

Social Support Resource Library

Student Version



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Where to Seek Help

College can be a time of freedom, a time to learn new and exciting things, and a time to make new friends and lasting memories. However, there are other, less pleasant experiences that many students face: struggling with subjects they excelled in while in high school, failing exams, or racing to meet deadlines. If this sounds familiar, understand that you are not alone. No matter what type of school you are attending, there are resources on campus to help you through these issues.

<h3>Academic Help</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach out to your professors. They usually hold regular office hours and are responsive to e-mails. Ask them for guidance, to review drafts of papers or projects, or for the name of a tutor. • Talk to your academic advisor. He or she can help you come up with a plan of action for managing your course load, help you determine a balanced course selection for next semester, and provide you with general study skills and test-taking tips. • Your campus likely has peer-support programs, such as tutoring programs, study groups, and writing guidance. The most important thing to remember is to act quickly; do not wait until it is too late to turn things around. For instance, if you've failed a midterm, don't wait until the week before the final to begin working with a tutor. Getting help sooner can mean the difference between barely passing and doing well.
<h3>Personal Help</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your college likely has counselors on staff to help you work through any personal problems that arise, whether they have to do with your family, your relationships, your friends, or your sense of self. If you are feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or unable to control where your life is headed, make an appointment or attend walk-in hours at your school's counseling office as soon as possible. Counselors are highly trained individuals with a range of resources to help you work through these problems. If your college does not offer counseling, seek an outside counselor—counseling is covered by most insurance companies. • If you are feeling stressed and hassled but have been managing it successfully, check out the Self-Management Resource Library for ways to overcome anxiety, boost your mindfulness, and relax.

Financial Help

- Check out the resources offered by the financial aid office at your school. They may offer a payment plan, suggest a low-interest student loan for meeting your monthly expenses, or have other ideas to help you out. Some schools offer scholarships or grants, and most schools offer work-study programs where you work part-time at an on-campus job, earning money for tuition.
- If you haven't yet done so, complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA: www.fafsa.ed.gov) to see if you qualify for federal aid. Federal student loans tend to have lower interest rates than bank loans, do not need to be repaid until after you finish school, and offer income-based repayment plans. In addition, many private organizations offer scholarships—you just need to know where to look. The United States Department of Labor offers a free online scholarship search at <http://studentaid.ed.gov/types/grants-scholarships/finding-scholarships>.
- For more tips on how to create and stick to a budget, check out the Financial/Budget Planner.

Keep in mind that your academic performance in college comes down to one major factor: **you**. The choices you make every day can affect how you perform in classes. Taking care of yourself physically—eating healthy and regularly, exercising, getting enough sleep, and avoiding unnecessary stress—can improve your mental sharpness. In addition, monitor how you spend your time. You might need to drop an extracurricular activity for a little while if it's interfering with your coursework or adjust your part-time work schedule if you are having trouble turning assignments in by their due dates. For tips and tools to help manage your time, check out the Academic Skills Resource Library.

Inventory of Teamwork Skills

Being part of a team entails understanding your personal strengths and where you may need to rely on others for assistance. Listed below are ten characteristics that make a productive team member. Rate your level of confidence in each skill—be honest—and see if there are any areas where you could use a little more work.

Very Confident	Somewhat Confident	Not Confident	
			Reliability: I can be counted on to get a job done.
			Effective communication: I express my thoughts clearly and directly, with respect for others.
			Active listening: I listen to and respect different points of view. When others offer me constructive feedback, I don't get upset or defensive.
			Participation: I am a regular contributor to team activities, and I am well prepared.
			Open and willing sharing: I am willing to share my experience and knowledge with the team.
			Cooperation: I work with other members of the team to accomplish the task—no matter what.
			Flexibility: I adapt easily when the team changes direction or when I'm asked to try something new.
			Commitment: I am responsible and dedicated, and I always give my best effort.
			Problem solving: I work to find solutions rather than focusing on problems.
			Respect: I treat other team members with courtesy and consideration.

If you answered most questions with “very confident,” congratulations! You are a valuable team player. Of course, there is always room for improvement; select one or two skills you would like to enhance further, and develop a plan for how to improve those skills (try using the goal-setting worksheet in the Commitment Resource Library). You are in a great position to support a peer who might be struggling with building his or her own teamwork skills.

If you answered most questions with “somewhat confident,” you are on the right track! You would probably benefit from focusing on developing more in a few areas. Develop a plan on how to improve these areas (try using the goal-setting worksheet in the Commitment Resource Library). You can also ask a peer or advisor to work with you on teamwork strategies, and with a little time, energy, and dedication, you will feel confident in your abilities.

