pursuing a degree in. Your major is the field of study that you are focusing on in college. You must have a major to graduate and usually you would major in something related to the career you want to pursue after graduation. In most colleges, you can choose to double major, which means you choose two areas of expertise to focus on.

**Minor:** A secondary subject that you will focus on to a lesser degree than your major. If you choose to pursue a minor, it can be chosen based on personal interest and does not necessarily need to be related to your major. A minor is almost always optional.

**Non-Traditional Student:** This usually refers to college students who did not begin college directly after graduating high school. This term is flexible and varies by college, but may include students who are part-time, who do not have a high school diploma, who are older than 25 years old, who are financially independent, and more. 84% of college students are non-traditional students.

**Pass/fail:** Some classes do not assign letter grades, but instead you will either pass the course or fail it based on criteria determined by your instructor. It is rare for college courses to follow a pass/fail system unless there are special circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Pre-requisites:** To take most advanced level courses, you must have previously taken other specific classes. For example, the prerequisite classes for Organic Chemistry 2 are Organic Chemistry 1 and General Chemistry.

**Pre-Med, Pre-Law, etc.:** Many students have plans to enter a specific professional career or program after graduating college. These students may refer to themselves as being pre-law if they want to become a lawyer, or pre-med if they want to become a doctor, etc.

**Rolling Admission:** Rolling admission refers to when colleges accept students as applications are submitted rather than waiting until the application deadline has passed. If a college follows rolling admission, the earlier you apply, the less people you are competing with and the more time the college has to evaluate your application.

**STEM:** Refers to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

# GLOSSARY

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**Transfer Credits:** Generally, certified degree-granting schools trust other degree-granting schools. This means that if one school has granted you credit for a class, then other schools will typically also give you credit for that class. For example, you might take Introduction to Spanish at a community college, and then ask UT Austin to give you credit for Introduction to Spanish. There can be complications. Different schools don't always have identical classes, and if the two schools disagree on the contents of a particular class, then you might not be able to get the credit you want at the second school. This must be worked through on a case-by-case basis, so speak with your advisor.

**Two-Year College/Community College:** These colleges generally serve the local community and most students who attend a community college will either graduate with an Associate's degree or complete their first two years, then transfer to a university to finish the last two years. They are generally very cheap and accept most if not all applicants. You can receive a Bachelor's degree from many two-year colleges, but typically they have a limited number of majors/minors/programs compared to four-year universities. Examples of two year colleges in Texas: Lone Star College, Austin Community College, Houston Community College, San Jacinto College, Lee College.

**Unique Course Number/Code:** A code of numbers that identifies which specific section of a class you are taking. For example, 100s of people take Organic Chemistry each year. However, not all those people can be in the lecture room at the same time. So these people are split up into sections. All of these sections have the same course code (the Organic Chemistry code), so to differentiate the sections from one another, they are each given a unique course code.

**Upper Division Classes:** Upper division classes are advanced classes that often have some sort of prerequisite to take in order to register for it.

**Upper Division Standing:** You are referred to as upper division standing if you have completed a certain number of credit hours that is equivalent to around half of your degree.

# INTRODUCTION

*This handbook was created by Aneesh Thallapureddy, Brooke Jones, Derek Sandoval, and Sarah Campbell under the supervision of Lindsay Bing.*

This handbook is dedicated to guiding formerly incarcerated individuals in Texas in their pursuit of undergraduate higher education as a means of reentry. Making the decision to attend college is a significant life event. For non-traditional students, this decision can seem very intimidating.

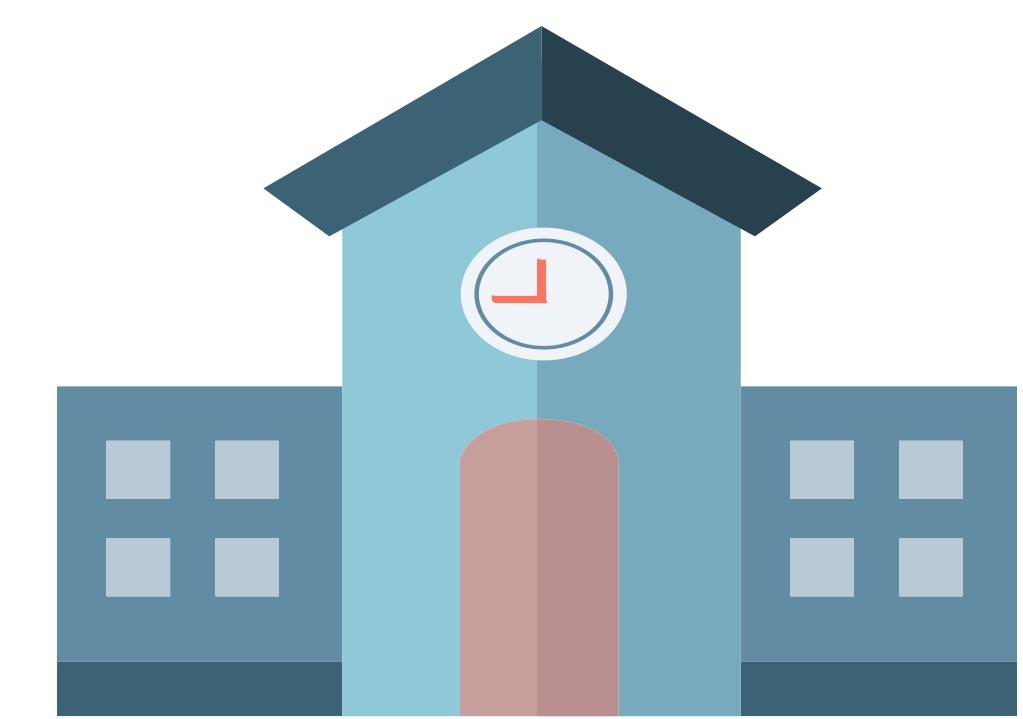
Reentry is a difficult and complex process in any regard, and we hope that this handbook can provide the resources and tools necessary to better understand how to navigate your reentry into education.

Inside this handbook, you will find general information regarding the entire process of entering the world of higher education: from how to apply to your selected schools to what to do once you have enrolled. You will also find more specific information aimed at answering any questions that might arise in your journey to higher education, such as how to navigate technology or what careers you may be eligible for after graduation. The information provided here does not encompass everything you will need to know when deciding to attend college, so we encourage you to reference the list of county-specific resources at the end of this handbook.

***“Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today.***

***-Malcolm X***

# Main College Paths



There are three main paths you can take when pursuing a Bachelor's degree. These are not your only options, but are the most common paths.

## Four-Year Community College

Many two year colleges (community colleges) now offer four-year Bachelor's degrees. This means you do not need to transfer to a four-year university to obtain a Bachelor's degree anymore if you choose not to.

**Pros:**  
This is the cheapest option; no need to relocate

**Cons:**  
Limited degree choices; quality of education may be lower

## 2x2 Path

The 2x2 path is when you complete your first two years of general education courses at a community college, and transfer to a four-year university for your last two years.

**Pros:**  
This path is cheaper than completing your whole degree at a four-year university; you will have more time to figure out your major, and you will not have to relocate right away

**Cons:**  
More expensive than path #1; some credits may not transfer, and you cannot take major-specific courses until your third year

## Four-Year University

You may also complete your entire Bachelor's degree at a four-year university.

**Pros:** Universities often have more diverse majors to choose from and a broader range of programs; these programs are often more academically rigorous

**Cons:**  
This path is the most expensive option; diving right into a university can be overwhelming for some

# General Curriculum

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Listed here is the general curriculum required for every bachelor's degree awarded in the state of Texas. Some four-year universities will add onto this list, but cannot take away from it. **That is to say, no matter where you attend college in Texas, you'll need these courses at a minimum.** Below is a breakdown of each requirement with [example courses from Lonestar College](#). Each university will offer different courses to meet the requirements, but most university's gen ed requirements are similar. The general curriculum applies to the main college paths because you will, generally, take these courses for your first two years of college.

**Communication:** developing ideas, commandment of oral/written/visual literacy, and persuasive communication.

- Example courses: General English or speech class

**Mathematics:** understanding key mathematical concepts and the application of these tools.

- College algebra, math for business, statistics, calculus

**Life and Physical Science:** using the scientific method on the physical world to describe/predict/explain natural phenomena.

