Navigating Virginia Western Community College:

A Guide for Ageless Learners

Spring 2014
Going to college at any age can be a challenge. For those returning to school after years of working a job or managing a home and family, even going through the enrollment process can be demanding. Virginia Western Community College (VWCC) recognizes this, which is why in spring 2013 the college became part of the American Association of Community Colleges’ Plus 50 Initiative.

The Plus 50 program was started nationally in 2008 to help laid-off workers get back to the labor force. It has expanded beyond workforce training and career development to include learning and enrichment and volunteering for the group often referred to as “age-less learners.” More than 21 percent of Virginia’s part-time college students are over the age of 40, according to the American Association of Community Colleges 2012 statistics.

Adult learners bring much experience to the classroom, but they also have many commitments beyond school. Some of you might be concerned about assuming the role of student.

This guide is designed to smooth your re-entry into education by preparing you for what you will encounter and explaining how you can navigate your way to success.

### Plus 50 Considerations

Here are questions to think about. You do not necessarily need to have the answers yet. Learning is a lifelong process.

- Why am I going to college? What is my goal? Complete this statement as part of your planning your college time: “I want to .... ”
- How many hours a week do I have for school? For study?
- Am I up-to-speed on computer use? If not, do I have access to a computer to practice? Are there classes available to improve my skills?
- Do I have transportation concerns?

**Suggestions for ageless learners from VWCC’s New Student Advising Center:**

1. Don’t doubt your abilities.
2. Expect teachers to be glad to see you.
3. If school seems stressful, enroll part-time.
4. Enlist the support of your spouse, partner, or family.
5. Consider weekend or evening courses.
6. Develop peer support by sharing your plans with friends or coworkers.
7. Take review courses or a course in how to study.
8. Be realistic about how much time you have to devote to school.
## Getting Started Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read “A Guide for Ageless Learners”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complete application for admission to the college</td>
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<td>Complete financial aid forms, as needed</td>
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<td>Learn how to use your student email account</td>
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<td>Look for scholarships through the Virginia Western Foundation office</td>
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<td>Order official copies of your high school and/or college transcripts, if needed</td>
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<td>Review the schedule of classes for the upcoming semester</td>
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<td>Get advising assistance on choosing courses</td>
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<td>Take placement tests for courses requiring them</td>
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<tr>
<td>Register online for classes; pay online, in person or with payment plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buy any books needed online or at the Bookstore in Craig Hall on South Campus</td>
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<td>Take some time to bring your computer skills up to par, if necessary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Check out the campus; note parking areas near your classes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visit the library and other campus services if time allows</td>
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<td>Login to your Blackboard site</td>
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<tr>
<td>Once your classes are posted, create an assignment calendar</td>
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<td>Make a note of your instructors’ names and email addresses</td>
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<tr>
<td>If you plan to use a laptop on campus, set up a VWCC Wi-Fi connection; see instructions online or contact Help Desk, Room M273, 540-857-7354</td>
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SERVICES:

Admissions
Chapman Hall, C108
http://virginiawestern.edu/admissions/seniors.php
540-857-7231
admissions@virginiawestern.edu

Adult Career Coaches
Receive assistance with:
• Exploring career options
• Researching earning and growth potential of career paths
• Setting learning goals and overcoming obstacles
http://www.virginiawestern.edu/workforce/careercoach.php
Amanda Decker
540-857-6279,
adenecker@virginiawestern.edu
Debra Squire
540-857-6296 dsquire@virginiawestern.edu

Hall Associates Career Center
Learn how to search for employment
540-857-6326

Advising Center
Chapman Hall, Room 105,
Get help planning a program of study
http://virginiawestern.edu/services/advising/index.php
540-857-7237

Campus Police & Safety
http://www.virginiawestern.edu/services/handbook/safety.php

Financial Aid
Chapman Hall, C106
http://virginiawestern.edu/financialaid/index.php
540-857-7331
finaid@virginiawestern.edu

