Frequently Asked Questions

Can you suggest the best or quickest way to adjust to class work and academics in general, if I am a new student?

A: Seek out people that are unlike yourself. We all like to be in a social group where we feel comfortable. But one way to make the transition is get to know people who might live here, who are from other countries. Talk to them and share your thoughts, initial observations, struggles. You will see that you are not alone in all this new-ness, and that should help you realize that even though it’s new and it’s different, you can still be a leader during the moment of change.

Also getting very confident with English is the best way to transition. It can be exhausting working really hard to understand not what someone’s saying, but what someone just said. The sooner you force yourself through an uncomfortable moment, and it might be a week, several weeks, or months, the sooner you will feel more comfortable. Most international students are often more proficient with their English than they give themselves credit for. And you also just have to be bold and willing to make mistakes, say things not quite correctly.

When can student start contacting their advisors and teachers, and what is the difference between the two?

A: Please wait until you go through the on-site orientation because you’ll meet your advisor during that time. You’ll have a chance have a conversation, and a lot of your questions will be answered at that time. You’re also welcome to email the general contact at the academic advising center and they will answer any questions that are appropriate to be answered before orientation: https://advisingcenter.uiowa.edu/ Advisors will work with you one on one to help plan your academic courses. Your instructors are the people who are going to teach those courses.

What is the average class size for the first year and how about other classes?

A: Classes at the University of Iowa can be very, very large, maybe 300 students. On the other hand, some are very small, maybe 12 students. Classes in the University Honors program are particularly small, maybe 15 to 25 or 28. We have some classes that are mostly discussion groups, maybe 20 students sit and talk about their assignments and readings. And we have others that are more lecture-style, which may also have a component to it that involves small group work.

Is it possible to view the syllabi of courses before the schedule of the class?

A: Some courses will have their syllabus on MyUI. If you’re searching for syllabus, you actually don’t have to log in to see this. On the MyUI general page, if you type in, for instance, chemistry 1070, if you go into the course and registration down in MyUI, often times there will be a link to the syllabus. The syllabus won’t include things like the specific readings, but they will include the general information.
Some instructors will include a lot of information in the course descriptions on MyUI, and some of our instructors do not.

Can I have more than one major? If I don't have a major yet, what courses should I be taking?

A: Yes, students can have more than one major. It helps if majors are compatible, in order to shape your professional career after graduation. Please speak to your academic advisor about the requirements for several majors and then choose the one (or two) you'll like the best.

If there’s a career you're interested in, the Pomerantz Career Center advisors can help you develop a context for understanding what your interests are, how that might influence your career, and what major might help you get on the path you want to be on. Bring that information back to your academic advisor and they can help you select your major and related courses.

As a new transfer student, how do I know my classes at the previous school are meeting the general education requirements at UI?

A: It’s important that you get the official transcript record from your previous school sent to the University of Iowa as soon as possible. It will be reviewed by the Admissions office who determine what requirements were already fulfilled or not. The requirements that you haven’t fulfilled will show at what we call your degree audit, your “road map to graduation.” It shows how far you’ve come, and how many miles you have left to go. You and your academic advisor should have a conversation of that road map so you can fill in the (missing) pieces.

Is it possible to explain how grades and GPA’s work here?

A: Grades are the responsibility of your teacher. The teacher follows certain guidelines. Generally, to receive an A grade, you must be in the top 10 percent of the class, or the top 15 percent. With the grades going down by percent. Your grade is based on many activities, not just one test, or two tests. A lot of the grade is based on how much you engage in class discussion, how much you are an active learner in the class, and how much you help other students learn. Learning is not just about you learning, it’s about you teaching. Your grade is based on your total performance. And it is hard to get A’s at the University of Iowa. It’s hard to be in the top 10 percent of the class.

How a student can achieve a high GPA?

A: Why can one student receive A’s while another student is getting D’s? Well, student with A’s will say that they study every day. Studying over a long period of time and practicing using that information, helps student to find out what they’re confused about and what they’re learning. At an exam they can recall and apply what they’ve learned. It's not about brilliance, or being smart enough. It's about being patient, understanding that the learning takes time. It’s an everyday practice. Practice with friends, practice alone, and practice with tutors.

One way to study well is to also to test yourself. One of the things that the University asks in general is to apply the learned information. You might have the information memorized in a certain context. But the instructor is going to ask you to apply that information in a different context. Give yourself the opportunity to either sample problems, or to test yourself, quiz yourself or have others quiz you. That’s
often a very important part of the whole study process. And it helps you go from knowing the information and to applying the information.

**How do the semester hours translate into actual hours?**

**A:** The semester hour has a certain worth in almost all United States institutions of higher education. One semester hour equals about 60 minutes of time in the classroom. If you take a 3-hour course, you will be in the classroom for three hours a week. If you take a four-semester hour course, you will be in the classroom for that particular course for four hours a week. In addition, each credit hour has an expectation that you will do two hours of homework for each class. In other words, semester or credit hours speak to the amount of time you are with your instructor and your fellow students in class, but also speaks to the amount of homework you will do outside of class.

**How can I graduate early?**

**A:** Well, we are glad you are so enthusiastic about coming to the University of Iowa and about studying hard. Instead of going fast through the curriculum, we would like you to do internships, to be involved in your classroom, the University, and make sure to get good grades. In order to graduate in three years, you would have to pick a particular major that allows that. Not all majors do. For example, it is very difficult to complete business degree in three years. Also, your College can limit the amount of credit hours a student can take during a semester, especially when students are still learning, or increasing their proficiency in English. So based on your language skills, you may not be able to take the credit hours you need to graduate in three or four years.

If the cost of education is your concern to graduate early, the best way to save money is to be very successful in each of your classes. Then you do not have to take the class over.

**In regard to the Success at Iowa course, when can the students start the course, and are there any tests for the course?**

**A:** You should be automatically enrolled in this class by the beginning of July. You can start working on it ahead of the orientation and arrival to the school. There are quizzes after each module, and you cannot move on until you finish the quizzes of that module. The quizzes consist of small questions but they’re not like the exams that you usually take for other classes, or other tasks in general. The quiz just helps you understand what you read, and learn about the University and how it works.