Tips for Registering and Succeeding in College Classes

This checklist references sections found in the Postsecondary Education Planning Guide for Adults Supporting California's Foster Youth. Visit jbay.org/resources/ed-planning-guide to access the complete guide.

Considerations Before Enrolling in Classes:

As a student prepares to register for classes, they may want to consider the following questions when selecting their classes:

◆ What additional demands/responsibilities will I need to consider when planning my schedule (e.g., sports, work, children, personal well-being)?

> *Do I plan to work part-time or full-time?*

> *How much transportation time will I need to get to and from school?*

◆ What do I know about myself and my learning style?

> *When am I most alert and able to focus? Am I a morning person or evening person?*

> *Do I like learning by listening/reading or by doing?*

> *Will I want to plan blocks of time between classes to complete homework/group projects/meetings and have time to study?*

◆ What do I need/want to know about the professor before enrolling in a class? Students can check **ratemyprofessors.com** to see what other students have said about professors to help find the one that is right for them.

Understanding Unit Load

When students are determining how many classes to take, it is important to know what the time commitment will be. The chart below breaks down how much time a student will typically spend in class and how much time they are expected to commit to their schoolwork based on their unit load.

Unit (Course) Load	Lecture / Class Time *(instructional time spent in class)*	Study Time *(e.g., reading, reviewing notes, writing essays, studying for exams, etc.)*	Total Academic Time Per Week
1 unit	1 hour	2-3 hours	3-4 hours
3 units = about 1 class (part time)	3 hours	6-9 hours	9-12 hours
6 units = about 2 classes (half-time)	6 hours	12-18 hours	18-24 hours
12 units = about 4 classes (full-time)	12 hours	24-36 hours	36-48 hours
15 units = about 5 classes (full-time)	15 hours	30-45 hours	45-60 hours

Unit Load Impacts Financial Aid - Most financial aid is awarded based on how many units the student is enrolled in. For example, to receive the Chafee Grant or the Cal Grant a student must be enrolled "half time" in at least six units. The Pell Grant and Cal Grant are prorated based on the number of units a student takes. If they are enrolled in at least 12 units they will receive the maximum award amount.

More Than One Way to Be a Full-Time Student at Community College

◆ Community college students can consider a number of ways to set up a full-time schedule with their academic counselor to best meet their needs. Full time is considered taking at least 12 units. For students pursuing an associate's degree, students must take at least 15 units per semester with all coursework counting towards their degree to graduate "on-time" within two years. In a **"traditional"** schedule a student may take four to five classes beginning and ending at the same time. In comparison, **"staggered"** courses have different start and end dates throughout the semester, and **"stacked"** courses have two classes starting at the beginning of the term and two at the middle of the term.

◆ Students who participate in services for students with disabilities may qualify for a reduced course load, which allows eligible students to take fewer classes while still being considered full-time for programs like EOPS or College Promise Programs that require full-time enrollment.

Maintaining Satisfactory Academic Progress

Educate students about the importance of maintaining Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP), which is required to maintain their financial aid. SAP comes down to not dropping too many classes and maintaining a good GPA. Three factors are considered when determining SAP:

◆ **Academic Progress:** Is the student receiving passing grades in the classes they are attempting and earning a minimum grade point average (GPA), typically a 2.0 GPA?

◆ **Unit Completion:** Is the student completing a minimum percentage of units that they attempt each semester? Each college and university has a set "passing rate," often 67% completion.

> *If a student is not doing well in a course, they may decide to withdraw or drop the course rather than get a low grade. While withdrawing can help maintain the student's GPA, it will also result in the student earning a W on their transcript which can impact the student's unit completion rate.*

> *Students who are considering withdrawing from a course should check with their academic counselor and the financial aid office to understand how this will impact their SAP and financial aid.*

◆ **Completion Time:** Students must complete their program within 150% of the published time frame. For example, if a student is attending a community college that requires 60 units for an AA (associate of arts degree), they cannot take more than 90 units to complete the degree.

See the Financial Aid Guide for CA Foster and Unaccompanied Homeless Youth for more tips on maintaining financial aid at jbay.org/resources/financial-aid-guide.

Student Academic Portals, Course Syllabi, and Attendance Policies

◆ **Encourage students to check their academic portal often to view their course syllabi and other relevant course information** (e.g., Canvas, Blackboard). A student should begin checking their academic portal two to five days before the start of a class to ensure they are prepared for the first day of class.

◆ **Work with the student to review their course syllabi.** Students are expected to read the course syllabi carefully and take responsibility for attendance and assignment deadlines. A student who says "I did not know" will often be referred back to the course syllabus.

◆ **Sit with your student to review attendance policies.** Attendance policies are generally standard across most college courses and only allow between three to five absences. Failure to attend class can result in being dropped from the class, which can also impact financial aid and academic standing. Encourage students to talk to their professors if they are experiencing personal hardship that is preventing them from meeting class policies.