



If you anticipate being released during the school year, and you want to finish your degree at a traditional campus after returning home, there are many things you will likely need to prepare for. In this resource, we will go over the things you will need to do before and after your release from prison and your start at a traditional campus. This is an exciting time for you, and we're glad to go over the things that will help you set yourself up for success!

THE LANDSCAPE

Here are some terms you'll need to know in order to understand more about the transfer process and the differences between a current program and your program at a traditional campus.

PEP: A Prison Education Program (or PEP) is a special designation that indicates that a college program within a prison facility has gone through an approval process that includes the U.S. Department of Education, the state's Department of Corrections, and a handful of other stakeholders. This approval and review process is in place to ensure that PEP programs are serving the best interests or needs of their incarcerated students.

Main campus: This term refers to the central or flagship campus of a college or university. For private, non-profit colleges this might be the only other campus apart from the PEP campus. Public or state-funded colleges and universities are much more likely to have a network of campuses (sometimes called satellite campuses) that have spun off from the original or main campus.

Satellite campus: An offshoot or branch of a college that serves as an independent campus within a network of schools that are part of the same college system. For example, Penn State has its main campus in State College, PA, but has over 20 satellite campuses throughout the state of Pennsylvania. The extent to which a satellite campus has policies and an identity that are separate from those of the main campus will vary by college system. For example, some systems might list just the main campus on an awarded diploma, while others will list the satellite campus.

Traditional campus: This term is used throughout this resource as a means of making a distinction between college campuses that exist within prison facilities (PEPs, for example) and college campuses that have been established in the free world (traditional campuses).

KEY TERMS

Key terms in **blue** can be found in the *Navigating Forward Glossary* if you'd like more information.

QUESTIONS THIS RESOURCE WILL HELP ANSWER:



What should I do if I may be leaving prison in the middle of a semester?



What paperwork should I be gathering or submitting before I go home?



What should I be thinking about when I'm deciding which school to attend post-release?



What will be different about my college experience outside compared to inside?





WARM UP QUESTIONS

Here are some questions to think about before you review this resource. Your answers might shape what information is the most important for you to consider as you begin to plan for the future. It's okay if you do not know the answer to some or all of these questions. This just means you have now learned what you need to research moving forward as you plan for your transition.



Do you know how your current program is funded? Are you currently attending a Pell-approved PEP program or are you attending a college program that is paid for through state or private funding?



Where do you plan on living after release? Do you plan on living near the location of the main campus after you are released? Do you have a support system there and a plan for securing housing and other basic needs?



Will your tuition increase when you leave incarceration? Will the tuition cost be larger than the maximum Pell Grant award? What financial aid questions do you have?



When do you plan on starting school after release? Do you plan on enrolling immediately after you are released or do you anticipate needing some time to adjust to life on the outside before you re-engage with college coursework?



Will you need to transfer in the middle of a semester? How can you plan for that ahead of time to make sure you can continue classes and don't miss coursework?

IMPORTANT NOTE

When you leave incarceration, channels of communication with your college should become much easier. Still, you may have to be persistent at times. Don't give up! These kinds of challenges happen to many students -- it's not you! If you can't get a response by phone at the office you are contacting, try:

1. Visiting in person
2. Contacting an advisor or professor
3. Reaching out to a different department to ask for help
4. Seeking peer help from a student you know or a student leader





MID-SEMESTER RELEASE PLANNING

When you may be released in the middle of your academic semester, it is important for you to make a plan to be able to successfully complete (or responsibly withdraw from) your existing classes. Even if you aren't sure if you will continue college, or if you know you want to take time off, this process is important to ensure you don't end up owing fees, having holds on your account, or failing your classes!

Notify the school: Notify the school of your potential release, and request a meeting with your advisor. Be sure the point of contact you are working with has your 1) Name, 2) anticipated release date, and 3) Courses you are currently enrolled in. Work with this point of contact to determine 4) which campus you will attend, and 5) if you plan to maintain the same program of study or change your major.

Ensure technology access is functional: Many schools communicate with students primarily through a student portal and student email. For many prison education program students, access to these portals may be shut off. It is vitally important that your access is restored when you are released, or you won't be able to access essential services and communication. Your advisor might not be aware of this issue! Here are some questions to ask your advisor.

- Do I have a student email address and a student portal account?
- Do I need to contact anyone to ensure I have full access to my accounts restored?
- Can someone show me how to log in to my student account, and how I can check my enrollment information and email?
- How should I expect to get messages from my professors and the financial aid office?
- If I need help with navigating technology, where can I go for help?