- General biology, chemistry, environmental science, geology, or physics

**Language, Philosophy and Culture:** focused on how ideas and values of other cultures are expressed and how they affect human experience

- Upper-level English courses, philosophy courses, upper-division foreign language (French, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Italian, Japanese, German)

**Creative Arts:** appreciation and analysis of art.

- Art appreciation, art history, dance, theatre, music history

**American History:** the history of the United States, and sometimes Texas History.

- United States History to 1877, United States History Since 1877, Texas history

**Government/Political Science:** focused on the constitution of the US, with emphasis on Texas.

- Federal Government, Texas Government

**Social and Behavioral Sciences:** application of empirical and scientific methods that contribute to the understanding of what makes us human. Explore interactions among people and institutions and their impact on society.

- Sociology, world geography, anthropology, criminal justice

**Component Area Option:** differs by school, needs to involve critical thinking skills and communication. This is typically a class you will take your first year at a university, whether you're a transfer or a freshman. Often, that course is a freshman symposium/"signature course," -- the name depends on what school you're at.

- Composition and rhetoric course, physical wellness

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# JOB RESTRICTIONS

We want to encourage you to pursue any career you want, whether that be a lawyer, professor, researcher, business entrepreneur, or otherwise. However, it is important to note which careers may be limited due to having a record. One of the most useful tools in figuring out the consequences of a certain conviction can be found in a database called the [National Inventory of the Collateral Consequences of Conviction](#). You can search restrictions in any state using that tool.

## The most important stuff to look for:

- What is the consequence (limited ability within a field, background check, etc.)?
- What is the discretion of this consequence (is it mandatory or would the job supervisor/issuer be able to make the deciding call on enforcement)?

The NICCC digests this information through their database. Below is a general guide on how to use it:

**Search Collateral Consequences**

Use these categories to search and view details of policies relating to collateral consequences of a criminal conviction.

**KEYWORDS** ?  
Select all that apply

**JURISDICTION** ?  
Select all that apply

**CONSEQUENCE TYPE** ?  
Select all that apply

**Search Consequences**

In the above picture, *jurisdiction* refers to the state of interest. *Consequence type* refers to the sort of rights/opportunities affected. *Keywords* include the field of employment, certification, or otherwise that you're looking for. You can also click "more search options" to further narrow it down. You can click the "?" beside any of these terms to get more information on what the words mean.

**DESCRIPTION:**

Include Federal Consequences

**JURISDICTION** ? **CONSEQUENCES** ? **KEYWORDS** ? **OFFENSE TYPE** ? **DISCRETION** ? **DURATION** ?

Texas  Select all that apply Education & schools  Select all that apply Select all that apply Select all that apply

**Export** **Clear** **Search**

[Next Page »](#) Matched 128 entries with 157 consequences

Title	Jurisdiction	Consequences	Keywords	Offense Type	Discretion	Duration
Tex. Fam. Code § 65.201 <a href="#">Ineligible to seal records of truancy</a>	Texas	Judicial Rights	Education & schools Students & interns	Any felony	Mandatory/Automatic	Indefinite

For this search example, "education and schools" was selected in *keywords* and "Texas" in *jurisdiction*, and this search found 157 entries. Pictured above is just the first entry.

# JOB RESTRICTIONS

## Consequence Details

### Ineligible to seal records of truancy

[Tex. Fam. Code § 65.201](#)

RELEVANT SUBSECTIONS	DISCRETION
(a)(1),(2),(3)	Mandatory/Automatic
DURATION	RELATED LAWS
Indefinite	
NOTES & OTHER INFORMATION	CURRENT THROUGH
Number of consequences: 1	2018 legislative session and all 2018 regulatory rulemaking
KEYWORDS	TYPE
Education & schools Students & interns	Judicial Rights
OFFENSES	
Any felony	

For more information, we clicked the hyperlink (“Ineligible to seal records of truancy”) in the bottom left corner. *Relevant subsections* refers to the section of Texas law that this rule can be found, and *discretion* refers to who enforces the consequence (as in, it could be mandatory or could be up to the person issuing). *Notes & other information* helps to broaden the understanding of the consequence, *offenses* refers to the type of crime that triggers the consequence, and *current through* indicates the Texas legislative session that the information is current from. Some of these restrictions may be temporary or appealable, so you may still be able to pursue some of these jobs.

List of Some Notable Mandatory Restrictions for felonies unless otherwise specified:

- Public office
- Labor union officer/organizer
- Interior designer license
- License to practice medicine
- Law enforcement license
- Chiropractic license
- Surgical Assistant
- Multistate nursing license
- Medical Perfusionist
- Marriage/Family therapist
- Social worker
- Electrical/sign Apprenticeship
- CPA
- Birthing Center Employee
- Interpreter

# DEGREE AND CAREER PLANNING

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Once you have an idea of what you can't do, you can start to figure out what you want to do. You likely fall into one of two different camps.

1. I know generally what I want to study, but not what job I want to get.
2. I know what job I want to get eventually, and want to figure out what to major in.

If you fall into the first camp, you should go through *both* the following sections. If you fall into the second camp, you can skip the first section.

## 1. I know generally what I want to study, but not what job I want to get

While there is nothing wrong with choosing a field of study based only on interest, it is also a good idea to know what you want to do with your degree. This will help you get a more realistic view of your post-graduation financial situation. It will also help you focus your extracurriculars on a specific career, which can make you a more competitive job applicant.

The first step is to research what jobs you can get within a certain field of study. Listed below are some helpful resources.

- [Study.com](#): Lists common careers for each field of study, by education level
- [Texas Career Check Programs of Study](#): Breaks down fields of study into various groups
  - Lists occupations that are a best fit for that kind of education

Of course, you should not limit your research to just these resources. Specific fields may have specific websites which can give out more information. These resources are just a starting point. In addition, many colleges publish information on the average starting salary for each degree, which you can use to get a better sense of how much each degree pays. You can find such information [here](#), for example.

## 2. I know what job I want to get eventually, and want to figure out what to major in

Once you have an idea of what job you want, the next step is to investigate the job to make sure that it lines up with what you are expecting, both in terms of job description as well as in pay. Also you should make sure that the job you want is compatible with your desired level of education. Here are some useful resources to find out more about your desired job.

- [Study.com](#): Gives a good overview of the job, such as job descriptions
  - Also describes what education people with that job usually have
- [Texas Career Check Occupation Info](#): gives data on salaries and projected job growth that is specific to Texas
  - Also gives information on credentialing and education requirements
- [O Net](#)
- [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)

Of course, you should not limit your research to just these resources. Specific careers may have specific websites which can give out more information. These resources are just a starting point.

Once you have confirmed the job you want to do, you need to decide on a major that best fits that job. For some jobs, this is easy: there is a major that directly ties to the career. For example, if you want to become an accountant, you could just major in accounting. For others jobs it is more complicated. For these jobs, you should again consult the above resources. Study.com lists common majors for each job, and Texas Career Check lists the most important knowledge/skills for each job, which you can use to inform your choice of major. In addition, you can look through the list of applicable certifications on Texas Career Check and see if they specify what kind of degree they require.

# DEGREE AND CAREER PLANNING

For example, let's walk through what someone who is interested in the life sciences (but does not know what eventual job they want) might do. First, they would go to the Texas career check website and see what general fields are in the life sciences.

**BIOLOGICAL AND BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES**

- Biochemistry, Biophysics and Molecular Biology**
  - Biochemistry
  - Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
  - Biophysics
  - Molecular Biochemistry
  - Molecular Biology
  - Molecular Biophysics
  - Photobiology
  - Radiation Biology/Radiobiology
  - Structural Biology
- Biology, General**
  - Biomathematics, Bioinformatics, and Computational Biology
  - Biotechnology
  - Botany/Plant Biology
  - Cell/Cellular Biology and Anatomical Sciences
  - Ecology, Evolution, Systematics, and Population Biology
- Genetics**
  - Animal Genetics
  - Genetics, General
  - Genome Sciences/Genomics
  - Human/Medical Genetics
  - Microbial and Eukaryotic Genetics
  - Molecular Genetics
  - Plant Genetics
- Microbiological Sciences and Immunology**
  - Molecular Medicine
  - Neurobiology and Neurosciences
  - Pharmacology and Toxicology
  - Physiology, Pathology and Related Sciences
- Zoology/Animal Biology**

After looking through the list, they decide they want to eventually work in genetics. They then go to study.com and look at what jobs a geneticist might have.