If you answered most questions with “not confident,” don’t fret—there are ways to develop your confidence as a team player. Set a few teamwork-related goals (try using the goal-setting worksheet in the Commitment Resource Library). You can also ask a peer or advisor to work with you on teamwork strategies. Asking for help when you need it is a skill of a productive team member; asking for help is a great first step on your path to building confidence in your teamwork skills.

Effective Team Players

Not everyone has the skills to be a good team player. Even if *you* have great teamwork skills, you may need to collaborate with team members who have team behavior that is less than ideal. What would you say or do in problem situations? Below is a chart that lists problem situations. Read each situation in the chart, and indicate how you would react with possible solutions.

Problem	What are some possible solutions?
A team member is always late to team meetings.	
A team member never participates in discussions.	
A team member dominates the conversation.	
A team member refuses to work with another member of the team.	
A team member never meets deadlines and always has excuses.	
A team member falls asleep during meetings.	
A team member does not stick to the topic or goal of the work and constantly takes conversations off track.	
A team member is always disagreeing with others and does not compromise.	
A team member becomes angry when offered constructive feedback.	
A team member is always off task during team meetings.	

Leadership Checklist

Successful teams have leaders who bring people together to get a job done. In any group of people working together, every member of the group has something to contribute. A group may have an official leader, but every member of the group is responsible for the success of the group. Leadership is a function of a person's actions and example more than of whether that person is designated as being in charge.

The group leader's role is not to tell everyone what to do. A group leader should do the following.

- Motivate the group
- Keep the group on task
- Resolve conflicts when group members cannot agree
- Help everyone work together toward a common goal

Group work can sometimes lead to conflict. When members of the team disagree, an effective group leader will do the following.

- Discuss the disagreement openly with the group
- Communicate each person's position, focusing on the issues rather than any personal feelings
- Help resolve the disagreement by coming to a decision that all members of the group can accept

Every member of a team can serve as a mentor by sharing strengths, skills, and knowledge with others. A mentor serves as a coach or a guide to help other people develop their skills. An effective mentor will do the following.

- Show by example
- Work side by side with those being mentored
- Give guidance and feedback to those being mentored as they work independently

Practice your teamwork and leadership skills as often as possible. Every time you work with others in a group, you have an opportunity to improve your skills. That group might be a study group or project group, a volunteer group, a social club, or your coworkers or family.

Working in Diverse Groups

Everyone is shaped both personally and professionally by a cultural background. In college and in your career, you will likely be working closely with peers from a diverse range of backgrounds and who have different sets of experiences, values, and interests from your own. Having cultural competence is the key to thriving in culturally diverse settings, and that confidence is developed over time. Culture goes beyond ethnic heritage and it includes many roles, such as being a student, a sibling, a writer, an activist, a volunteer. Before learning about other people’s cultures, it’s a good idea to become aware of your own culture and how it has shaped you. Understanding your own cultural shaping will help you better understand how and why culture is important to others. Speak to people from your own culture, such as your relatives, your classmates, and your coworkers. Identify characteristics that are typically associated with your culture. Are they positive or negative? Do you share these characteristics? Answer the following questions to get a better sense of your cultural background and how it contributes to your role as a student.

Where were your parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents born?
What language or languages do you speak?
What are your hopes and dreams for the future?
What do you most enjoy doing?
What is or has been your biggest challenge this year?
What is one thing you are proud of?
What is your most important value?
What is one thing people would not know about you just by looking at you?

Next, work on building relationships with people from other cultures. Don’t focus on your differences— if you are working together on a team, there will be some aspects that you all share in addition to working toward a shared goal. Consider using the questions you answered above to get to know your teammates better. The following guidelines can also help you create connections.

Focus on things you have in common
Practice active listening to learn about your teammates
Let go of any preconceptions or labels you have of people or groups
Ask open-ended questions about people’s cultures and histories
Try seeing the world through someone else’s eyes
View differences as learning opportunities
Practice collaborative problem-solving skills

Communication Skills: A Quick Reference Guide

Effective Speaking and Listening

Whether you are at college, at work, or at home, clear communication is an important part of teamwork. Respectful discussion and exchange of opinions are essential to working effectively with others.

- Think about not only what you want to say, but also about how you want to say it before you speak.
- Express yourself directly but without anger or defensiveness.
- Make it clear what is fact and what is opinion.
- Listen carefully to what each person has to say. To listen actively, do the following.
 - Look at the person who is speaking.
 - Focus on the speaker by listening to his or her words and noting his or her tone of voice, gestures, and facial expressions.
 - Do not interrupt; wait for your turn to ask questions or respond.
 - Ask questions and summarize in your own words what the speaker has said to clarify and confirm your understanding.
 - Offer honest, respectful feedback.
- Hold off on making judgments until everyone has had a chance to speak.
- Work toward consensus—a decision that all members of the group can accept and that helps everyone reach the common goal.