Complete any school requirements: Your school may have paperwork for you to complete, especially if you are changing your official campus or your major. Find out what requirements the school has and request those forms. If you are a student that will be on a registry or parole, you may want to inquire if there are any reporting policies.

Inquire about changes: There will be differences between how your college program works on the traditional campus, and your program may forget to point these out to you -- especially if you are one of the first students to make this transition. Here are some sample questions to ask about:

- Do I have to re-apply to the college in order to attend on the main campus?
- Am I already a **Degree Seeking Student**, or do I need to change my enrollment?
- How do I apply for financial aid? Can you assist me with this before I leave?
- Are there scholarships or other funding sources that are available after I get out?
- Will there be changes to how I register for my classes? Who can assist me with this?
- How can I arrange a campus tour?
- What support networks exist at the college for students who are "non-traditional" (working adults, first generation college students, etc.)?

Make a plan with your professors: To be able to complete your current courses you need to make a plan with each of your professors for 1) how you will communicate after you leave, 2) how/where/when you will attend class, 3) what assignments will be expected from you, and 4) how you will turn in your assignments or take your exams. If your courses are in person or via zoom, you will need to decide if you will join a different section of the class, continue with an independent study, or set up some other arrangement. You may decide to make a plan to work ahead and complete your courses early, but you will need your professor's permission also.





MID-SEMESTER RELEASE: READINESS LIST

When you are approaching your release date in the middle of the semester, you can use the following readiness inventory to help confirm that you have the pieces in place to be able to successfully complete your semester. Use the checklist below according to the kinds of courses that you are enrolled in, and whether or not you plan to complete the semester or withdraw.

**If you want to
withdraw from
your
current
courses**



- ☐ I have discussed my withdrawal timeline with my advisor.
- ☐ My advisor has confirmed I will not need to repay any tuition or fees as a result of withdrawing from my classes at this time.
- ☐ I submitted an official request to withdraw from to my advisor and have received written confirmation that I have been dropped from my courses.

**If you are
planning to
finish your
current courses
post-release**



- ☐ I have confirmed with my advisor that they have all necessary paperwork.
- ☐ I have established a plan with each of my professors for keeping in contact and completing my assignments and final coursework.
- ☐ My college has confirmed I will have access to my student email account and I have practiced accessing my student login and student email.
- ☐ I have a plan for computer access and internet.
- ☐ I have a plan to be able to access my assignments, textbooks & materials.
- ☐ I have mapped out all remaining assignments for the semester and have a sense for all remaining deadlines for each course.
- ☐ I will contact each of my professors as soon as I am released so they have current contact information for me in case plans need to change.
- ☐ My professors, college advisor, and I have established a plan for how my final exams will be proctored, where I will need to go to take them, etc.

**If you're taking
Zoom Courses**



- ☐ I have access to all of my zoom links.
- ☐ I have received any necessary permission from my professors, parole officers, and/or facility to join the zoom sessions post-release.
- ☐ I have practiced downloading zoom, joining a meeting, and using the meeting controls.
- ☐ I know what time the zoom sessions will meet.

**If you're taking
in-person
courses**



- ☐ I have made arrangements to turn in all my remaining assignments.
- ☐ I have made arrangements to switch to a different section of the class, and my professor knows to expect me in that new section.
- ☐ I know where and when I will have class and what transportation I'll use.

**If you're taking
online
courses**



- ☐ My professor knows I will be joining the online class post-release.
- ☐ I have practiced logging into my portal and know how to access it.





SHOULD I TRANSFER TO A NEW SCHOOL WHEN I GET OUT?

As you prepare for your release, one of the major considerations you will need to weigh is whether or not you will be continuing with the same college and course of study, or if you will be transferring to a different college or program after you leave incarceration. Speak with your program coordinators and advisors, explore the following questions, and consider some of the potential pros and cons below:



Program of study: Does your current college offer the program that you are most interested in studying, or will you want to switch to a different program of study that your current college does not offer? Are you already considered a fully admitted and enrolled degree-seeking student at your college, like everyone else on campus, or is enrollment in the prison program treated differently?



Policies: Will your program allow you to continue on the traditional campus, or are there any policies that can prevent you from doing so?



Cost: How will the cost of your courses and your financial aid eligibility change? Are you eligible for in-state tuition? Is there a different college option that would be cheaper?



Credits completed: Have you already completed more than half of your degree? Due to **residency requirement** rules, you may not be able to transfer more than half of your credits to a new school. Transferring schools after you have already completed most of your degree could require you to retake courses.



Support: Does your college enroll other non-traditional adult learners, or is the campus only set up to support students ages 18-24? What supports are in place for learners like you?