## Careers in Genetics: Job Descriptions & Degree Requirements

Jan 08, 2021

Show Me Schools

[View 10 Popular Schools »](#)

Continue reading to learn about a variety of careers that involve genetics. Engineers, healthcare professionals, agricultural scientists and law enforcement professionals may all work with genetics as part of their career.

### Perfect School Search

What is your highest level of education?

Select your education level

What subject are you interested in?

Biological and Biomedical Sciences

Genetics

Select your specialty subject area

Where do you want to attend class?

Show me all schools

### Overview of Careers in Genetics

All living organisms have a genetic code. This can be identified through DNA testing. Dog owners can submit a sample of their dog's saliva to discover their dog's breed. People can send their DNA sample to labs that will use it to determine where their ancestors came from. More commonly, we associate DNA testing with a process completed as part of criminal investigations to identify suspects, or medical tests to identify genetic disorders.

Job Title	Median Salary* (2019)	Job Growth* (2019-2029)
Agricultural and Food Scientists	\$65,160	6%
Biomedical Engineers	\$91,410	5%
Forensic Science Technicians	\$59,150	14%
Biochemists and Biophysicists	\$94,490	4%
Genetic Counselors	\$81,880	21%
Medical Scientists	\$88,790	6%

Source: \*U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

### Careers in Genetics Requiring Undergraduate Degree

There are some genetics jobs that can be obtained with a bachelor's degree in the appropriate field. Identifying bachelor of genetics jobs really means considering degree programs related to genetics, as there is seldom an actual major in genetics at the undergraduate level. A major in Microbiology involves the study of genetics. Following are three examples of jobs working with genetics for which an undergraduate degree is sufficient preparation.

- Agricultural and Food Scientists
- Biomedical Engineers
- Forensic Science Technicians

**Popular Schools**

The listings below may include sponsored content but are popular choices among our users.

**1 Purdue University Global**

[BS in Nursing - RN-to-BSN](#)

What is your highest level of education completed?

# DEGREE AND CAREER PLANNING

After looking through the options, they decide to look into becoming a forensic geneticist. They then looked at the page for forensic geneticists to get more details about the job.

They then investigated the job in some of the other resources to make sure that the information is accurate, and to make sure they have a good idea of what the job entails.

Note that the job they were interested in may be under a different title than what they originally thought (forensic science technician instead of forensic geneticist).

Lastly, using the above resources, they see that the most relevant major for a future forensic geneticist is biology or biochemistry. They then choose to major in biochemistry.

## Become a Forensic Geneticist: Step-by-Step Career Guide

Jan 16, 2020

Show Me Schools

[View 10 Popular Schools »](#)

Research the requirements to become a forensic geneticist. Learn about the job description, and read the step-by-step process to start a career in forensic genetics.

### Perfect School Search

#### What is your highest level of education?

Select your education level

#### What subject are you interested in?

Biological and Biomedical Sciences

Genetics

Select your specialty subject area

Show me all schools

### Popular Schools

### What is a Forensic Geneticist?

Degree Level	Bachelor's degree
Degree Field	Biology, chemistry, biochemistry or comparable discipline
Certification	Voluntary certification is available through professional organizations
Key Skills	Problem solving, critical thinking, communication, reasoning
Mean Salary (2018)	\$62,490 (for all forensic science technicians)

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

A **forensic geneticist** is a scientist who analyzes blood, fluids and tissue samples to extract DNA for identification or evidence. These professionals spend a lot of time in laboratories and might collaborate with teams of other scientists or law enforcement professionals. Forensic geneticists might be forced to work irregular or overtime hours. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), predicted that job opportunities for all forensic science technicians, which includes forensic geneticists, would increase 14% between 2018 and 2028, which was much faster than average. This rapid growth was attributed to increased use of DNA analysis by law enforcement and the legal system in general. However, the bureau also noted that competition for jobs in this field could be strong, since it's been glamorized by television shows and movies. As of May 2018, forensic science technicians earned a mean annual salary of \$62,490, according to the BLS.

## OCCUPATIONAL OUTLOOK HANDBOOK

Search Handbook

Go

PRINTER-FRIENDLY

Occupational Outlook Handbook > Life, Physical, and Social Science >

### Forensic Science Technicians

[Summary](#) [What They Do](#) [Work Environment](#) [How to Become One](#) [Pay](#) [Job Outlook](#) [State & Area Data](#) [Similar Occupations](#) [More Info](#)

### Summary

Quick Facts: Forensic Science Technicians	
2019 Median Pay	\$59,150 per year \$28.44 per hour
Typical Entry-Level Education	Bachelor's degree
Work Experience in a Related Occupation	None
On-the-job Training	Moderate-term on-the-job training
Number of Jobs, 2019	17,200
Job Outlook, 2019-29	14% (Much faster than average)
Employment Change, 2019-29	2,400



#### What Forensic Science Technicians Do

Forensic science technicians aid criminal investigations by collecting and analyzing evidence.

#### Work Environment

Most laboratory forensic science technicians work during regular business hours. Crime scene investigators may work extended or unusual hours and travel to crime scenes within their jurisdiction.

#### How to Become a Forensic Science Technician

Forensic science technicians typically need at least a bachelor's degree in a natural science, such as chemistry or biology, or in forensic science. On-the-job training is generally required for both those who investigate crime scenes and those who work in labs.

#### Pay

The median annual wage for forensic science technicians was \$59,150 in May 2019.

# *DEGREE AND CAREER PLANNING*

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## Next Steps

Once you have a major and a job decided, the next step is to talk to a college counselor to make sure you are on the right track. Here are some potentially useful questions to ask:

- You can ask your general academic advisor if your major is a good fit for your desired job.
- You should also ask what extracurricular activities (if any) are typically done by people pursuing your chosen career.
- You should make a general course plan with your advisor, so that you know generally what classes you are taking when, and to make sure you are on track to finish your degree within four years.
- In addition, you should see if your college has a specific department or set of counselors for your chosen career, and set up an appointment with them. They will be able to provide you with more specific and accurate information than a general academic counselor.
- Lastly, you may wish to see if there are any organizations in your university which focus on your desired career. These organizations are often a great way to meet people who are further along your desired degree/career path, who can give you good advice.
- If you are planning to transfer into a four-year university, then you may wish to ask your advisor about which universities are best for your desired career.

You might wish to re-do this process once you transfer to a four-year university to make sure you are getting all the support you can. And of course, if you know any people who are working in the career you want, you should talk to them about their job and ask them for advice.

# FOUR-YEAR COMMUNITY COLLEGE PATH

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This section will be focused on applying to a two-year/community college. Most two-year colleges accept every applicant, so check to see what schools are closest to you. You can apply to begin college in the Fall, Spring, or Summer semesters. The deadline to apply depends on the school, so it's best to Google "x school admissions deadline" to check. Keep in mind, though, that applications are typically due many months (or even a year) in advance of the desired enrollment date. This means that a Fall enrollment for 2022 may have an application deadline from Fall 2021-April 2022.

- The application to a two-year college is similar to the transfer application for four-year colleges. They only differ in that a two-year college has less application requirements (no essay, no rec letters, etc.) Also, two-year colleges typically have no admissions fees.
- ApplyTexas, the system used to apply to colleges/universities in Texas, does *not* inquire into criminal history

If you are curious about this path but still a bit unsure, be sure to reach out to an academic advisor at your intended college. Some questions to keep in mind:

- Do you offer a four-year degree at this school?
- What sort of four-year programs do you offer for [intended] career path?
- Do you have any resources or advisors specific to students who have been incarcerated?
- What financial aid packages do you offer?
- Can I finish a four-year degree online here?

Once you have found some schools in your area (or perhaps elsewhere) that you are happy with, you may begin applying. As aforementioned, most community colleges accept every student that applies, so your job is to get all the application materials and submit. Below is how the process will look.