Library
Brown Library
http://virginiawestern.edu/library/index.php
540-857-7303

Scholarships
Fishburn Hall
Carolyn Payne, Scholarship Program Coordinator
540-857-6371
cpayne@virginiawestern.edu

Student Consumer Information
Chapman Hall, Room 102
http://virginiawestern.edu/services/studentconsumerinfo.php
Dean of Student Services
540-857-6348

Tutoring/ The Academic Link
Brown Library Building Main Floor
(1-on-1/Group)
Walk-in Math and Writing Tutoring; Online Tutoring; Academic Skills Coaching
http://virginiawestern.edu/services/link/index.php
540-857-6442
tutoring@virginiawestern.edu

SPECIAL AMENITIES:

Fitness Center
Located on first floor of new Student Services Building (opens Fall 2014); cardio and strength equipment and free weights; showers, lockers. 540-857-6326

Campus/Community Services
http://www.virginiawestern.edu/facstaff/campuscommunityres.php

Finding Food on Campus:
Vending machines are located in several places, but real food is available (generally 7:30 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday-Thursday; closes earlier on Fridays) during fall and spring semesters in the Campus Commons, First Floor Business Science Building. Vendors include Domino’s Pizza and Java the Hutt. Subway scheduled to open in Fall 2014 in Student Services Building.
http://www.virginiawestern.edu/studentlife/campus_facilities.php

Student Discounts:
A number of businesses offer discounts to students. The discounts require you have a valid Student ID card.
http://www.virginiawestern.edu/studentlife/discounts.php

Printing Services
WEPA
http://www.virginiawestern.edu/iet/tech4students/printing/

Public Computer Labs
http://www.virginiawestern.edu/services/ltc/labs.php

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION:

Botetourt Resource Center
Botetourt Resource Center
Senior transportation for Botetourt residents.
540-985-0131 or 540-254-1468

CORTRAN
Services to Roanoke County residents who complete applications; must be 60 years or older or eligible under ADA guidelines; Monday through Friday.
www.radartransit.org
540-343-1721 Ext. 4

RADAR
Services in Roanoke City and County include transportation for physically disabled or transportation for disadvantaged individuals. www.radartransit.org
540-343-1721

Ride Solutions
Ridesharing/carpool matching for persons commuting into or out from Roanoke, New River Valley, greater Lynchburg and
surrounding region.
540-342-9393

Valley Metro
Free rides Monday-Friday to students who show their VWCC ID.
540-982-0305

Valley Metro Star
Transportation provided to individuals in Roanoke City, Vinton or Salem who are “functionally” unable to use Valley Metro some or all of the time; must complete registration.
Call 540-982-2222 for application; approval process generally takes about two weeks.
www.radartransit.org
540-343-1721, Ext. 3

**IMPORTANT VOCABULARY TERMS**

**Articulation agreement**
An agreement between community colleges and four-year universities that permit a student to transfer credits towards graduation at the four-year school. The agreement states, among other things, the exact courses and specific letter grades that can be transferred. The goal is a smooth, transparent transition to the four-year institution by an informed transfer student.

**Matriculation**
Matriculation refers to the formal process of entering a college or university with the distinct intention of earning a degree.

**Retool**
Improve the chances of job seeking in a different industry by taking courses that are directed toward learning the necessary new skills.

**Dynamic classes**
Any class that does not follow the standard enrollment deadline.

**Hybrid classes**
Classes delivered partly in the classroom and partly on the web.

**Power Hour Program**
Assistance for students who require more intense tutoring than is available in Virginia Western's Math, Writing and Academic labs; one-on-one tutoring several times. A free service.

**GETTING STARTED**
Even if you aren’t arriving at college right out of high school, you will do just fine. In fact, sharing your experiences with other class members will enrich them. Community college student bodies traditionally have been a mix of ages and experiences.

Adult Learner Orientation sessions will be offered prior to the fall and spring semesters. To learn more about Virginia
Plus 50 QUICK REFERENCE

Western Community College and gather information about becoming an Adult Learner, please plan to attend one of the orientation sessions. They will be announced on the VWCC web site home page under the Calendar.

