

Going to College with a Felony Conviction

What You Should Know

Can people with felony convictions attend college?

Yes. Anyone who is 18 years old with a high school diploma or its equivalent (GED) can attend most colleges and universities in California.

Seven reasons people with convictions should return to school

1. Going back to school can help overcome barriers associated with convictions while providing personal satisfaction, more career choices, and a higher and more stable income.
2. School provides a constructive environment, structured schedule, positive influences, and lots of opportunities.
3. Jobs that community and technical colleges prepare you for are often "felony friendly" and plentiful. Well-chosen four-year or advanced degrees can provide even more opportunities.
4. More "first generation" students than ever are going to college and becoming role models for their families and communities.
5. There are programs to help you get ready for college and advisers to help you pick classes and start planning a career.
6. You likely qualify for financial aid, even if you have been convicted of a crime.
7. People who struggle in high school often improve in college because they have more control over what and when they study.

Where can I find more information?

Search online and talk to people you know about your specific situation. You can also contact your local community or technical college in person, by phone, or online. Admissions representatives are usually well-informed and eager to help.

Two websites in particular have lots of useful information, toolkits, and other resources for formerly-incarcerated people returning to school:

www.rootandrebond.org

www.correctionstocollegeca.org

*We Are All Students
was started by and for
formerly incarcerated
and other system
impacted students.*

**We
Are
All
Students**
By Us. For Us.



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What (Else) You Should Know

Figure out where to start

Community College (aka "junior college"): If you want an associates or bachelor's degree, or you want to go to college but aren't sure what to study, the best place to start is likely community college. They offer many fields of study to choose from, and advisers can help you pick classes.

Vocational School (aka "trade school" or "technical college"): Many certification programs can be completed in a year or less. Find out what you need for the job you want and reputable schools in your area by searching online and talking to employers and people you know.

For-Profit Schools: These can seem inviting because they target low-income people, but many are not licensed/accredited, so the degrees may not get you a job.

Figure out when to start

You must enroll and apply for financial aid months before you start. Find your school's application and deadlines online.

In general, full time students can earn an associates degree (AA/AS) in around 2-3 years and a bachelor's degree (BA/BS) in 4-5 years. Becoming a lawyer or earning a master's degree (MA/MS) usually takes 2-3 more years, and earning a doctorate (MD/PhD) takes at least 4 years after earning a bachelor's.

College is a lot. Being a full-time student takes as much time as full-time work. Failing classes and leaving school early can hurt your chances of ever getting a degree, and you could be forced to repay grants or loans even without earning a degree.

Figure out how to support yourself

College is expensive, but there is a lot of support for low-income students. You'll have to complete the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)* each year. It requires a lot of time and information, so start right away. Fill it out online, and contact your preferred school or local community/technical college for free help.

www.studentaid.ed.gov

Loans must be repaid (often with interest), but your school may also know about grants, scholarships, and fellowships, which are free investments in you.

Besides paying for classes, one of the most difficult challenges will be supporting yourself in other ways. Everyone's situation is different, but most have to work during college. Consider work in the non-profit sector, or other jobs that are "felony friendly," provide flexible schedules, and offer professional experience related to your education and chances for advancement.

See the rest of the information on this brochure to help you get started, talk to people you know who have gone to college, and reach out to representatives at your local technical or community college.