**To get started on your application:** First, make a checklist of what **documents** you need to apply. It varies by institution, so do a quick Google search first ("x college admissions") ("x college admissions checklist") and dig around to get the most specific information for your prospective institution. Generally, the following are needed:

- Any transcripts you have (High school transcript, GED, and/or other college credits).

If you attended and graduated from high school prior to incarceration, you can contact your high school's records office and request your high school transcript. Google your high school and either call the registrar's office or see if there's an online transcript request system offered. If you earned a GED, you will need to request your transcript from the GED website or from the agency that helped you earn your education, from the testing center you took the test at, or;

If you earned any form of education from a Texas state prison that was affiliated with the Windham School District, you can access [this page](#) that gives instructions on how to obtain educational records such as a GED or vocational certificate.

- TSI assessment (take after you submit ApplyTexas application)

- Social security number (you don't need an SSN to apply but it's used for some financial aid awards)

- Record of a Bacterial Meningitis Vaccination if you are under 22 years of age and intend to take courses in person. You will need to contact a doctor that has your vaccination records, or get vaccinated.

# FOUR-YEAR COMMUNITY COLLEGE PATH

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**Second**, make an [ApplyTexas](#) account. ApplyTexas is an application website used by every college/university in Texas. Some community colleges may have their own designated application form, but most will use ApplyTexas. Click the link above, then click “create your account now.”

**Third**, log into ApplyTexas and start your applications! Some tips:

- The tab you’ll be using the most is the “My Applications” tab
- To begin an application, switch to the “My Applications” tab and **click “Start a New Blank Application.”**
  - There will be two options, one for 2-year college and one for 4-year. The 2-year college option applies to any community college, such as Lonestar College or Austin Community College. Four year applies to universities like University of Texas, University of Houston-Clear Lake, etc.
- The application will begin, and you’ll be **prompted to select a school, major, and fill out all the information the school needs**
- You can **save & leave the application before submitting**, so you *do not* need to finish it all in one sitting
- Once you’ve completed an application for one institution, **you can copy the information into an application for a different school** by clicking “Copy an Existing Application” under the “My Admissions” tab (near “Start a New Blank Application”)
- [ApplyTexas](#) has useful application instructions and admissions information for each school
  - View sample applications and admissions instructions

# 2x2 PATH

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This section will be focused on transferring from a community college (or any college credits you have) to a four-year university. Two years at a CC, two years at a university: 2x2. A *transfer student* is anyone who has completed college-level courses at one institution and transfers to another.

The second most economical degree plan is to start at a 2-year community college, finish up the general education requirements for any degree, then transfer and finish your last two years at a four-year university. (Find definitions for 2-year vs 4-year college in the "Glossary" section.) This is the second most economical plan because community colleges tend to be thousands of dollars cheaper than four-year universities, and generally you're taking the same courses for the first two years of your degree no matter where you're at. Also, if you are attending college under support of financial aid such as a Pell Grant, you may only have enough funds to cover community college tuition without going into your own pocket. This section will break down into more detail about general curriculum, community college, and the process of transferring.

You may find that you finish all of your general curriculum classes with room to spare in your first two years. In that case, you might want to take other classes in order to fill up your schedule and keep advancing your degree. Good choices for classes to take are intro-level courses for your major. For example, a biochemistry major would probably take general chemistry and intro biology. A sociology student would probably want to take intro to sociology. You can look at the degree plan for your major at the university that you want to transfer to in order to get a good idea of what your major's intro classes are.

*Note: Be sure to google “[x university] transfer process” to get the most specific information for the university you plan to attend.*

## Finding a University to Transfer to

So, you've done your two years at a community college and are ready to head to a four-year university to receive a Bachelor's degree. The following page includes a guide on how to search for the schools you want to apply to.

# 2x2 PATH

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1 You want to begin by assessing your options. This step is necessary despite where you are in the process, but it would be ideal to complete this step a few months before applying. Research which universities or colleges seem to be your best fit. One method of narrowing down which colleges you want to apply to is to begin by making a list of “must-have” qualifications you are seeking in a school and going from there. Factors you will want to consider in this are: the programs or degrees you are seeking, cost of tuition, location of the school, acceptance rate of the school, etc. Once you have made the list of requirements you are seeking in a school, research (Google/contact) the colleges you have in mind or are in your area and see if they match up with the qualifications you listed.

A common strategy that aspiring college students use to make their list of schools they want to apply to is to divide colleges into three categories: **reach schools, target schools, and backup schools**.

- **Reach schools** are those colleges that have low acceptance rates or where your odds of acceptance are low. Applying to at least one reach school (as long as you can afford the application fee) is generally a good idea, because the worst that happens is you are rejected.
- Most of your schools should be **target schools**. These are the colleges where your GPA, test scores, life experience, etc. seems to align with the typical student that they accept. To see your chances of being accepted to certain colleges, you can use this [calculator](#) that will show you your odds of acceptance depending on certain criteria.
- **Backup schools** are the colleges that you think you will definitely be accepted to no matter what. These are the schools that, according to the calculator referenced above, are almost guaranteed to accept you.

2 Prior to your enrollment deadlines, you should determine which standardized tests (if any) your schools of choice require so that you may have time to study for them if needed.

In Texas, all incoming college students are required to take the Texas Success Initiative (TSI), unless you are exempt. Your schools of choice should have a page listing TSI exemptions, like [this one](#) from the University of Texas at Austin.

Some colleges in Texas will require the ACT test, the SAT test, both, or neither. If your school requires these test scores, you will want to go to the corresponding test's website and register for a date prior to your application deadline. Ideally, you would have a few months to study for these tests.

As of the time this handbook is being written, many colleges around the country are changing their test score requirements due to the pandemic. For example, if you are applying to enroll in the 2021-2022 academic year, many schools such as UT Austin are not requiring any standardized test scores.

3 If you are 2-3 months from your application deadlines (fall), it is time to begin the application process. You will need to apply for federal financial aid, if eligible, around October. There is a section further in the handbook with detailed instructions on how to apply for financial aid.

Depending on the individual requirements of the schools to which you are applying, you will likely need to gather at least one letter of recommendation. Some colleges require no letters while some may include three, so be sure to check these requirements for each school.

# 2x2 PATH

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## Transfer Credits

When transferring, you want to make sure the university you're transferring to will take as many transfer credits as possible. Often, schools won't take *all* of the credits you've completed at a different college, or they'll apply those credits in different ways to their own degree plans.

The quickest way to examine which credits will and won't transfer is to see if the university you want to transfer to has a transfer equivalency website. Google “[x university] transfer equivalency” to find your school's. For example, UT Austin has an [Automated Transfer Equivalency](#) System (ATE) that lets students check where their credits will go from one school to UT if they decide transfer into UT. A walkthrough is pictured below:

## Automated Transfer Equivalency System

The **Automated Transfer Equivalency (ATE)** system is a searchable transfer credit database for more than 320,000 courses at Texas colleges and universities.

Choose a search method:

- **Search by the UT Austin Course Designation**  
(better for UT students planning to take courses elsewhere)
- **Search by the Sending Institution's Course Designation**  
(better for prospective transfer students)

### TRANSFER RESOURCES

[Automated Transfer Equivalencies](#)

[Common Transfer Credit Issues](#)

[Austin Community College Transfer Guides](#)

[Texas Community College Transfer Guides](#)

For this search, we are going to click the bottom link to indicate that we are a prospective transfer, i.e. transferring into UT Austin. Select Lone Star College, type in the course abbreviation (FREN for French) and the course number (1411). FREN 1411 is a French I course at Lonestar. Then click “initiate search.”

**ATE Search by Sending Institution's Course**

Search the transfer evaluation inventory by the department and course number at the sending institution (i.e. the college at which the course originates).  
Results are sorted by sending institution's department & course number.