Nonverbal Communication

Communication goes beyond words. Be sure to do the following when you speak.

- Maintain eye contact.
- Be aware of your facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice.
- Keep your body posture relaxed.
- Choose appropriate timing for your message (for example, a time when you and the listener aren't rushed or preoccupied).

Communicating with Confidence

Communicating your opinions while respecting the rights and opinions of others is a skill that you can learn and improve with practice. Work on the skills in familiar situations where you feel comfortable, such as when you are with friends.

- Respectfully acknowledge the other person’s opinions, beliefs, and feelings.
- Freely ask questions to clarify your understanding.
- Honestly express your own opinions, beliefs, and feelings.
- Avoid blame, humiliation, recrimination, defensiveness, self-righteousness, and other destructive attitudes and tactics.
- Be as specific and clear as possible, and ask the other person for feedback.
- Ask for help when you need it.
- Stand firm and say no when necessary.

Conflict Resolution Tips

Group work can sometimes lead to conflict. Here are some tips on settling disagreements among members of a group.

- Openly discuss the disagreement.
- Give each person an opportunity to speak while listening actively, respectfully, and patiently.
- Put aside personal feelings and opinions for the moment to better understand all positions.
- Focus full attention on each speaker, take turns asking questions, and restate what a speaker has said to clarify and confirm understanding.
- Avoid judgment and blame, keeping open minds and positive attitudes. The focus is on the issues, not on the people and personalities.
- Use positive rather than negative language. Instead of saying “You’re wrong about this,” say “That’s a good idea, but if we look more deeply...” or “Have you considered...?”
- Distinguish between needs—the important points where there can be no compromise—and interests—areas that allow a little leeway.
- Openly discuss the disagreement.

Working together toward consensus—a decision that all members of the group can accept and that helps the group meet its shared goals—is a critical component of conflict resolution. To help reach consensus, the group can do the following.

- Review shared goals and consider what resolution to the current conflict best serves those goals.
- Consider how the group has successfully reached consensus in the past.
- Look for areas of agreement between the different sides of the conflict and build on those.
- Identify obstacles to reaching consensus in the current conflict, and determine what everyone can do to overcome them.
- Get outside help from a trusted source to mediate the disagreement if the group cannot reach consensus on its own.

Prioritization Checklist

Learning how to prioritize effectively is a skill that will be invaluable throughout your entire life. The tips below can be applied to class work, job tasks, and personal activities. It's easy to feel overwhelmed when your to-do list is long, and oftentimes, it can seem like everything you have to do is a high priority, especially during finals, but setting priorities can help you juggle everything you need to do. Follow these tips to make progress on a day-to-day basis.

- Make a list. Each morning before you start your day, make a list of everything you have to do that day. Divide the list into three columns: High Priority (must be done today), Important (good to get started today, but not critical), and Less Important (do when you have spare time). Write each task in the appropriate column. Be sure to include larger tasks like working on school assignments, and smaller tasks, like mailing a birthday card to your sister, and assign each task by priority. Then separate everything into three columns: High Priority (must be done today), Important (good to get started today, but not critical), and Less Important (work on this when you have spare time).
- Assess the value. Finishing certain tasks will be more beneficial than finishing others. For example, you might have a pressing commitment for a social organization you belong to, but you also have a chemistry midterm to study for. Even though they are both high-priority tasks, only the midterm will affect your GPA, which can have long-term ramifications.
- Get organized. Develop a personal productivity system to which you hold yourself accountable. A paper planner, notebook, calendar, or online tools can help you organize your to-do tasks, can give an overview of everything you are working on, and can help you in meeting deadlines. For a sample planner calendar, see the Academic Skills Resource Library.
- Be honest. Be realistic about how much you can complete in a day. Setting unattainable goals will only lead to disappointment. For tips on setting achievable goals, consult the Commitment Resource Library.
- Be flexible. Circumstances can change in a matter of moments. You should be able to deal with new priorities as they arise and decide how urgent they are. For example, you might be immersed in writing a term paper that is due at the end of the week, but you then get an e-mail from a professor about a last-minute quiz in a class that starts in 20 minutes. In this case, it's probably a better idea to postpone the paper for a moment to study for the quiz.
- Know when to step away. When you're working on something that is very high priority, you can end up getting bogged down on details and spending more time than is necessary. This can prevent you from tackling other tasks on your list. Enforce strict deadlines to make sure you don't sacrifice some things on your list.

Budget Planner

Budgeting for College

Worrying about such things like how you are going to make your next tuition payment or afford rent next semester can be very stressful, and stressing about money will take your focus off your studies. Use the following tips to minimize your expenses, pay your bills on time, and plan for the future.

