



Academics

Adapted from Auburn University, International Student and Scholar Orientation Handbook, 2005, author unknown.

As an international student, you may find American teaching methods and practices quite different from those you are used to. Undergraduate college programs generally require four to five years of study, master programs involve usually two further years of study, and doctoral programs three or more years beyond the master's level. Degree specialization comes later in the U.S.A. system than it does in most other countries. It is not until the third year of undergraduate work that a student concentrates on the study of his "major" field. There is further specialization in graduate work, especially as students undertake research for their thesis or dissertation. Regular class attendance, preparation for frequent examinations throughout the term, and participation in class discussions are all expected in the U.S.A. educational system.

International students often find the classroom atmosphere and the student/professor relationship very casual and informal. In general, professors welcome questions from students and encourage student participation in class discussions. Never hesitate to ask a question about something you do not understand. In many classes the professor expects discussion, questions, and input by class members. In smaller classes, part of your grade may be based on verbal contributions in class. If the limitations of class size and/or time do not permit questions to be asked during class periods, you may bring them to the professor during his/her office hours.

Professors are required to keep regular office hours and will usually announce them during the first or second class meeting. Office hours and appointments are intended specifically to provide student-professor contact. Some instructors prefer to make individual appointments with students. It is recommended that you visit your instructor only during his or her office hours unless you make an appointment for another time. Also, professors will often provide an outline of the course, known as a syllabus. This guide is designed to help you understand the goals, format, and grading system of the course. If you have questions about the syllabus, what the course will cover, or the evaluation system in the class, ask the instructor.

Instruction is given in courses, the credit for which is measured in semester hours. Most courses meet three hours a week during the Fall and Spring semesters and have a value of three credit hours for one semester. For each hour a course meets, an average of two hours of preparation is expected of the student.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is theft and misrepresentation. It refers to the act of stealing and passing off, as one's own, the words or ideas that are the property of another. Plagiarism usually takes the form of copying or paraphrasing, without proper acknowledgment, the words or ideas of a professional scholar or critic. Copying or taking credit for someone else's writing as if it were your own, brings serious consequences. If you use another person's words or thoughts, it is very important to give the person credit. There are resources and handbooks that contain information on the correct procedures.

Coursework

Many courses will require a "term paper" or a "paper" to be written. A term paper is based on study or research you have done in the laboratory or library. Your teacher will usually assign a term paper in the early part of the course. You are expected to work on it during the semester and submit it towards the end of the class. Term papers usually constitute a significant portion of your course grade. It is a good idea to write the paper well in advance of the due date so that you can take the paper to the Writing Center so they can read it and suggest revisions.

You will have many examinations during your studies at VMI. Almost every class has a "final examination" at the end of the semester. Finals are given during the week after the last day of classes each semester.

Most classes will have a "mid-semester examination" near the middle of the semester. There may be additional "tests," "quizzes," and small papers throughout the semester. These tests are designed to assure that students are doing their work and to determine how much they are learning. Some teachers will give "take-home examinations" either as final exams or during the semester. You are expected to take them home and work on them by **yourself**.

There are two basic types of examinations: objective and subjective. An objective exam tests a student's knowledge of specific facts. These exams can be difficult because there are often subtle differences in meaning that require a sophisticated knowledge of English. Questions on objective exams are usually multiple choice, true and false, matching, identification and fill-in blanks. Subjective examinations require the student to answer "essay questions." This type of exam tests a student's ability to organize and state his or her knowledge of a particular subject. It should be remembered that you should **never** look at another student's paper during an examination. This is called "cheating" and may result in a "zero" grade for the examination and disciplinary action.

Textbooks

You can purchase textbooks at the VMI Bookstore, located in Lejeune Hall or online. Textbooks may be purchased new or used. Used textbooks are usually priced considerably cheaper than new books. It is usually advisable to wait until classes begin to buy your textbooks, this way you can be sure of buying the correct edition. If you do not wish to keep your textbooks, they may be sold back to the bookstore at the end of each semester. Unfortunately you will not get much money back when you sell your textbooks.

Places to Go for Academic Help

[Miller Academic Center](#)

Cadets obtain personal academic counseling from specialized counselors and engage in peer tutoring and mentoring programs.

[The Institute Writing Center](#)

Working closely with writing experts, cadets improve writing in various disciplines.

Top 10 List of Common Student Mistakes

Getting through college doesn't take genius level intellect or luck, but it does require you to work smart while you're working hard. "The secret isn't so much brain power as willpower and time management," says Dr. E. Glenn Griffin, Professor Emeritus at Purdue University. The following is taken from Dr. Griffin's 10 Most Common Mistakes.

Cramming: You never do your best work by waiting until the last minute; you just trick yourself into believing that. The only way to learn is to read and review material until it becomes set in your long-term memory. Cramming is the equivalent of moving a house in one shot with a Yugo.

Going to Class Unprepared: If you don't know what the lecture is about then you can't study later. Expecting to "get it" later is dangerous.

Waiting Until Late At Night to Study: If you waste daytime hours, you won't remember the material as well when you pull an "all-nighter." You also will want to sleep and talk yourself into not studying long or not at all.

Reading Chapters Without Thinking: Write notes while reading and stop to work with the material. You have to comprehend the material to pass it.

Waiting to Long to get help > Get Help Quickly: Don't wait until you are drowning before asking for help. Ask your professor questions before the test; it makes you look good and helps you understand the material. The sooner, the better.

Not Listening in Class: You will learn much more by listening and discussion than you can from just reading the textbook.

Not Participating in Class: You have to pursue education and that means taking an active part in the classroom.

Failing to Review Notes After Class: Right after class, the notes and ideas are still fresh. Don't count on remembering what you wrote or thought that night.

Neglecting to Review: Periodically review what you have covered in class. You spend less time studying for exams because you know it already.

Not Getting Involved: Take advantage of all the diverse and helpful programs that VMI has; your educational benefit is the reason we have them.