

FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS AT USC:

Strategies for Success

2019



USC University of
Southern California





First-Generation Students at USC

Welcome to the Trojan Family! We are honored you chose USC to be your home for your undergraduate experience.

At USC, **17%** of the first-year undergraduate population are first-generation students.

At USC, we define first-generation students as those whose parents do not have four-year degrees. Even if you have older siblings who are currently attending or have graduated from college, you are considered part of the first generation to enroll in, and eventually complete, college.

We are proud to have you here at USC. We have many resources and support services to help you navigate your college experience, and this guide will help prepare you for success at USC.

Do you consider yourself an independent learner?

If not, what's your plan for becoming one? What are some of your other learning styles? How can they help you be successful in a college environment?

Transitioning from High School to College

Class Times and Scheduling

Perhaps one of the biggest changes you will need to adjust to is the idea of going to class throughout the day, even well into the evening. Unlike high school classes, university classes are offered from 8:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. This means that you will need to manage your time differently, as you will have various gaps during the day. What will you do to use that time wisely (including taking time to eat)? Make sure to be mentally and physically ready to address this change in your routine.



Professors and Teaching Assistants (TAs)

Some courses, such as General Education (GE) and other large lecture classes, will have a professor and teaching assistants (TAs). TAs tend to be graduate students (often PhD students) who are in the process of becoming a professor or researcher. Sometimes, the TAs have more of a teaching role than the professors, and they may be the ones to grade assignments and examinations. Be sure to seek assistance and familiarize yourself with the professors and TAs for your classes.



Assignments and Due Dates

Submitting assignments (such as homework, lab work or other materials required by a class) on time, by the deadlines, is your responsibility. Professors may not provide you with constant reminders of due dates. Be sure to review the syllabus and note deadlines and important dates.



Grades

Outstanding grades are often harder to earn in college. Yes, the work is more intense and difficult. But professors are also not held to grading systems that you may have become familiar with in the past. Some college courses may grade on a curve, while others may follow a specific set of points or a scale. Depending on the class, a “B” can be considered a superior grade. Always check your syllabus for details about grading. If you have questions, talk with your professors and teaching assistants about grades and go over the expectations and standards for outstanding work.

Choosing Classes and Registration

Each semester, you will be assigned a specific time and date to register for the following term. Until you have earned 24 units of credit at USC, you will need to meet with your academic advisor to complete your course registration (see “Mandatory Advisement” on page 9). Once you have earned 24 units, you will register on your own.

At USC, all students are required to complete a liberal arts core called General Education. These classes help ensure that you are knowledgeable about a range of subjects and that you graduate as a well-rounded individual. You will want to create variety in your schedule by balancing your major-related coursework with General Education classes, increasing your exposure to different disciplines each semester.

Important Note: You should always speak to your academic advisor (at least once a semester) to make sure you are on track. Ideally, you should do this a few weeks before your registration day and time.

Ask for Help!

This is a big one. Many times, college students do not realize how much assistance is available on campus. Our mission is to ensure student success, and we do that by offering a variety of resources to support your endeavors. Don't let your assumptions about college, competition in the classroom or the need for help prevent you from seeking assistance. In fact, students who seek out support, create study groups, speak to their instructors and ask the most questions ultimately do the best. The next time you hear the word “resource,” don't brush it off. Take note of what the resource is and how it can help you in the future!





Staying on the Path to College Success

Utilize resources: There are a multitude of support services on our campus designed to promote and guide student success. Many of these resources are listed at the end of this guide. Before the school year begins, we encourage you to explore these services' websites to better understand the resources provided.

Visit your professor during office hours: This is a great opportunity to ask for help on course materials, or simply to get to know your professors better. Check your professors' course syllabi for the times they are available to meet with students outside of class.

Make appointments with your academic advisor: Academic advisors are USC staff members who help students select their courses and navigate their undergraduate academic experience. Not only do advisors make sure students stay on track for graduation, but they are able to connect students to a variety of campus opportunities.

Use a planner, phone calendar or paper calendar to stay organized: A college schedule is very different from what you might have been used to in high school. Use a paper or digital calendar to keep track of your class schedule, assignments due and any other responsibilities such as club meetings or part-time work.

