College Glossary

Academic Terms

Academic Advisor: Staff members who are assigned to students in their department. They help students choose majors and minors, design a course of study and help ensure students fulfill graduation requirements.

Academic Calendar: The system by which an institution structures its school year. Three common types are semester, quarter and trimester. It also includes important dates such as mid-term and finals testing, deadlines to add or drop courses and when your student account is due to be paid.

Accreditation: Recognition of a college or university by any of the regional or national accrediting bodies, indicating the institution has been judged to be meeting its objectives.

Credit Hour: A unit of academic credit that often represents one hour of class time per week for a period of study.

Faculty: The person at a college or university who is engaged in teaching, research, service or related administrative responsibilities.

Honors Program: Any program offering opportunity for superior students to enrich their educational experience through independent, advanced or accelerated study.

Liberal Arts: Academic studies on subjects in the humanities, social sciences and sciences with a focus on general knowledge.

Pre-professional: Courses which prepare students for later specialized education. For example, "pre-med" includes pre-professional courses in chemistry and biology which are prerequisite for later specialization in medicine.

Prerequisite: The beginning course in a series of courses. It must be taken and passed before enrolling in the next class.

Registrar: The administrative officer of a college or university who maintains academic records.

Semester: Half of an academic year, usually fourteen to sixteen weeks.

TRIO Programs: Federally funded outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services to students from first-generation, limited-income families, as well as students with disabilities. Student Support Services (SSS) is one of eight TRIO programs that include tutoring, counseling and academic advising.

Admissions Terms

Admissions Officer/Counselor/Representative: A professional staff member in the admissions or enrollment services office who provides information about college admissions, financial aid and other college services for prospective applicants, parents, counselors and others.

Admissions Guidelines/Entrance Requirements: Academic requirements for acceptance to a college. Usually high school GPA, ACT or SAT test score, essay and/or recommendation letter.

Deferment: If referring to admission, deferment permits an accepted student to postpone enrollment for a certain length of time.

Deposit: A fee payable within a specified date of acceptance for admission verifying their intention to enroll. The fee may or may not be refundable.

Early Action Application: An application whereby you apply early and receive early notification of admission, but these plans are non-binding. Students should notify the college of their intentions by May 1st.

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Early Decision Application: An application whereby you apply early and receive early notification of an admissions decision. Early decision applications can only be made to one school and are binding agreements.

Fee Waiver: Permits students to submit college applications or test registration forms for free. Waivers may be granted by high schools or colleges to students who meet certain criteria.

Letters of Recommendation: References written by a teacher, coach, or other non-family person that a student submits during the admissions process.

Placement Test: An exam given to students to determine class placement in math, science, or other subjects to align their educational needs with the appropriate coursework.

Rolling Admissions: Applicants can submit their applications to a university anytime in a large time window.

Financial Aid Terms

Consent: The permission given on the FAFSA form to import federal tax information from the IRS to the FAFSA. Consent is required from all contributors to be considered for federal financial aid.

Contributor: Person whose federal tax information is required on the FAFSA.

Cost of Attendance (COA): The total estimated amount, including tuition, fees, books and supplies, transportation, housing and food, and personal expenses, it will cost to go to college. It is usually expressed as a yearly figure and is used to calculate financial need.

Deferment: If referring to financial aid, deferment is a postponement or delay of payment obligation on a student loan.

FAFSA Submission Summary: This is an overview of the information that is put on the FAFSA. It will list a student's SAI and estimated aid. It can be located in the student's portion of the FAFSA and does not contain federal tax information.

Federal Work-study: Provides part time jobs for students with financial need, allowing them to earn a paycheck while in school.

Fees: Additional charges for items not covered under regular tuition, such as labs, activities, technology or parking. Fees may be added based on the credits a student is taking or have one standard charge for all students.

Financial Literacy: The ability to understand and use financial skills, such as budgeting, saving and more.

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (**FAFSA):** The form used to apply for financial aid.

FSA ID: The login that needs to be created by each contributor to complete their sections of the FAFSA.

Grant: A type of financial aid that consists of free money given to the student by the federal or state government, a company, school or charity. The North Dakota State Grant is available to North Dakota residents attending a North Dakota college.

Loan: A type of financial aid that is borrowed from a lender (bank or government) and repaid over an amount of time with interest.

Merit: A type of financial aid, like a scholarship, that is awarded to students who have demonstrated special academic abilities or talents, regardless of financial need.