Location: Will you live close enough to campus to attend required courses, exams, or events in person, or will you need a fully remote program? Does your college offer programs that are fully remote? Keep in mind that taking online classes is not the same as enrolling in a fully remote program. It is possible your college may still require you to come to campus for exams or events unless explicitly stated.

KEEPING THE SAME SCHOOL

- You don't have to transfer or go through an admissions process
- Familiar people and systems
- You get to keep all of your previous credits

PROS
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CONS
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- Location might be too far away
- The program may not be designed for working adult learners
- The program might not be specific to your career goals

TRANSFERRING SCHOOLS

- You get to choose your program from a wider selection of choices
- Location or class formats might be better customized for your lifestyle

PROS
+

CONS
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- You may have to repeat courses if you've completed more credits than a new school will accept
- You may have to go through a longer admissions process

If you do decide to transfer, visit the **Continuing School Checklist** page at the end of this resource, and the *Navigating Forward* resource called **Transferring Overview** for more information.





WILL HAVING PAST CONVICTIONS LIMIT MY COLLEGE OPPORTUNITIES?

Formerly incarcerated people have successfully completed college all over the country, and you can too! It's possible that you may encounter challenges or requirements that other classmates don't have to navigate (most likely during admissions). This reality can be discouraging, so lean on your support network whenever possible to stay focused on why college is important to you and the strengths you bring. Here are some policies to consider as you prepare to enroll at a traditional college campus:

- If you must reapply to a college upon release, you may be asked about prior criminal convictions as part of the application. Though many colleges are moving away from asking this question, some still have it. If you are asked questions about prior convictions, answer truthfully. Just because a college includes this question doesn't mean all students with prior convictions will be denied. Typically, these responses are reviewed case by case, and your application may go before a review panel. The college may follow up with you for additional information, interviews, or letters from your parole officer or other character references. Remember that if you find yourself needing to provide narrative information about a criminal conviction, you can be honest and still set boundaries around what you share. You can also frame your discussion around the ways in which you have or hope to grow and evolve through the experience of higher education.
- Some colleges may have internal policies prohibiting individuals with felony convictions from being admitted to that college or to a particular program or major. Sadly, this can be true even if a college offers programs inside a prison facility. If your PEP program uses Pell Grant funding, your program is **required** to allow incarcerated students to transfer to their other campuses when they leave incarceration. Here's the exact language from the federal rules:
 - "Ability of students to transfer credits to any location of the institution: [...] all formerly incarcerated students are able to fully transfer their credits and continue their programs at any location of the institution that offers a comparable program, including by the same mode of instruction, barring exceptional circumstances surrounding the student's conviction."
- If you have missed more than two consecutive semesters during your reentry process, you may be required to reapply to your school, even if you are applying to the same college where you were enrolled when you were incarcerated. If you know you will be taking time away, ask your college what to expect from the admissions process when you go through it on the outside.
- Colleges may also restrict individuals with felony convictions or students with certain types of felony convictions, like violent or sexual offenses, from living in student housing. This restriction is frustrating because on-campus housing can be more convenient and easier to secure than off-campus housing. If your college provides residential living to students, it will likely have a residential housing office, and this office might have information about other affordable off-campus housing options for students.
- If you are on parole or a registry, the rules of your supervision may prevent you from engaging in some social or educational experiences that other students around you are able to experience, like certain internships or travel programs. You should always ask because you never know!
- If you are on supervision, you may also need to be more mindful than your peers about the behaviors of those around you, especially when it comes to things like drug use or possession of firearms. Avoid social situations where other students may be putting your freedom at risk.





WHAT TO EXPECT: DIFFERENCES YOU MAY EXPERIENCE ON THE TRADITIONAL CAMPUS

The following pages outline some things that may be different when you move to a traditional campus. Make note of some of the challenges and possible solutions, and any questions that emerge for you.

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“The best part of of enrolling was being able to choose classes and meet professors that were working in my major. The instructors that I met in my major, which was Graphic Design with a focus inn studio art exposed me to unbelievable opportunities in my field. Those instructors have a lot to do with why I am a full time visual artist today.” - THEI Alumnus



YOUR FINANCIAL AID PACKAGE

There are several factors that might impact your financial aid award and how much college will cost when you move from a prison campus to a traditional campus. Here are factors that can impact financial aid, and will be important to explore with your financial aid advisor:

COST OF ATTENDANCE

Cost of Attendance is your school's estimate of the total possible cost of enrolling in a specific program for a year. It includes direct costs, like tuition, and indirect costs, like textbooks, supplies, and living expenses. When changing to the traditional campus, your Cost of Attendance may change quite a bit.