Think your computer skills are rusty? VWCC can help you get up to speed, or refer you to other resources. Has it been a while since you had to study for an exam? Worried about math and English skills? Don’t be. The college has special classes and tutoring to help with those. Check out the handy Resource Guide in this guidebook.

Support systems for students are everywhere, however to take advantage of them, you need to officially become a student. This generally involves six steps:

- apply for admission
- complete Financial Aid forms (if you need aid)
- take the placement tests
- review the upcoming semester schedule
- register for classes
- pay tuition

**Step 1 — Seek Advising Assistance**

**Persons who want only enrichment courses** may start with the Admissions Office.

**Find Your New Career or Update Job Skills**

Talk with an Adult Career Coach or Advising Specialist: VWCC has extensive advising opportunities for you to get help in making decisions about courses of study.

- **New Student Advisors** are in Chapman Hall, room 105; phone: 540-857-7237. Each Academic School has an Advising Liaison who is versed in available career pathways in the programs of study included in that school.

- **Workforce Development Adult Career Coaches** can guide you through plans for educational and career training as well as provide access to multiple resources that will help you be successful. If you are coming to college for retraining or to start a new career, you should go directly to an Adult Career Coach in the Workforce Development office. Call Amanda Decker at 540-857-6279, email adecker@virginiawestern.edu or Debra Squire at 540-857-6296, email dsquire@virginiawestern.edu 40-857-6675 or send an email for an appointment to careercoaches@virginiawestern.edu.

These coaches will assist you through the processes discussed here. It would be helpful, though, if you read through the processes before your meeting with the Adult Career Coach.

**Step 2 — Completing the Application:**
Prepare for the application process by gathering up the following items that apply to you.

- **Official transcripts from high school or other colleges attended (keep them sealed)**
- Driver’s license
- Voter registration card
- Social security card (required for financial aid)
- Immigration documents
- Military papers
- Tax documents (if need later for financial aid application)

Whether you **start with an Adult Career Coach** or **go directly to Admissions**, you have three ways to complete the application. Choose the one that makes you most comfortable.

1. If you use a computer regularly, go to the Admissions homepage at www.virginiawestern.edu. Choose “Future Students” from the top menu, and select “Apply Now”) and go through the application process. You can find instructions to review under Help.

2. If you are not so comfortable with computers, but do use one, go to the college Admissions website and download the application and complete it by hand.

3. If a mouse means only a “furry creature” to you, call Admissions at 540-857-7231 or drop by the Admissions Office on campus and get help with completing the application.

Admissions’ staffers will talk with you about the college’s programs. They will ask if you are interested in getting a degree or a certificate — or just want to take some classes. Once you leave Admissions, you will feel much more comfortable returning to school.

**Step 3 — Now that You Have Applied, Check your Email**

You might wonder why you need to worry about your email at this point, but it is important to know your **student email address** and be able to access your email account because the college distributes all information to students through this email. All course-related emails are sent to your student account.

After completing the on-line application, you will receive a user name and a password for your MyVWCC account. You can find the MyVWCC link at top of the VWCC website, www.virginiawestern.edu. Once you log into your MyVWCC account, you can access the following:

- Blackboard (where your classes can be found);
- Student Information System (where you can add or drop classes)
• Your email (which is a Gmail account)

**Step 4 - Take the Virginia Placement Tests**

All students who enroll in credit classes that require a math or English prerequisite or are declaring a program of study must take the Virginia Placement Test or VPT. Most non-credit programs of study do not require the Virginia Placement test. VPTs are computerized tests, and each can take up to three hours, so plan them for separate days. You also have several ways to prepare for them.