Sending institution	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text" value="select a sending institution"/>
Sending institution's department abbreviation	<input style="width: 100px; height: 25px; border: 1px solid #ccc;" type="text"/> <small>4 characters maximum.</small> <small>Enter the exact department abbreviation (for example "E" or "EN" or "ENG" or "ENGL" for English) as it appears in the sending institution's catalog, course schedule, or transcripts. If the abbreviation is 5 or more characters, enter only the first 4.</small> <small>If you don't know the other school's exact department abbreviation, try a <a href="#">search by UT department</a>.</small>
Sending institution's course number	<input style="width: 100px; height: 25px; border: 1px solid #ccc;" type="text"/> <small>exact match only</small> <small>6 characters maximum.</small> <small>Leave this field blank to find ALL courses for the specified department.</small>
<input style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 2px 10px;" type="button" value="Initiate Search"/> <input style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 2px 10px;" type="button" value="Clear Menu"/>	

# 2x2 PATH

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The results can be read as: my LSC FREN 1411 class, titled FRENCH 1, yields four credit hours and transfers to UT as FR(ench) 406. Therefore, the student will get credit from my LSC course and the credit will be for a FR 406 class at UT.

## ATE System

Results of your **search** by sending institution's course...

transfer credit from LONE STAR COLLEGE SYSTEM						
course	title	sem hour credit value	UT Austin transfer credit evaluation	modifying conditions		
				if course taken from	thru	if course submitted from
FREN 1411	FRENCH 1	4.0	FR 406			

1 equivalency record(s) found. End of list.

As a prospective transfer, you should do this for all of the courses you take or plan to take at your original school (so, for me the original school would be LSC). This is to ensure you don't waste time or money on classes that won't count at your next school.

Referring back to the "general curriculum" section on p. 07, you will want all of your generals to be completed before you transfer (though this is not a requirement to transfer). Your institution will typically have entire lists of courses that qualify as one of the general curriculum component areas. **Be sure to reach out to an academic advisor at your school to make sure your courses are all correct.** Some questions to ask an academic advisor about the curriculum you have/need to take:

What courses do I need to take at this school to fulfill the general curriculum? *Do you have a list of these courses?*

What other courses should I take in addition to the generals?

Do I need to know what major I want to complete my generals?

Will all of my credits transfer to the university I want to go to?

What courses do I need to take to transfer?



# 2x2 PATH

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## Applying as a Transfer

So, now you know what general curriculum to finish before transferring, which credits will transfer, and how to minimize the cost of obtaining a degree. Applying to transfer is the next step. The process of transferring to a four-year university is slightly different from applying as a first-year student in these five main ways:

1. You **don't need an SAT/ACT**, generally
2. The **essay portions are different** (prompt, length, # of essays might be different)
3. **Need at least 24 credit hours** to transfer (about 2 semesters as a full time student), usually
4. Must **submit college transcripts** in addition to high school transcript (if applicable)
5. Might have some **major-specific requirements** to fulfill
  - For some majors, in order to apply to transfer in you need to have fulfilled some specific courses. For economics at UT Austin, a transfer student needs to have taken Calculus I and II and some introductory econ theories before applying.
  - You can still transfer in without these fulfilled, however, it just won't be into your preferred major and would have to transfer internally later.

Let's begin the process of applying.

First, make a checklist of what documents you need to apply. It varies by institution, so do a quick Google search first ("x school transfer admissions") ("x school transfer admissions checklist") and dig around to get the most specific information for your prospective institution.

Generally, the following documents are required to apply to a university (the requirements are similar to what is needed to apply to community college, but with additional documents):

1. **Social security number** (it's okay if you don't have the card, you only need the #). If you don't have an SSN, you can still apply but may not be eligible for certain types of financial aid
2. **College and high school transcripts/GED** (if applicable). See the **Four-Year Community College** section for more information on how to obtain your transcripts.
3. **Résumé**: You can use Google Docs or Microsoft Word to write a resume. "Prison Fellowship" has published a [guide](#) that explains how to write a resume with a record. There are many YouTube videos and websites that can also walk you through the process.
4. **Recommendation letters**: It is best to ask an instructor for a recommendation letter, but if you are unable to do this or need more letters, reach out to a manager or mentor you've had. Even your high school counselor (if applicable) may be able to help. [This article](#) from PrepScholar goes into more explanation of how to ask for a recommendation letter.
5. **For non-citizens/international applicants**: Test scores demonstrating English proficiency ([TOEFL](#), [IELTS](#)); your permanent resident card, and a residency affidavit (not necessary if you're a Texas resident).

Second, make an account for the university's application portal. Many universities in Texas use the ApplyTexas or CommonApp application portals. This section is focused on ApplyTexas.

- Click on this [link](#), then click "Create your account now."

# 2x2 PATH

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Third, log in and fill out your application. For example, here is what you would do in ApplyTexas:

The tab you'll be using the most is the "My Applications" tab.

- To begin an application, switch to the "My Applications" tab and **click "Start a New Blank Application."**
  - There will be two options, one for 2-year college and one for 4-year. The 2-year college option applies to any community college, such as Lonestar College or Austin Community College. Four year applies to universities like the University of Texas, the University of Houston-Clear Lake, etc.
- The application will begin, and you'll be **prompted to select a school, major, and fill out all the information the school needs.**
- You can **save & leave the application before submitting**, so you *do not* need to finish it all in one sitting
- Once you've completed an application for one institution, **you can copy the information into an application for a different school** by clicking "Copy an Existing Application" under the "My Admissions" tab (near "Start a New Blank Application").

Once you have finished the application, you will probably receive an email confirmation. If you have any questions about the application process, it is best to refer to the admissions office of the university you have applied to. Email or call an admissions advisor to answer your questions, they are there to help you successfully apply and gain admittance to their school.

# FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITY PATH

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Applying to a four-year university for the first time is a bit different from transferring into a four-year university. This would be your path if you have no college credits and want to begin at a four-year university (the University of Houston, Texas State University, etc) rather than at a community college (Houston Community College, etc).

Firstly, you can apply as an “early decision” or “early action” applicant, which can potentially give you a higher chance of being admitted. When you are going through the application process, you will have the option to apply as ED or EA, or RD (regular decision/regular application). The deadlines for these types of applications differ (EA/ED are earlier than RD), so it’s useful to know what you plan to apply as well ahead of application season.

To see the main differences in applying as a transfer vs a first-year to a university, see the "Applying as a Transfer" section on p. 20. Otherwise, you can follow all the same steps as outlined in either application section.

## After Applying to a Four-Year University

You have successfully applied to a four-year university! Congratulations. After you have submitted your application, you will await an admissions’ decision. There are generally three responses you might receive from an admissions’ office: an acceptance, a rejection, or a waitlist.

Early decision means that you are applying early for a certain school, and if accepted, you are committing to enrolling in that school and rejecting any other admissions offers from other schools. Early action means that you are applying early for a school earlier than their regular deadline and receiving an admissions decision earlier than typical. Early action applications do not require you to commit to the school.

Accepted: If you are applied under an “early decision” deadline, you will have to commit to attending the school you were accepted to and to deny any other admissions offers from other schools.

If you applied early action or under any other regular deadlines, you will likely be required to accept your admissions offer sometime between April and May, but you can accept anytime. Sometimes, you will be offered financial aid with your admissions decision, and the school you have received the offer from may specify that you need to accept or reject your admissions offer at a certain time in order to keep your financial aid offer.

If you applied regular decision, you will receive an email notification or letter in the mail, or sometimes both, informing you of your acceptance.

Rejected: If you were rejected, it is okay. There is no need to panic. Most students will receive at least one rejection. If you are confident that the admissions office made a mistake and you should have been accepted, most schools have a policy stating that you can appeal their decision. Here is a [guide](#) on how to appeal an admissions decision. The chances that your decision will be successfully appealed are low, but it is still an option.

Waitlisted: This means that the school has put you on a list to potentially be accepted at a later date. This is not a rejection, it is more like the college has decided to push your admissions decision to a later date. If you have been waitlisted by a school, you can research (google: University of XYZ waitlist acceptance) how often they accept waitlisted students so that you can gauge your odds of acceptance. Being waitlisted can leave you conflicted, because you may feel pushed to accept your admissions offer from another school that has accepted you. Finding out the odds of being accepted after being placed on a waitlist can help you make your decision.

# FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITY PATH

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If you have been accepted or waitlisted by multiple schools, you will need to finalize your choice of where you will attend college. If you have been offered financial aid by any of these schools in your admissions choice, be sure to add this into your considerations. Also consider tuition costs, location, programs, and more. Be sure to reach out to admissions and academic advisors at the schools you are most considering to get a better idea of what they can offer you. Some potential questions:

- My intended career path/major is [x], what resources and programs do you have that can help me?
- Are there any organizations on campus that are for non-traditional students?
- Do you have resources or advisors specific for students who have been incarcerated?