Get involved in student organizations: USC has nearly 1,000 student clubs and organizations. While this may seem overwhelming, this wide variety means that most students will find their niche on campus. We encourage you to check out the Involvement Fair during Welcome Week (the first week of each semester). This is a great opportunity to learn about the various organizations at USC and to join the ones that interest you. You can always start with one or two organizations, and then add more as you progress through your studies at USC.

Do you have a system for taking class notes?

What if the lecture is three hours long and the instructor talks fast? Could you keep up? What tools do you have in mind when thinking about note-taking?

Financial Fitness

Understanding and managing your finances is a major part of college life. You will face new financial responsibilities, including paying for tuition and completing financial aid forms. Several resources exist to help you maintain financial fitness and manage the ways in which you spend your money.

Here are some tips to help get you started:

- **Create a budget** for yourself and stick to it.
- **Always look for student discounts.** The USC Ticket Office offers discounts for items such as movie tickets and other activities. Research bargains and all the ways you can save money on activities. In addition, USC provides and hosts activities that you can participate in for little or no cost, such as in your residence hall or through Campus Activities. Stay up-to-date with campus events. www.uscticketoffice.com • campusactivities.usc.edu • calendar.usc.edu
- **Buy used or discounted books.** Check the USC Bookstore for used copies and/or visit the Amazon website for discounts. Alternatively, see if the books are available in any of the campus libraries. www.uscbookstore.com • amazon.com • libraries.usc.edu
- **Save the dates.** Check the Financial Aid Office's website or their Twitter feed for dates and deadlines, and keep track of them in your calendar. Talk to a financial aid counselor about what kinds of aid you may qualify for. You may be surprised at how much aid is available to you. Be sure to submit your financial aid and scholarship applications by the posted deadlines, though. Missing a deadline could mean missing out on a good opportunity! financialaid.usc.edu • twitter.com/uscfinancialaid
- **Be careful with credit cards.** Using credit can help you in a pinch, but it can become a trap if you're unable to pay off balances each month. Don't take on more debt than you're able to repay.
- **Assess what's important.** Think about what you spend your money on and what matters most to you. Consider how peer pressure and certain assumptions about spending money and material possessions can get in the way of saving money. Choose to spend your money on the things that are most important to you and that add value to your college experience.



What is your study strategy?

How do you study? Do you have specific requirements when it comes to studying, such as the type of environment, noise level, time of day, etc.?



Breaking Down the Code: Dictionary of College Terminology

Academic Advisor: A full-time, professional staff member who individually assists students with their course plans and college progress. They advise students regarding what classes to take, as well as other opportunities at USC. Students are assigned an academic advisor by the time they attend Orientation.

Bachelor's Degree: A four-year degree obtained at a college or university. After you complete your degree requirements at USC, you will have earned a bachelor's degree.

College or School: An academic division within the larger context of USC. For example, the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences is the college for majors in the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. The Viterbi School of Engineering is the school for engineering majors.

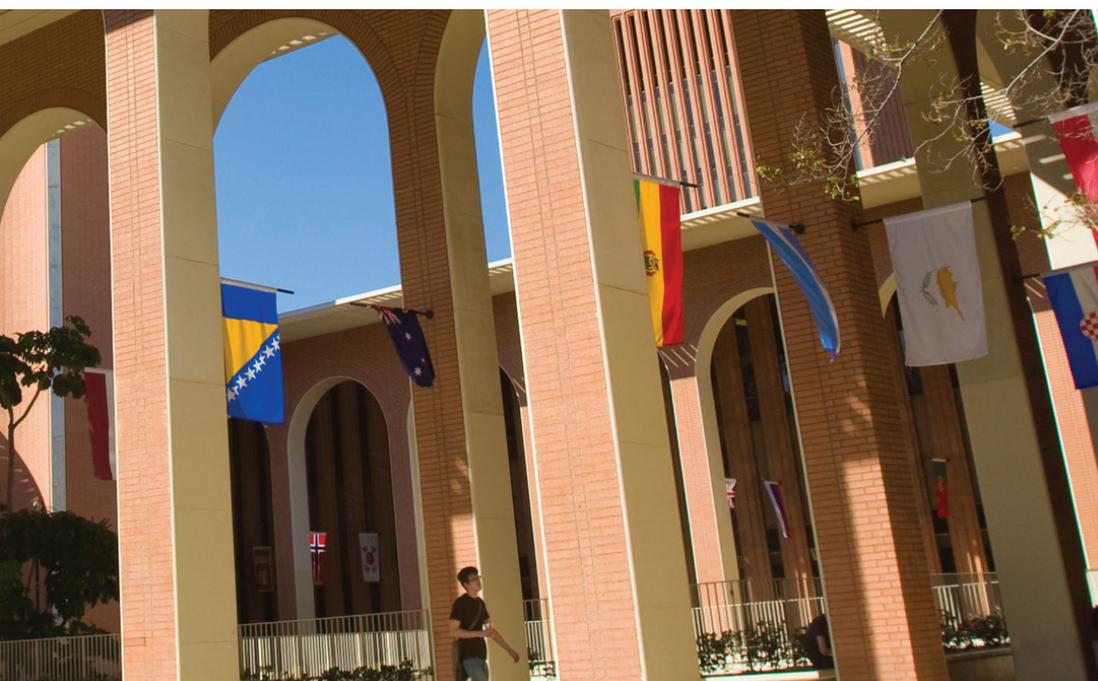
Co-requisites: Courses that must be taken either before or in the same semester as a particular course in a prescribed sequence of courses.