Don’t be nervous. You cannot fail these tests. They are designed to help you learn how strong your skills are in math and English so that you are able to choose the appropriate classes. You are advised, though, to study for the tests, and there are several ways to get started:

- VPT Workshops are held every semester to help maximize your placement test scores.
- If you are computer-savvy, you will find practice tests at [http://www.virginiawestern.edu/services/ltc/placement.php](http://www.virginiawestern.edu/services/ltc/placement.php)
- Or, you can visit the Testing Center on the bottom floor of the Brown Library building and get staff assistance with the practice tests.
- After you complete the practices, you can take the results to the Academic Link office on the floor above the Testing Center to get help with math and English.

When you are ready for the real test, you will take it in the Testing Center.

**Step 5 — Financial Aid?**

If you need financial help to pay for your credit classes and required books (and some non-credit programs), or plan to apply for a scholarship, you must complete the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)*. Timing is important because of the time it takes to process a form. For fall classes, it is best to complete this application by June 21 or earlier. VWCC’s Financial Aid Office schedules a “Super Saturday” in February where you can get help with the FAFSA.

For spring semesters, the deadline is November 1 of the previous year.

Many of you may have completed a FAFSA for a child headed to college so you know what to expect. The forms can be time-consuming, but if you begin with the right information, it will go faster.

Here is what you need to gather up for this step:

- Social Security Number (required)
- Alien Registration Number (if you are not a U.S. citizen)
- Most recent federal income tax returns, W-2s, and other records of money earned.
• Bank statements and records of investments (if applicable)
• Records of untaxed income (if applicable)

If you are comfortable using a computer, you can complete the form online. You will find a link to the application and the VWCC school code you must include on it at: www.virginiawestern.edu/financialaid

If you do not want to do this alone, get help at the Financial Aid office in Chapman Hall, Room 106. The staff is used to assisting students with the application. Assistance is available on a walk-in basis. For questions, call 540-857-7331, or send an email to finaid@virginiawestern.edu.

Financial Aid staff also will discuss any special aid programs that might apply to your situation, such as On-Ramp grant for dislocated workers, veterans’ benefits and the federal Pell Grant.

Now that you are enrolled in college, you need to make some decisions about what kind of program will match your future plans and then what classes within that program will you sign up for during the coming semester.

Learn About Available Scholarships
The Virginia Western Educational Foundation offers scholarships that can help with the tuition, book purchase, and other expenses. The main application period for fall is in May. Another process takes place in fall to offer help for the next spring semester. Please send an email to Carolyn Payne at cpayne@virginiawestern.edu or call 540-857-6371 with any questions.

Explore Learning Options  Be realistic about your available time. For each hour in class, you will need two to three hours of study time each week. You also need time to travel to and from school. Study in blocks, which is more efficient than catching 15 minutes here and there.

• What about taking an Online class to save time?
  ◆ Online classes are for convenience of schedule, not for saving time.
  ◆ Online classes can be more demanding than traditional on-campus classes because the student has to work more independently, have access to a computer and the internet and have basic computer skills
  ◆ Online classes work best for well-organized self-starters

Note: To find more information about online courses at VWCC, please visit www.virginiawestern.edu/distance.

• Fulltime Fridays
  ◆ Some courses are offered that meet only on Fridays, which makes it possible for a student to attend classes one day a week.
Step 6 — Enrolling in a Class and Paying Tuition

Once you have your study goals defined, you can take the final step to select classes and pay tuition. In all instances, be your own advocate: Ask questions.

You can register for classes online through My VWCC. Instructions can be found in the Student Survival Guide.

You can pay your tuition online through My VWCC, in person, by mail, or through a payment plan.

For more information, refer to the Tuition & Payment site. Please Note: Registration is not complete until your tuition is paid by the payment deadlines. If tuition is not received by the deadline, your classes will be dropped and you will need to re-register.

There are several options for tuition payment. See the Payment Options page for complete instructions.

Purchase your Books: the Bookstore is located on South Campus in Craig Hall, at the entrance of Duncan Hall. You can also purchase your books online through the Bookstore web site.
Opportunities
for a Lifetime of Learning

(540) 857-6675

An Equal Opportunity/
Affirmative Action Institution

Visit us on the web at www.virginiawestern.edu