After you have made your choice and accepted an admissions offer, you are on your way to higher education! After accepting an offer, most schools will let you know what your next steps are. If you submitted an unofficial transcript in your application, they may ask you to submit an official transcript sometime over the summer. If you have been offered financial aid from FAFSA, you will likely need to complete entrance counseling over the summer before they will disburse your student loans. Most colleges will also want you to submit your vaccination records unless you have an exemption. These next steps will vary by school, so be certain to check what you need to do.

Sometime before the start of your first semester, there will likely be some type of orientation for freshman students to attend. Orientations are great ways to introduce yourself to your school and to college life in general, as well as an opportunity to meet other students and faculty. The school will send you instructions before the start of the semester on how to enroll for your classes. Depending on the school, they may give you instructions on how to schedule a meeting with a college advisor so that you can discuss which courses you should enroll in. If you are a freshman, you likely will not enroll until very close to the first day of classes, which is typically in late August.

# FINANCIAL AID

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Paying for college can be a barrier for many prospective students. However, financial aid can reduce the cost of higher education immensely. Financial aid can be in the form of scholarships, grants, work-study, or loans. Financial aid can also come from public (government) sources, or private sources. We will discuss each of them in this section. It's important to apply for financial aid so that you don't have to worry about tuition or any other college-related expenses. Even if financial aid won't cover everything, receiving financial aid can make college far more affordable.

**Grants:** Financial aid that you do not have to pay back. Grants are typically in the form of federal financial aid, the most common being the Federal Pell Grant and the Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant. You typically apply using the FAFSA (see section "Federal" below).

- Federal Pell Grant: for undergraduate students who demonstrate a large financial need.
- Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant: supplemental to the Pell grant, but not available at all schools.
- Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grant: For any college student (undergrad/grad) "who are enrolled in programs designed to prepare them to teach in a high-need field at the elementary or secondary school level"; comes with a four-year teaching commitment.

**Scholarships:** An award of financial aid that you do not have to pay back. Usually scholarships are competitive, and sometimes based on merit or various other criteria. There are many ways to apply for scholarships, and these are normally tied to the specific school you are applying to, and can also come from private sources (See section "Private Scholarships" below).

**Loans:** Financial aid that you borrow and have to pay back. Student loans can be acquired either through federal (FAFSA) or private sources, and have an interest rate.

- Federal loans: Given by the federal government; fixed interest rate; you do not have to begin repayment until usually 6 months after graduation, and you are eligible for federal benefits such as forgiveness and repayment plans. Examples of federal loans are:
  - Direct Subsidized Loan: For undergraduate students who are enrolled in at least half-time and demonstrate financial need. Students are not charged interest on the loan while in school.
  - Direct Unsubsidized Loan: For students who are enrolled in at least half-time, without needing to demonstrate financial need. You are responsible for paying the interest. If you do not pay the interest while you are in school and during grace periods, your interest will be added to the principal amount of your loan (what you initially borrowed).
- Private loans: **Do not take out private loans unless absolutely necessary. Private loans tend to be more predatory and more expensive to pay back than federal loans.** If you do need to take out a private loan, do as much research as possible before making a commitment. Consider speaking to friends, other students, or your school's financial aid office about private loans so that you are certain this is the best option for you. Private loans are given by private institutions, such as a bank or a lender; do not have to be a fixed interest rate; you may have to start repaying while in school, depending on the lender's requirements, and private loan decisions are often given based on your credit history.

# FINANCIAL AID

To receive grants and federal loans, you must fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), discussed below:

**Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA):** the form needed to receive any financial aid from the government to help pay for college, including federal grants and loans. This form can be filled out online or on the FAFSA mobile app. If you need help at any point during the application process, you can contact the FAFSA support staff or call your school's financial aid office for assistance. See the graphic here for an explanation of the FAFSA process.

The FAFSA application opens up every October 1st for the following school year. For example, if you're applying for financial aid for the 2021-2022 school year, fill out the application in October 2020 for priority aid consideration. The application closes on June 30th. Filing early is essential. Financial aid is awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, so filing late means possibly losing financial aid.

If you are currently incarcerated but planning to attend college the following year post-release, you may still fill out the FAFSA. It is always a good idea to fill out the FAFSA every year, even if you think you are ineligible for aid. Generally speaking, formerly incarcerated students are eligible for financial aid with some exceptions. Here is a [guide](#) that goes into further detail.

- If you are on probation/parole/in halfway house, you are eligible
- Eligibility is limited if you were convicted of a drug or sexual-related offense, but not impossible
- The biggest issue for eligibility is if an offense occurred *while you were receiving federal student aid*
- The only “box” on the FAFSA is that you will be asked whether you had a drug conviction for an offense that occurred *while you were receiving federal student aid*. This doesn’t mean you aren’t eligible, though.
- People with sexual offense convictions cannot receive a Federal Pell Grant (though there are others types of grants still available).

## THE FAFSA® PROCESS

We provide more than \$120 billion in grants, loans, and work-study funds each year to help pay for college or career school. To apply for this aid, you must complete the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®)* form. Also, state governments and many colleges and career schools use your FAFSA information to award you their aid.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Some schools won't consider you for merit scholarships (scholarships based on academic achievement or other talents or skills) until you've submitted a FAFSA, so complete one even if you think you won't qualify for federal aid.

### RELAX!

The FAFSA is designed to be simple to fill out. Tips throughout the application help you understand the questions. Most people finish filling out the FAFSA in less than half an hour!

## PREPARING FOR THE FAFSA®

### GATHER THIS INFORMATION

The FAFSA asks questions about you and your finances, so have the information below handy.



Social Security number



Alien registration number



Federal tax information or tax returns



Records of untaxed income



Cash, savings, and checking account balances



Investments other than the home in which you live

### DON'T HAVE ALL YOUR INFO READY YET?

That's okay; you can start the FAFSA, save it, and come back later to finish it. (To find out whether you need to report info about your parents, visit [StudentAid.gov/dependency](#).)

## FILLING OUT THE FAFSA®

### SUBMISSION OPTIONS



Electronic form  
(fill out at [fafsa.gov](#))



Mail-in application  
(download PDF at [fafsa.gov](#) or request a printed PDF by calling us at 1-800-433-3243)



Electronic submission by your college or career school  
(ask if they can submit the FAFSA for you)

### MEETING FINANCIAL AID DEADLINES

Each October, the FAFSA is available for the next school year. It's important to fill it out as soon as possible to meet school and state financial aid deadlines.

### DID YOU KNOW?

You'll be able to retrieve and transfer tax information into the form automatically using the Internal Revenue Service Data Retrieval Tool (IRS DRT).

## PROCESSING THE FAFSA®

After you submit your FAFSA, your information will be sent to the colleges and/or career schools you listed on the form.

### PROCESS TIMELINE

You'll receive an e-mail within a few days, letting you know your FAFSA was processed.

Your college or career school might request additional information from you. Make sure you respond by any deadlines.

### FIRST-TIME APPLICANTS

You'll receive an aid offer from each college or career school you applied to and listed on your FAFSA, stating the amount of aid you could receive at the school.

Review and compare your offers, and decide which school to attend based on the school's net cost and how well the school suits your needs.

Get free assistance and answers at [fafsa.gov](#) or 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243).

### RENEWAL APPLICANTS

You'll receive an aid offer from your school stating the amount of aid you could receive at the school.

Formally accept the school's aid offer - and remember, if you're offered student loans, borrow only as much as you really need. Your school will handle your aid. Ask the financial aid office when and how your aid will be paid out, what it'll cover, and how much (if any) money will come directly to you once tuition and fees are paid.

# FINANCIAL AID

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If you applied for financial aid with FAFSA and received funds, it is still possible to later lose your eligibility status for federal financial aid. This can occur for a few reasons, such as if you are convicted of a drug offense while enrolled in college. Here is a [guide on regaining eligibility](#) once you have been deemed ineligible. If this occurs, the first step is to talk to the financial aid office at your school. Google “[Name of college/university] financial aid office”, and call, email, or schedule an appointment to visit them to discuss eligibility, how to apply, and any other questions you may have.