<p>Figure out what you need versus what you want. You might need a laptop for completing school assignments, running specialized software, communicating with your professors, and keeping in touch with friends and family. But do you need a printer? Most campuses have computer labs or libraries where students can print for free or for a very low cost.</p>
<p>Keep track of your spending using the worksheet below. You may be surprised how much you spend on non-necessities, such as a daily latte or music downloads. These things might not seem expensive, but they can add up. Seeing how much you spend on impulse purchases can help you resist them in the future.</p>
<p>Use cash for all your purchases, and keep a credit card to use for emergencies only. It's too easy to spend money when no cash leaves your pocket, but you could end up saddled with debt. Even more, credit cards charge extremely high interest rates. If you have school loans, you already have one debt to repay upon graduation—don't add another!</p>
<p>Take advantage of your school's meal plan, especially if you live in a dorm and are unable to cook for yourself. Meal plans typically offer a significant savings over take-out food or dining out. Many dining halls also offer express lunches for when you are pressed for time between classes.</p>
<p>Buy used textbooks. Many colleges offer used textbooks in the school bookstore, and there are plenty of Web sites that sell used texts as well. Just be sure you are buying the edition specified on the course syllabus.</p>
<p>If a work-study job is offered as part of your financial aid package, take advantage of it. You can often find work-study jobs within a department you are interested in, such as assisting a political science professor, or working at the front desk in the campus women's center. Even a seemingly minor job can provide some income, and it can really boost a résumé.</p>
<p>At the end of the semester, take inventory of your textbooks and sell what you no longer need. Sure, maybe that elective Costume Design in the Eighteenth Century class was a blast, but will you need to look at the textbook again? If not, sell it. On the other hand, hold on to any textbooks that were for classes in your major that may become valuable resources in the future.</p>

Spending Worksheet

Keep a copy of the blank spending worksheet with you for a week, or even better, for a month. Where are you spending a lot of money? Are there areas where you can comfortably cut back on spending? You can employ a number of creative strategies for saving money—for example, you may be able to lower your grocery bill by shopping for sale items, getting a store discount card, and using coupons. Use the sample below to guide you.

Date	What did I spend money on?	How much did I spend?	Category?	Necessity?	Notes
April 1	Groceries	\$38	Groceries	Yes	Could I have cut down costs? Everything I bought was full price.
April 1	Rent payment	\$600	Rent	Yes	Nonnegotiable!
April 2	Coffee	\$4	Dining	No	I need my coffee, but I could get a regular instead of a latte and save \$2, or even make coffee at home.
April 2	Music download	\$10	Entertainment	No	This was an impulse buy. Next time, I'll think about it a little longer.
April 4	Lunch—food truck	\$8	Dining	No	I needed lunch and the dining hall was closed, but I didn't really need a cheesesteak AND fries.
April 5	Dinner—restaurant	\$30	Dining	No	This was to celebrate my roommate's birthday—I don't eat out that often.
April 6	Book for class	\$14	Books	Yes	I should have checked the library for this book.
April 6	Magazine	\$5	Entertainment	No	Definitely didn't need this one.
April 6	Tuition payment	\$3200	Tuition	Yes	Nonnegotiable!
April 7	Haircut	\$40	Personal	Yes	I needed a haircut, but I don't need to go to the most expensive place on campus.
April 7	Gas	\$45	Transportation	Yes	I drive EVERYWHERE. I have a bike—I should start using it more.
April 7	Dinner—pizza with friends	\$12	Dining	No	Friday night tradition, and a great chance to unwind. I don't want to give this up.

Next, figure out how much they are spending in each category in a month.

Category	Total Amount
School	
Tuition	
Books	
Other school materials	
Lodging	
Rent	
Utilities	
Transportation	
Car payment	
Car insurance	
Gas	
Car maintenance/repairs	
Public transportation	
Parking	
Communication	
Cell phone	
Internet access	
Entertainment	
TV and Movies (theater or streaming)	
Music (downloads, CDs, concerts)	
Going out with friends	
Other	
Personal	
Clothing	
Personal products	
Other	
Food	
Groceries	
Restaurants	
Other	
Medical expenses	
Other (uncategorized)	
Total:	

Once YOU'VE tracked YOUR spending, figure out their monthly income.

Source of Income	Amount (monthly)
Wages	
Financial aid	
Allowance	
Other	
Total:	

Finally, subtract their total expenses from YOUR income.



If you are left with more than zero at the end of the month, well done! It is a great idea to put that money into a savings account—you will be happy you did once you complete college. If you are left with a negative number, consider prioritizing your expenses and try to omit the least important ones. Incurring unnecessary debt while in college should be avoided if at all possible. If you are struggling to make ends meet, contact your school's financial aid office. They may offer a payment plan, suggest a low-interest student loan for meeting your monthly expenses, or have other ideas to help you out.