Some colleges charge a lower tuition rate in their prison education programs, which means students could experience an increase in tuition post-release. This could also happen if you lose the benefit of **in-state tuition**, which is possible if you move to a different state or if your state calculates residency using your address prior to incarceration. Other new costs to consider are textbooks, technology, school supplies, and expenses associated with being on campus like transportation, a parking pass, or other campus fees. Talk with your school about the costs you should expect on your campus post-release.

ENROLLMENT STATUS

How many classes are you taking? This will impact your costs and also the amount of financial aid you are eligible for. Are you switching from part-time enrollment to full-time? You may be eligible for a larger financial aid award if you increase your enrollment to full-time, but your costs will also increase.

FINANCIAL AID ELIGIBILITY

Post-release, you may be eligible for federal student loans and other financial aid opportunities you couldn't use in prison. On the other hand, there may be a scholarship or tuition benefit covering your costs in prison that you will not be eligible for post-release. Your process for applying for aid may also be different. Talk with your financial aid office to learn more about any state, private or school scholarships or grants you may be eligible for post-release, and what changes to expect.





**WHAT TO EXPECT
(CONTINUED)**



ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

When attending college on a traditional campus, your access to technology, both in terms of physical technology and in terms of digital resources like the internet, online search engines, online databases, and digital applications, will be unlimited. This increased access can be a challenge as well as a benefit.

- Wide access to resources in your school's online library, which can be useful for research in your courses or even for learning things outside of class.
- Your student account online allows you to get most information about your financial aid, admissions, or enrollment whenever you need it without having to go to campus or wait for business hours.
- Many resources may even be accessible from your cell phone, even when you don't have internet access for a computer.

PROS
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CONS
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- Most class info and assignments may come through an online portal; professors may expect you to be able to complete assignments using programs you haven't used before.
- You may feel behind with some of the technology that is incorporated into everyday process at the college.
- Some digital tools or online sites that you didn't have access to when you were incarcerated might be distracting--like online video games, TV or YouTube.

Don't be afraid to ask for help -- especially if you can't navigate your coursework. There are resources to assist with improving your digital literacy. Technology is a language and it's never too late to learn it!



YOUR ADVISOR

Your academic advisor will usually be a faculty member from a department that is related to your course of study, and they can be a valuable resource for you. Your advisor's primary role is to help with academic advising, like selecting and enrolling in courses and getting connected with academic resources, but they can also help you navigate other challenges and connect you with people and offices for support.

In many prison education programs, your advisor may be the person selecting your courses and bringing you textbooks and materials. This role will change on the traditional campus because you will be responsible for navigating many of those steps yourself. But your advisor can still be your resource along the way! If you didn't have much contact with your advisor while you were incarcerated, you will likely find that this person is much easier to access - by email, by phone, and in person - than when you were incarcerated. Your advisor will usually be listed in your online student portal. It's appropriate to reach out to request a meeting or phone call to discuss your questions.





WHAT TO EXPECT (CONTINUED)

VARIETY IN ACADEMIC PROGRAMS



When enrolling in courses on the outside, you will have many more options in:

The variety of courses that you can choose from to meet your degree requirements

The format of the courses offered (online, in-person, or a hybrid model)

Scheduling when you take your courses

Choosing how many courses to take at one time

Selecting majors, minors, and programs

Make sure that you check in with your academic advisor or someone in the registrar's office before you enroll in courses so that you know the full range of options available to you. Your advisor should be able to assist you with selecting courses and registering for them. If you are thinking about changing your major, it's important to realize how this may impact which classes you need to take and your graduation requirements. Sometimes switching your major will require you to reapply to the college in a brief admissions process. Talk to your advisor about your choices.



A SHIFT IN ACADEMIC RESPONSIBILITY

As you prepare for college on the outside, you should expect more autonomy in making academic and financial decisions about your education. Some of these changes will be obvious, like having a wider range of classes and programs to choose from, or having more financial aid options. But the autonomy may also come with new responsibilities and procedures that may be less obvious.