Course Number: A number assigned to each course offered at the university. It consists of the academic department abbreviation and a three-digit number that indicates the particular class and its level or difficulty. For example, the course number for Principles of Microeconomics is ECON 203. "ECON" indicates that it is an Economics course. Courses at the 200-level are typically sophomore- or second-level courses.

Course Withdrawal: When a student decides to no longer take a course that they have already enrolled in. Depending on when the student withdraws from the course, the course may or may not appear on a transcript and the withdrawal may or may not affect the student's grade point average.

Curriculum: The prescribed classes in a program of study needed to complete a degree at a given institution.

Dean: A senior university administrator. Every college or school at USC has a dean.



Department: A smaller unit within a college or school at USC. For example, Psychology and Biology are departments within the Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences.

Discussion Section: Most large classes at USC will have an associated discussion section. These smaller and shorter sessions allow students to review and discuss the material taught in the course that week. Teaching assistants usually lead these sections.

Double Major: When students are completing two majors within the same academic school.

Drop/Add: The first three weeks of each semester, during which students can make changes to their course schedules (add and/or drop courses) without penalty.

Electives: Courses that are taken to meet degree requirements but do not satisfy General Education or major requirements. Students typically choose their electives based on interest or curiosity, or the applicability to a second major or minor(s).

Faculty: Professors who teach courses at USC.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA): A federal law that requires universities to protect the

privacy of student education records and allows students the right to inspect their own records. USC abides by FERPA and allows students to view their records as stated in the university's Student Education Records policy.

Federal Work-Study: A form of financial aid that allows students to work part-time on campus and earn money for college expenses, up to a set maximum amount. Most students can earn between \$2,500 and \$3,500 per academic year.

First-Generation: A student whose parents do not have four-year degrees.

First-Year Seminars: These 2-unit elective courses can be taken only during the first year at USC. These seminars offer a small course format and do not last the entire semester.

General Education: The General Education program comprises a series of liberal arts courses that all students, regardless of their majors, are required to complete. Courses are designed to ensure that you are knowledgeable about a broad range of topics and will graduate as a well-rounded individual. Students take one to two courses in each of eight categories to satisfy the requirements.



Greek Life: Student organizations that are referred to as fraternities and sororities. At USC, there are several Greek Councils, including multicultural and professional organizations, that oversee them. To participate in Greek life, USC students are required to have earned at least 12 units in USC coursework and maintain a 2.5 grade point average.

Internship: Work experience related to career goals. Internships can be paid or unpaid. Many students do internships at local companies to gain experience in their field of interest. Students can receive college credit for unpaid internships.

Lab: A hands-on portion of a course typically offered in conjunction with science lectures. Labs give students the chance to test out the theories and concepts covered in the lecture.

Leave of Absence: Procedure designed to allow a student to take a leave from their academic career at the university and return to their studies at a later date.

Lecture: Also known as a class. This is the period of a class when a professor teaches new material to students.

Lower Division: Refers to courses that are numbered 299 and lower. Lower-division courses typically cover broader topics and set a foundation for future courses.

Major: A student's main focus of study. Students must take a required set of courses to complete a major. A student earns a bachelor's degree in this particular field of study.



How will you deal with stress?