## Private Scholarships: University

Most universities have a list of scholarships that they award to eligible students. Since these awards are specific to each university and have widely varying requirements, the only way to get more information is to look up the available scholarships from your university of interest.

## Private Scholarships: Other groups

Private scholarships are also offered by companies, organizations, or other non-governmental groups. In many cases, applying for one requires more than just financial information. For example, you may be asked to write an essay, or potentially even be interviewed. In addition, private scholarships often focus on specific demographics. There may be scholarships for specific ethnic groups, or for the children of people who worked in a particular job. These scholarships are also often restricted to people who live in a particular area. For all these reasons, it is difficult to provide more than a few scholarships that would apply to all people seeking higher education after incarceration. While we have provided a few such scholarships, your best bet is to use a scholarship finding website to look for scholarships that apply to you in particular. Don't just look for scholarships made specifically to the formerly incarcerated: make sure look for any scholarships that you fit the criteria for. Also see the "Additional Resources" section at the end of this handbook for more scholarship resources.

## Formerly Incarcerated Student Scholarships:

- [Scholarships for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated People](#)
- [Prison Education Foundation](#): for people who were incarcerated within the last year; you must apply for all federal aid that you are eligible for first
- [Transcending through Education Foundation](#): available to individuals transitioning out of incarceration

## Scholarship Finder Websites:

- [College Board's Big Future](#)
- [Career One-Stop](#)
- [FastWeb](#)

## Talking with the Financial Aid Office

Whether you have clarifying questions, questions on how to get started, or if you want to know more about what your prospective college offers for financial aid, reach out to the financial aid office at your university. Follow the steps listed above in “Losing eligibility” to find your school’s financial aid office contact information and schedule an appointment.

If you are unsure of what questions to ask, below are a few common questions financial aid advisors receive:

1. How do I apply for financial aid? What are the deadlines to apply?
2. What is the true cost of going to school here? How much will I most likely be paying out of pocket?
3. What are your financial aid deadlines and when will we hear back after filing the FAFSA?
4. What are part-time employment opportunities on campus?
5. What is the average debt for your graduates?
6. (If you have already received a financial aid offer) Is there more financial aid available?
7. How will scholarships impact my financial aid?

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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## Disabilities and College

Going to college is difficult enough as it is without considering people with disabilities. If you have a disability, whether it's a learning disability, a physical disability, or any other kind of disability, you may run into extra hurdles during your college career. However, most colleges are equipped with services for students with disabilities to help you succeed.

### Accommodations and Services

While each school varies, here are some of the accommodations services for students with disabilities can provide, according to UT Austin's [Services for Students with Disabilities \(SSD\) webpage](#):

- Classroom accommodations: If you have trouble in class due to your disability, student disability services can help reduce some of the barriers you face. This may include getting access to class materials or presentations outside of class; copies of class notes; permission to record class sessions; flexibility with assignment deadlines and seating arrangements.
- Exam accommodations: you may receive extra time to take your exam; assistance with taking your exam at a different location, free from distractions; permission to use a calculator for your exam or to use a computer to write an essay for an exam, and someone to read the questions out loud on the exam.
- Reduced course loads: You typically need to register for 12 hours of classes (usually 4 classes) to be considered a full-time undergraduate student, and 9 hours (usually 3 classes) in order to be a full-time graduate student. SSD can help reduce the number of classes you have to take in a semester to be considered full-time.

- Medical Withdrawal: You may have to leave school for the semester for medical and/or mental health reasons, but are afraid of losing any financial support. SSD can help you withdraw from classes for the semester without losing your financial aid.
- Sign Language Interpreter Services
- Captioning services
- Priority registration for classes

These aren't all of the resources available, and resources may vary depending on the institution. The most important thing to remember is to communicate with these offices as soon as possible.

### Make an Appointment

Accommodations are not one size fits all. They are made on an individual basis to address the barriers that impact a student's ability to learn. Usually these accommodations will be made during an initial intake appointment. After making an appointment, you will meet with a representative of the SSD office to discuss your disability, any documentation you have regarding your disability (doctor notes, therapist/counseling diagnoses, etc.), and the impact it has on your learning.

From there, the representative will discuss options for accommodations. The representative will help you communicate with your professors, usually through an accommodation letter. You do not have to disclose your disability to anyone aside from this representative. Admissions, financial aid, and professors are not supposed to ask about your disability, and you do not have to tell them any details.

You have rights as a student with disabilities. For more information, click [here](#), and [here](#).

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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## More Online Resources

### Scholarship Finder Websites:

- [FinAid](#)
- [Scholarships.com](#)
- [College Board Scholarship Search](#)
- [College Data Scholarship Finder](#)
- [College Scholarships Search Engine](#)
- [Edvisors](#)
- [Scholarships360](#)
- [Peterson's Scholarship Finder](#)
- [List of other scholarship finders](#)

### Other Online Resources:

- [Guide to Paying for College](#)
- [Financial Literacy and Career Resources](#)
- [FAFSA Guide to Understanding Scholarships](#)

### Texas Department of Criminal Justice Resources

- Reentry Hotline Number (877) 887-6151
- Alt. Phone: (512) 671-2134
- [rid@tdcj.texas.gov](mailto:rid@tdcj.texas.gov) or [tcoomm@tdcj.texas.gov](mailto:tcoomm@tdcj.texas.gov)

### County-Specific Resources for Texans

#### Dallas County

- [Academic advising for Dallas College](#)

#### Tarrant County

- ["Stay the Course"](#) is an organization in partnership with Tarrant County Community College. They provide students with resources for staying focused on completing their education and securing employment.
- [Academic advising for Tarrant County Community College](#)

#### Bexar County

- [Café College](#) is a San Antonio-based organization that provides resources for students who want to attend college. They have specific resources for adult students.
- [Academic advising](#) for Northeast Lakeview College, Northwest Vista College, Palo Alto College, St. Philip's College, and San Antonio College.

#### Travis County

- Austin Community College organization called ["Students with a Purpose"](#) (SWAP), is dedicated to supporting formerly incarcerated students by eliminating systematic barriers through engagement within the college and throughout the community.
- [Capital IDEA](#) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to lift working adults out of poverty and into living wage careers through education and career advancement. They offer support for applying to Austin Community College and offer many different programs.
- [Austin Clubhouse](#) is dedicated to the recovery of adults experiencing mental health illness by providing opportunities for our members to live, work, and learn, while contributing their talents through a community of mutual support. They offer support with employment, housing, education, and wellness.
- [Foundation Communities](#) provides affordable, attractive homes and free on-site support services for thousands of families with kids, as well as veterans, seniors, and individuals with disabilities. They also have a program called the College Hub where they support non-traditional students.
- The [Austin Area Urban League](#) workforce and career development programs as well as job readiness programs. The [Austin Area Urban League Young Professionals](#) provides professional development support, financial literacy support, and more.
- [Academic advising for Austin Community College](#)

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#### Harris County

- [Project Grad Houston](#) is dedicated to helping Houstonians get into and through college.
- [Academic advising for Houston Community College](#)
- Houston Community College [online advising services](#)

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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## Navigating Technology



The use of computers and phones in higher education is more prolific now than ever before. Often, your main access to most resources are online. You might also take notes on your computer, have an online calendar, send and receive emails to professors and classmates, access assignments and grades online, and much more. We know that for many formerly incarcerated students, trying to learn all of the new and changing forms of technology can be an intimidating task that might be a barrier for some who are wanting to attend college. To help overcome that barrier, we have provided general information on how to use the most essential forms of technology that you will likely need to know in college.

### The Basics

**Google:** Google is a search engine, which is a website that looks through the internet to find something you want to know about. Google is the most popular search engine, though there are others (such as Bing or Yahoo). Generally, using Google is fairly simple: just go the website and type in what you want to search for into the box. When using a search engine, it is usually better to phrase your search as keywords rather than as a full question. For example, “Average Austin summer temperature” is more likely to give you the results you want than “How hot is Austin in the summer?”. Most search engines are good enough that usually a question works fine. This kind of searching is good enough for most of the searches you will need to do on a daily basis. However, sometimes you need to find a very specific thing and normal searching won’t cut it. This is when [advanced searches](#) are useful.