For example, if you weren't able to access your online portal while you were incarcerated, your advisor may have been registering you for your classes, but this responsibility will now fall to you. Your college may also have developed special systems that you will not longer use. For example, you may have registered for your classes using a paper form, but you'll now be expected to use your student portal. Ask your advisor to help you identify these differences. Here are some common examples:

Registering for your classes and choosing your professors

Selecting when to take certain courses & following a degree map

Dropping classes

Requesting your own transcripts and other records

Tracking admissions, registration and financial aid deadlines

Deciding whether or not to take out student loans

Applying for, following up on, and accepting financial aid

Purchasing the correct textbooks and any supplies you need

Completing graduation paperwork

The good news is that there are people working on campus whose sole job is to support students! If you are feeling overwhelmed, or unsure of the steps to take, be proactive to connect with your academic advisor, a professor you trust, someone from the financial aid office, or even someone from the on-campus counseling/mental health office. It's normal not to have it all figured out!





WHAT TO EXPECT (CONTINUED)



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The physical space where you will finish your education is likely much different than the prison environment where you started college. Many college campuses are large areas with multiple buildings, parking lots, open outdoor spaces, and pathways to cut across campus. Larger universities can feel like small cities, with their own bus systems, police forces, and gathering spots for extracurricular and social events. You'll likely have to travel to different buildings for each class and learn the layout of different administrative offices to reach the people you need.

This can feel overwhelming at first, but you can learn it over time. You can contact admissions and ask for a tour of campus. If you get a course schedule ahead of the semester, you can visit campus and practice walking through your school day, learning what buildings you will take courses in. Preparing ahead of time can help you more easily overcome barriers to physically navigating the space, such as securing a physical ID card to access buildings or addressing any accessibility concerns if you have disabilities that impair movement.



Knowing where to go before the first day can help make sure you're both prepared and confident. Many college websites will include some form of campus map and building directory, which you can use to locate important offices on campus. Once you have your course schedule, you may be able to use campus maps and directories to find exactly where you need to go each day, plan your route, and even practice. You may also want to use this same strategy and tools like Google or Apple Maps to plan and practice your commute to campus, whether by car or public transportation.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Limitations may have prevented your prison education program from offering the full range of support services and programs that are now available to you on the traditional campus. These services include programs that support academic performance, such as tutoring centers and writing labs. They also offer resources for mental and physical health, like counseling services and health clinics. Additionally, career services provide opportunities such as job fairs and seminars on graduate school programs.

There are also offices and positions dedicated to student wellbeing and support. College officials like the Dean of Student Life and offices with names like the Office of Student Wellbeing can be valuable resources in supporting you as you transition to your new campus. Keeping open communication with professors, department heads, advisors, and other faculty may be able to help you as you adjust to this new environment and strive to keep your academic performance up.



LEARN MORE

For more information about the different offices and services offered on campus, see the *Navigating Forward* resource called **College Ecosystem**.





Continuing School Checklist

This checklist will help guide you through the first steps that you will need to take to continue college at a new school. Please understand, this is not a complete list, and you should be in touch with the college that you want to attend to make sure you have completed all necessary steps.

State/Federal Financial Aid Requirements:

- ☐ I have learned about the financial aid process and understand what FAFSA is
- ☐ I am not in default on any student loans.
 - ☐ If so, I have begun to rehabilitate my loans. My last payment will be made on _____.
- ☐ Completed FAFSA for year(s): ____/____, ____/____, ____/____
- ☐ I signed and submitted the FAFSA signature page.
- ☐ I reviewed my FAFSA Submission Summary and completed all required steps
- ☐ Completed my state's financial aid application (username: _____)
For Tennessee: Create TSAC Portal account
- ☐ Completed any additional financial aid program applications (username: _____)
For Tennessee: TN Reconnect Application
- ☐ The login to my student portal is (username: _____ PW: _____)
 - ☐ I have completed the school's financial aid application
 - ☐ I have confirmed all Financial Aid Requirements in my student portal
 - ☐ I have officially accepted my financial aid offer

College Requirements:

- ☐ Completed College Application(s)
 - ☐ School: _____ (username): _____
 - ☐ School: _____ (username): _____
- ☐ Requested high school transcript/GED transcript
- ☐ Requested all prior college transcript(s)
 - ☐ Prison education program college name : _____
 - ☐ Other Prior College(s) : _____
- ☐ Requested all applicable verification forms that the school has requested:
 - ☐ Proof of Income
 - ☐ Proof of Residency
 - ☐ Proof of Non-filing
 - ☐ Proof of Educational Purpose
- ☐ Completed all other outstanding requirements from the college (confirm by logging in to your student account and/or checking your email for school correspondence)
- ☐ Received my Student ID Number: _____

Additional requirements some schools may have:

- ☐ Placement Tests
- ☐ Letters of Recommendation
- ☐ SAP appeal letter
- ☐ Personal Writing Statement
- ☐ SAP Appeal supporting proof (for more info see **SAP and SAP Appeals**)





NAVIGATING FORWARD

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