Stress is a natural phenomenon that everyone goes through. How you deal with it will be important as you transition to a new college environment. Think of four to five things that help you alleviate stress, write them down and refer to them when you need a break.

Mandatory Advisement: A requirement that all students meet with their assigned Academic Advisors each semester for course registration until they have completed at least 24 units at USC.

Meal Plan: A pre-paid account for your on-campus meals. Your semester bill will have a meal plan fee, which covers the meals you will eat in the dining halls. There are various meal plan options. Some include Dining Dollars that can be used to purchase food from cafés and other eateries on campus.

Minor: An academic area in which a student can choose to study. Typically require less of a time commitment than a major (16-24 units).

OASIS: Stands for “On-line Academic Student Information System.” OASIS is an online portal that provides students with access to their academic records, information about any restrictions (or “holds”) on their accounts, and registration information.

OASIS for Guests: An online portal through which authorized guests can access and view a student’s academic records. Students must grant guest access through their own OASIS accounts before a guest will be able to view any records.

Orientation: Orientation events serve as students’ first in-depth introduction to campus life. Orientation covers the numerous resources available, and allows students to meet various staff and faculty, as well as future classmates. Students attend Orientation before the start of their first semester and register for their first semester of courses.



How do you think your relationships with your family will change when you go to college?

What do you want those relationships to look like?
What will you need to do to establish and maintain these new relationships?



Part-Time: Enrollment in fewer than 12 (undergraduate) semester units.

Pass/No Pass (P/NP): A grading option available to students for courses. Students may not apply this grading option to their major and minor courses and are limited to the number of units that may count towards their General Education (GE) requirements.

Prerequisite: A required skillset or course history that must be completed in order to take an advanced-level course.

Registrar: University official in charge of keeping and maintaining student records.

Resident Assistant (RA): A student staff member that lives on a floor in a residence hall. The RA provides support services and mentorship to residents, and ensures that policies are enforced.

SCampus: USC's online student handbook that serves as a guide to all university policies. Look for it at scampus.usc.edu.

Second Degree: When a student is completing two majors in separate academic schools.

STARS Report: A report that contains all USC coursework and accepted transfer work that applies toward degree requirements. Students can access their STARS report through OASIS.

Syllabus: A document that outlines the schedule, expectations and assignments for a course.

Teaching Assistant (TA): Typically graduate students, TAs often support professors in the classroom and take on duties such as grading assignments and exams as well as facilitating discussion sections.

Transcript: The official record of the courses a student has taken and the grades they earned.

Transfer Credit Report (TCR): A report that contains all transferable coursework applicable toward the USC degree. TCRs are generated by USC's Undergraduate Transfer Services and made available before the student's first semester at USC. Academic advisors use them to help students plan their USC coursework.



TrojansAlert: USC's emergency alert system. Students receive text messages and emails if there is emergency activity on or near campus.

Undergraduate Students: The student population earning bachelor's degrees at a university.

Units: The number of college credits that students may earn for a course. In general, one unit is equivalent to one hour (per week) of course time. USC courses can range from one to four units, with most being three or four units. Note that most 4-unit courses at USC meet for only three hours per week.

Upper Division: Refers to courses that are numbered 300 and higher. Upper-division courses typically cover more specific, specialized topics with the expectation that students have acquired a foundation of knowledge before taking the course.

USC Catalogue: The university's official online document of record. It covers the university's admission, academic and financial aid policies, and defines degree and major requirements for all majors and minors offered during that academic year.