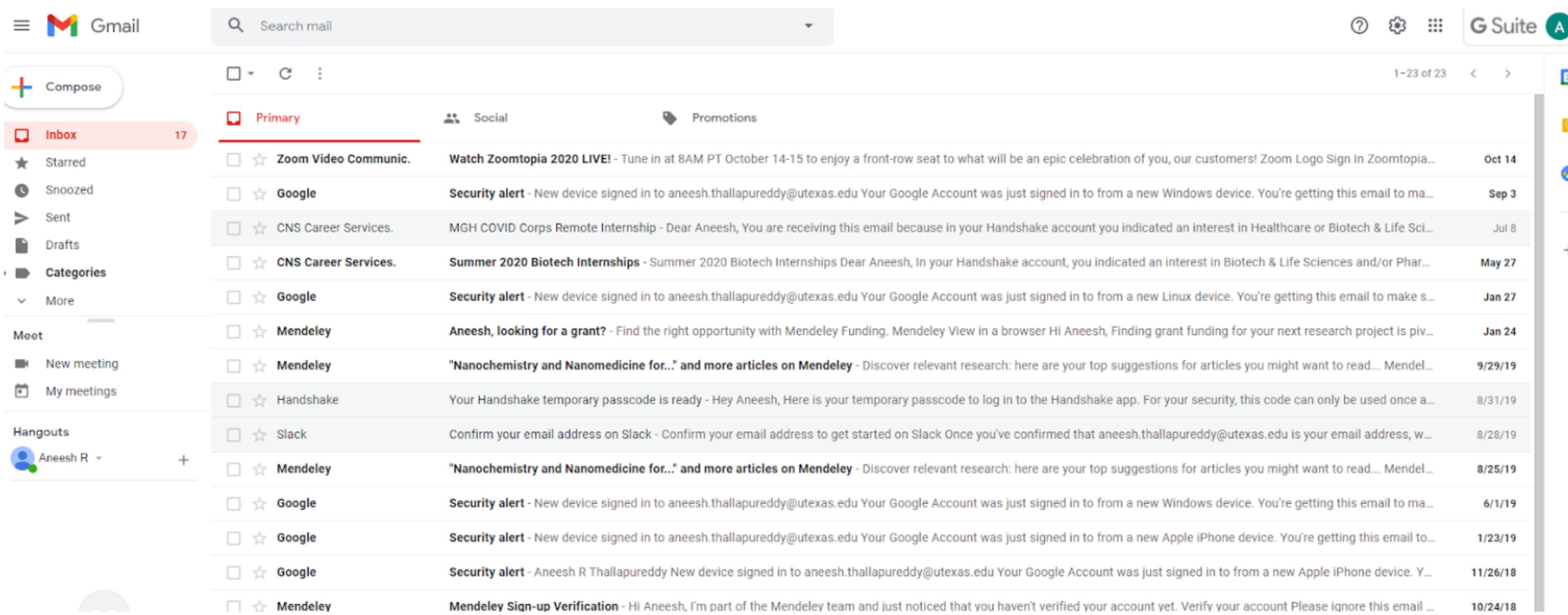
**Email:** stands for electronic mail. Email is just a way to send electronic messages to people over the internet. The first step to using email is to make an email account with an email provider. The most popular email provider is Gmail, which is run by Google. To do this, go to the [Gmail website](#), click create an account, and fill out the boxes. Once you have your email account, you can sign in to it from any computer using your email and password. Be sure to write your password down somewhere safe so that you can remember it. *It is also good practice to try and use different passwords for any websites that require you to have a password so that your accounts are secure.* Make sure you choose an email that is professionally appropriate. Your email should be made from your name and possibly some numbers such as your birth year, nothing more. [jsmith85@gmail.com](mailto:jsmith85@gmail.com) or [alicejohnson@gmail.com](mailto:alicejohnson@gmail.com) are examples of professional emails.

- For many colleges, the school will provide you with your own school-affiliated email account and will likely give you instructions on how to set it up. Typically, this will either be a Gmail account or an Outlook account (which is through Microsoft). For example, a student email for a UT student might be `firstname.lastname@utexas.edu`. If your college does provide you with a school email, it is still best practice to create your own separate personal email account, because your school email should be for school-related business and it may expire after you graduate.

**Checking your email:** When someone emails you, their message will show up in your inbox, as seen on the next page. Note that you must look through all three tabs (primary, social, and promotions) to make sure that you don’t miss any messages. In addition, if you know you were supposed to receive an email but you don’t see it in your inbox, check your spam folder. If Google thinks an email is not legitimate, it will send it here to prevent it from cluttering up your inbox. It isn’t perfect, though, so sometimes important mail gets sent there.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## Navigating Technology



When you look at an email in your inbox, the first thing you see (on the very left) is the person who sent you the email. Next to it is the subject line of the email, which gives you a brief description of what the email is about. Then it will start to show the first few words of the email. Click on an email in your inbox to read it. Generally, it is a good idea to keep your inbox fairly clean so that you can easily see new important emails. There are a couple of things that can help you with this. First, if you are constantly getting emails from a source that you don't want, look at the bottom of the email. There will be a link that will unsubscribe you from those emails so you don't keep getting them. In addition, if you read an email and it no longer has any use to you, you should delete it. If you have an email that is not likely to be useful anytime soon but which you still want to keep, you can archive it. Archiving an email takes it out of your inbox, but does not delete it. You can still find it using the search bar or by going to all mail.

**Sending an email:** First, click on the compose button in the top left of the screen. This will bring up a window for you to write your email. The topmost box is where you put the email address of the person you want to email. You can email multiple people at the same time. When you email multiple people, you can choose to put them in the “To” section, in the CC (carbon copy) section, or in the BCC (blind carbon copy) section. People in the “To” section are the primary recipients of the email. People in the CC section are not the main target of your email, but will still see all the emails in the chain. People in the BCC section will not see any further emails, and their email will not be revealed to the other people. The box below the recipient list is the subject line. In this, you put a short phrase that directly communicates the point of the email. Below that, you have the message box, where you type out your actual email.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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## Navigating Technology



**Replies to an email:** Sometime you will get emails that you need to respond to. This is pretty simple: just open the email and click the reply button. This will prompt you to write your response. The one thing of note is “reply” vs “reply to all”. When you reply to an email in the chain, only the person who sent that email can see your reply. If you instead reply to all, everyone who was either a main recipient or CCed to the email will see your reply. In situations where you want to privately reply to someone, make sure not to use the “reply to all”.

**Google Drive:** another Google service that is very useful for college. It has two main useful functions. To access Google drive, go [here](#) or search “Google Drive” on a search engine. Then, log in with your Google account, which is the same username and password that you use to sign into your Google email (all google products use the same account). You can upload files to google drive using the upload function. If the file is a common document format, then you will be able to edit it directly in drive. However you can upload whatever files you want, even if Google drive doesn’t recognize it. You can also directly create a file in drive by using the create a document button. You can organize your files by creating folders. You can also download files from google drive back on to your computer,

- **Cloud Storage Space:** The first useful feature of Google drive is that it allows you to put your files in a place that you can access from any computer. Instead of having to carry around all of your class documents in a flash drive (or as physical paper), you can simply put it on Google Drive and access it wherever. This has several advantages. For one, it is safer: it is easy to lose or break an important flash drive with projects on it, but files on Google Drive are not going to be randomly deleted. Another advantage is that you can work on your assignments from anywhere, even phones or tablets, instead of needing access to a computer with specific software (such as Microsoft Office) installed.
- **Collaborative Work:** The other useful feature of Google drive is that it allows you to work simultaneously with other people on the same document. To allow other people access to the document, you must share it with them. To do this, click the sharing button and either add people through their email, or send them the link. Multiple people can open a document at the same time, which means every person can work on the project simultaneously.

**Useful Shortcuts:** These shortcuts can be used on Google Drive, Microsoft Word, or most word processing programs.

- **Copy and Paste:** You can easily copy text or pictures from any document/website to another. Control + C copies, Control + V pastes.
- **Undo/Redo:** You can undo your most recent edits by using Control + Z. You can redo what you just undid with Control + Y.
- **Find in Document:** You can find a specific piece of text in most documents/web-pages by using Control + F.

# Texas Prison Education Initiative

