Navigating College as a New or Returning Student



Whether it's your first time as a college student or you're returning after some time away, starting college can feel both exciting and nerve wracking. There's a lot to balance and figure out, and it's not uncommon to feel lost, confused, or stressed out at points.

This article addresses some of the main concerns incoming students may have, and how you can handle them.

Choosing a Major/Conducting Career Research
It can feel overwhelming trying to find the career paths that are a good fit for you– but you don't have to figure everything out on your own. PCC Career Services is here to support you. You can make an appointment with us at this link or check out different career exploration sites here. Regardless of where you are in your career development process, we can help you navigate your concerns and connect you with the right resources.

Career Exploration

If you're not sure where to begin in terms of selecting a major or deciding on a career path, taking a few Career Assessments is a useful starting point.

- On Focus 2, you can take five assessments with questions about your values, interests, and skills to get results on careers that may be a good fit for you. You can also get information on different career options for your major(s) of interest. The access code to make an account with your PCC email/login is "panther".
- Oregon CIS is an online database with education/transfer, career, and scholarship information. The site offers assessments which analyze your skills and interests to suggest potential career options.

Keep an eye out for upcoming career services webinars that review a variety of topics, including career planning 101: How to Choose a Major or Career. You can check out upcoming webinars at this link.

Career Research

When you have a pretty solid idea of your industry/field of interest but want to learn more in-depth information about your options, it may be time for some more extensive career research.

- ONET is an online database with information on hundreds of different occupations, including job and salary information. It can be useful for narrowing down options and learning more about the wages and employment outlook for different industries and occupations.
- Professional associations are another useful resource for more in-depth information about a specific field. Examples of professional associations include anything from the American Nurses Association to the Society of Environmental Journalists. Getting aligned with organizations in your area of interest can be a good way to be more connected with an industry and get your foot in the door.

Career Services can help you with both career exploration and career research, whether you need assistance navigating the websites, interpreting your assessment results, or figuring out your next steps.

In addition, Academic Advising can help with course planning and scheduling, degree requirements, academic program options, reviewing unofficial transcripts, prerequisite overrides, academic standing concerns, and college success resources.

Study Skills and Time Management
As you navigate studying, working, taking classes, personal responsibilities, and figuring out your future, you may quickly start to feel like there's not enough time in the day.

If you feel yourself falling behind in a certain class or having difficulty studying or completing assignments successfully, PCC's Tutoring Services are here to help. PCC Tutoring offers free support for current students in a variety of subjects, online and in person at all four campuses.

Learn more here about time management.

Self Care Resources
The shift to becoming a full time student and balancing all your responsibilities requires time, effort, and motivation. It's important to prioritize your physical and mental health, even when things get hectic.

Find structure. Create a schedule each week that balances your responsibilities/tasks while setting aside time for taking care of yourself.
Wind down. What relaxes you? Whether you draw, read, walk/jog, meditate, work out, or do a craft or hobby, it's important to have something in your routine that helps you connect with yourself. Here's information on a few free meditation apps that might be a useful place to start.
Stay nourished. Give your body the nutrients it needs, and try to get at least seven hours of sleep whenever possible. If you are facing barriers to getting food, you can visit the Panther Pantry on any campus to access free food and hygienic resources as a current PCC student.
Reach out. You don't have to handle everything alone! Call a friend or family member or catch up over lunch, or join a group activity you enjoy.

PCC offers non-credit community education courses in a variety of subjects including art, music, workout, and cooking.

Learn more here about tools for self care.

Panther Tracks is a resource with guides to student success, covering everything from study skills to loans to student activities. You can explore all the panther tracks here.

Counseling
If you are experiencing significant barriers, difficult emotions, and frustrations with college or career issues, you can speak with a counselor. PCC offers free short term counseling services for students currently enrolled in credit classes. The counseling department also offers different groups and workshops from students, including drop-in sessions for academic stress management.

Student Insight
Below are some comments from a PCC student who works at the career center– reflections and advice based on their experience in college.

Brian
The best advice I can offer is to discover a sustainable way to keep yourself motivated. Trust me; you'll thank me later. Without delving into too many specifics, I'll mention that the path I took to decide on returning to college as an adult was long and arduous. You're likely familiar with the hurdles life throws your way—tuition costs, finding study time amidst a packed schedule—insert various struggles here. In my initial term, I felt a surge of excitement and motivation. After all, I was on the cusp of a journey to reshape my future trajectory. What wasn't there to be excited about? Attaining a college degree had always been my aspiration.

As time passed, that excitement and motivation began to wane. I no longer felt like my usual self. Stress and impending assignment deadlines gradually consumed my existence. What had happened to me? Was

college not meant for me? Was I not intelligent enough? Let me tell you what occurred: I lost all semblance of motivation. Term after term, I powered through on inadequate sleep and excessive caffeine consumption. It became evident that my existing mindset was no longer sustainable. I was compelled to make changes.

A friend of mine suggested revisiting my initial school days—recording my goals and thoughts from that time—and endeavoring to identify the missing piece. Through this process, I realized that what was absent was travel. Prior to beginning college, international travel had played a significant role in my life and was a major factor driving my pursuit of a degree. My ambition was to acquire new skills that would eventually allow me to work remotely and explore the world at the same time.

Soon, I formulated a plan to reignite my passion for travel. I began making conscious efforts to organize brief getaways whenever possible and immersed myself in travel blogs to fuel my future adventures. These steps boosted my motivation levels and reignited my focus.

The moral of my story is to uncover that motivational element and to prioritize it. It might be challenging at first but don’t give up. Once identified, it will serve as a source of motivation during the most challenging of times.