Departments & Services

Admission

(213) 740-1111
admission.usc.edu

American Language Institute

(213) 740-0079
dornsife.usc.edu/ali

Asian Pacific American Students Services

(213) 740-4999
apass.usc.edu

Athletic Administration

(213) 740-3843
www.usctrojans.com

Bookstore

(213) 740-0066
www.uscbookstore.com

Campus Activities

(213) 740-5693
campusactivities.usc.edu

Campus Tours

(213) 740-6605
admission.usc.edu/visitusc

Career Center

(213) 740-9111
careers.usc.edu

Cashier's Office

(213) 740-7471
sfs.usc.edu

Center for Academic Support

(213) 740-1741
undergrad.usc.edu/services

Center for Black Cultural and Student Affairs

(213) 740-8257
cbcsa.usc.edu

Disability Services and Programs

(213) 740-0776
Video Phone
(213) 814-4618
dsp.usc.edu

El Centro Chicano

(213) 740-1480
elcentro.usc.edu

Financial Aid

(213) 740-4444
financialaid.usc.edu

Fraternity and Sorority Leadership Development

(213) 821-1639
greeklife.usc.edu

Housing

(213) 740-2546
housing.usc.edu

International Services

(213) 740-2666
ois.usc.edu

Kortschak Center for Creativity and Learning

(213) 740-7884
kortschakcenter.usc.edu

LGBT Resource Center

(213) 740-7619
lgbtrc.usc.edu

Libraries

(213) 740-2543
libraries.usc.edu

Orientation Programs

(213) 740-7767
orientation.usc.edu

Overseas Studies

(213) 740-3636
dornsife.usc.edu/
overseas

Registration

(213) 740-8500
www.usc.edu/
registration

Religious Life

(213) 740-6110
orl.usc.edu

ROTC

Air Force

(213) 740-2670
priceschool.usc.edu/
programs/afrotc

Army

(213) 740-1850
uscrotc.com

Navy/Marines

(213) 740-1844
priceschool.usc.edu/
programs/nrotc

Student Financial Services

(213) 740-4077
sfs.usc.edu

Student Health

(213) 740-9355
studenthealth.usc.edu

Counseling Services

(213) 740-7711
studenthealth.usc.
edu/counseling

Testing Services

(213) 740-7166
undergrad.usc.edu/
services/testing

Undergraduate Honors Programs

(Resident Honors Program, Freshman Science Honors, Thematic Option)
(213) 740-2955
dornsife.usc.edu/honors

Undergraduate Transfer Credit

(213) 740-4628
arr.usc.edu/transfercrredit

University Operator

(213) 740-2311

USC Credit Union

(877) 670-5860
www.usccreditunion.org

USC Support and Advocacy

(213) 821-4710
studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

USC Card Services

(213) 740-8709
mycard.usc.edu

Veteran Certification Office

(213) 740-4619
www.usc.edu/va

Need to switch majors or add a minor?

Meet with your advisor, who can refer you to the appropriate department. You will then need to meet with an academic advisor for the program you are interested in. They can go over the program's requirements and the next steps you will need to take.

Schools & Programs

Accounting and Business

(213) 740-8885
marshall.usc.edu

Architecture

(213) 740-2420
(800) 281-8616
arch.usc.edu

Art and Design

(213) 740-ARTS (2787)
roski.usc.edu

Arts, Technology and the Business of Innovation

(213) 821-6140
iovine-young.usc.edu

Cinematic Arts

(213) 740-8358
cinema.usc.edu

Communication and Journalism

(213) 821-0770
annenbergl.usc.edu

Dance

(213) 740-9327
kaufman.usc.edu

Dentistry

(213) 740-2841
dentistry.usc.edu

Dramatic Arts

(213) 740-1286
dramaticarts.usc.edu

Engineering

(213) 740-4530
viterbi.usc.edu

Gerontology

(213) 740-5156
gero.usc.edu

Letters, Arts and Sciences

(213) 740-5930
dornsife.usc.edu

Music

(213) 740-8986
(800) 872-2213
music.usc.edu

Occupational Therapy

(323) 442-2850
(866) 385-4250
chan.usc.edu

Pharmacy

(323) 442-1369
pharmacyschool.usc.edu

Preventive Medicine

(213) 740-1060
hdpd.usc.edu

Public Policy

(213) 740-6842
priceschool.usc.edu





USC University of
Southern California

Student Development Programs

University of Southern California

Los Angeles, California 90089-0892

sdpesd@usc.edu

The University of Southern California admits students of any race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical disability or mental disability to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. It does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical disability or mental disability in the administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school administered programs. The University's full nondiscrimination policy can be found on the Web at **policies.usc.edu**.

The University of Southern California complies with all federal and state laws that protect individuals with disabilities from discrimination based on their disability status. As such, reasonable accommodations and auxiliary aids and services are available to individuals with disabilities when such modifications and services are necessary to fully access the institution's programs and services. Disability Services and Programs (DSP) provides accommodations and services to enrolled students with disabilities. Applicants and registered students with questions may contact the Office of Disability Services and Programs, at **dsp.usc.edu**. The university's ADA/504 Coordinator is Christine Street. She may be reached at **streetc@usc.edu**.