Net Price Calculator: An online tool that allows students and families to calculate a personalized estimate of the cost of a college or university. Each school will have this tool on their website.

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Offer of Financial Aid/Financial Aid Offer: A combination of financial aid (possibly including a scholarship, grant, loan or work) determined by a college financial aid office.

Prior-prior Year: Financial aid policy that allows students to file the FAFSA with tax data from two years previous to the start of their freshman year. Example: Students starting college in fall of 2027 will use tax information from 2025.

Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP): Used to define successful completion of coursework to maintain eligibility for financial aid. Federal regulations require colleges to establish, publish and apply standards to monitor a student's progress toward completion of his or her degree program.

Scholarships: Nonrepayable awards to students based on merit or merit plus need.

Student Aid Index (Formerly Estimated Family Contribution (EFC)): The number used to determine how much need-based federal aid a student is eligible to receive.

Tuition: Cost to take classes at a college or university.

Verification: A process used to verify information submitted on the FAFSA. Those selected for verification may be asked to submit copies of tax transcripts, W-2 statements or other documentation.

General Terms

ACT Test: American College Test (ACT) is a group of tests required or recommended by most colleges as part of the admission process. The tests measure educational development in English, mathematics, reading and science reasoning. ACT scores range from 1-36.

Advanced Placement (AP): A test given to high school students, usually at the end of their junior or senior year, after they have completed certain AP or Honors courses. Colleges may give advanced standing and/or credit for these tests if a student earns a score of three, four or five.

Apprenticeship: A training program that combines classroom learning and hands-on work in a trade or profession. Apprentices often earn a wage while they learn.

Associate Degree: A degree granted by a college or university for a program designed to be completed in two years.

Bachelor's Degree or Baccalaureate: A degree granted by a college or university designed to be completed in four years.

Career and Technical Education (CTE): This provides students and adults with the academic and technical skills knowledge and training necessary to succeed in future careers.

Certification: A non-degree credential that proves knowledge or skill in a specific area. Valued credentials vary by industry.

Community College: North Dakota has four community colleges: Dakota College at Bottineau, Lake Region State College, North Dakota College of Science and Williston State College. The North Dakota community colleges are associated with the North Dakota University System.

Degree Stacking: This is a sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over time to build up an individual's qualifications.

Dual Credit: A one semester course that earns a high school student both high school and college credit.

Early Entry: College level course that a student takes in high school, earning only college credit. Early entry classes do not impact a students high school GPA or meet high school graduation requirements.

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FERPA: Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974. A federal law designed to protect the privacy of education records, to establish the right of students to inspect and review their education records, and to provide guidelines for the correction of inaccurate data.

Grade Point Average (GPA): An average of all the grades a student has received on a four-point scale.

Internship: Work experience offered by an organization for a limited period of time. Interns develop workplace skills and knowledge, learn about the industry and may make importance connection. Internships may be paid or unpaid.

Major: The subject of study in which the student chooses to specialize; a series of related courses, taken primarily in the junior and senior years.

Minor: A subject a student chooses to have a secondary focus in during his or her undergraduate studies.

North Dakota University System (NDUS): Includes 11 unique campuses: two world-class research institutions, four outstanding regional universities and five vibrant community colleges.

Housing and Food: The cost to live and eat during college. Typically, if students live on campus, there are different housing and meal plan options for them to choose from.

Orientation: Events planned by the college to help students adjust to college life.

Polytechnic Institution: A type of college or university that focuses on providing hand-on, practical and applied education. Bismarck State College is North Dakota's Polytechnic Institution.

Private Colleges/Universities: These institutions are funded by student tuition and private donations rather than state and federal money. North Dakota has three private colleges: Trinity Bible College, University of Mary and University of Jamestown.

Proprietary/For-profit School: This refers to educational institutions operated by private, profit seeking businesses.

Residency Status: In public institutions, the classification of a student or out-of-state resident for tuition. It is based on a student's or their parents' permanent residence is located and the location of the school.

SAT: Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) is a test of verbal and mathematical abilities given by the College Entrance Examination Board. The test is required or recommended by many colleges as part of their admission process.

STEM: An approach to learning and development that integrates the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Technical School: This type of postsecondary school focuses on preparing students for a career.

Transcript: The official record of high school or college courses and grades, generally required as part of the college application.

Tribal College: Federally recognized and tribally governed colleges offering two- and four-year degree programs. North Dakota has five tribal colleges: Cankdeska Cikana Community College, Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College, Sitting Bull College, Turtle Mountain community College and United Tribes Technical College.

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