It’s on to October!

by Gaurav Khanna
Director, TRIO SSS Programs

It feels like we started yesterday, and we are already in to October! Though we miss seeing you in person in the office, in some ways we are busier than ever—working online with so many of you these first few weeks of the semester, doing your check ins, setting up support and getting you started on the right foot.

If we have not seen you yet, please don’t delay—now more than ever it is critical to surround yourself with the support that you need to succeed, so you don’t feel like you have to do this all yourself. We can still get you checked in and in a couple of weeks we’ll be starting on mid-semester reviews and four-week assessments from your faculty. Watch your email and set up a time to connect.

In addition, we are still running seminars and events, including mid-semester gatherings for both programs at the end of the month. The schedule is created specifically to provide timely information that is relevant to online learning. If you missed any of them, please check them out in our brand new Rx & Visions blackboard section. Recordings are available 24/7.

Even though this is an uncertain time, we must still plan for the future. In October, we’re planning to talk about transfer. In addition we’re doing our first ever virtual transfer visit to UMass Lowell—contact Sarah Pingeton or Alaina Lucchetti for more details if you are interested.

It’s so inspiring to see all of you continue to work towards your goals. Furthering your education this semester was a conscious choice for many of you after considering the challenges posed by COVID. Now is the time to build that strong foundation of success for the semester and really lean into doing the work that you need to do. We’re here to support you in any way that we can!

FAFSA
Angela shares the process for completing the FAFSA on pg 2.

Transferring during a Pandemic
Get the scoop on transferring during a pandemic on pg. 3

Student Spotlight
Read Anthony’s story and why he’s an Visions rock star on pg. 5
What is the FAFSA?
Chances are, if you’re a current student, you’ve likely completed the FAFSA at least once in preparation for this school year. But in case you’re new here, FAFSA stands for Free Application for Federal Student Aid, and is required for any students interested in receiving federal aid money for college. The FAFSA allows you to apply for multiple loans, grants, and scholarships simultaneously in one easy form.

Who is eligible to apply?
You must be a U.S. Citizen or an eligible non-citizen in order to apply. Funds are available for qualified students in two and four year institutions.

What types of aid can I be eligible for?
Federal student aid comes in three main forms: loans, grants and work-study awards. Loans must be paid back, whereas grant money does not have to be repaid. Work-study awards require you to work a certain number of hours at your institution to receive the aid.

How is the amount of aid determined?
The U.S. Department of Education uses the FAFSA to calculate your level of financial need by subtracting the expected family contribution from the cost of attendance. The college or institution you are attending will utilize the information in the FAFSA to disperse the aid relative to your course load.

Even if you plan to pay for college without federal aid, we recommend you complete the FAFSA anyway. Some private scholarships require the FAFSA to be completed, and TRIO grant aid may also be available by completing the FAFSA.

When should I complete the FAFSA?
The FAFSA is available October 1, 2020, and we recommend you complete it as soon as possible. Applications are awarded on a rolling basis, so the earlier you apply the more money you’ll be eligible for. You need to re-file every year you are in school.

What will I need to complete the FAFSA?
When you sit down to complete the FAFSA, you’ll need the following information:
1. Personal identification documents (driver’s license/identification card and social security card)
2. Federal income tax return
3. Records of any income, such as W-2 forms from a job
4. Untaxed income such as child support, interest income, pensions and veteran non-education benefits
5. Savings and checking account balances and other assets such as money from real estate (not your primary residence) farm and business assets.
6. If you are a dependent, your parent/guardian must submit this information as well

How do I complete the FAFSA?
1. Create a Federal Student Aid ID (FSA ID). This is a username and password that you’ll need to log into the US Department of Education website. Once you’ve done this, the Social Security Administration takes a few days to verify this information then you’ll receive an e-mail indicating you can get started with the application.

2. Fill out the FAFSA online and be sure that you are accessing the official application by visiting www.studentaid.gov

The application can be completed in about an hour, but take your time and be sure to enter all information correctly. The first time you complete this form will take a bit longer, but subsequent years will be much easier. Don’t put it off! For other tips and tricks to completing the FAFSA with ease, be sure to stay tuned to our e-letter as we will be offering a FASFA workshop later this month.

Rx
Mid-Semester Gathering

Monday, October 26, 2020
12:30 - 1:30 p.m.

Visions
Mid-Semester Gathering

Thursday, October 29, 2020
12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.
Speaking from Experience: What it’s like to transfer during a pandemic
by Sarah Pingeton
Visions Transfer Counselor

This spring while everybody was transitioning to online learning and life in quarantine there was a group of students who were preparing to make another transition: the move to their 4-year school after finishing at MWCC. The pandemic set in at a point in the semester when lots of students looking to transfer had already been able to go on tours, attend information sessions, and figured out where they would apply. Some students already had their acceptances. Other students were still in the process of figuring everything out and were faced with making all of their decisions virtually and on short notice.

This week I was able to catch up with a couple of Visions students who graduated in May and transferred this fall. Kyle Eaves, currently participating in a 3+1 transfer agreement with Nichols College, and Dejia Rodriguez, attending UMass Amherst, were willing to share what their experiences have been like.

Kyle Eaves dealt with rapidly changing plans. If you asked him in February, his plan was to attend Franklin Pierce University in Rindge, NH. Then, with school being virtual and no guarantees about the fall semester, Kyle decided to join the National Guard. Another pandemic snag got in the way of that, and Kyle changed his plans again, finally deciding that he would continue with classes and pursue transfer plans. By early August, Kyle decided to transfer to Nichols with a 3+1 program, which meant he could continue taking classes at MWCC but would still need to go through the application and transfer process with Nichols. Here’s what Kyle had to say about his experience, “It was pretty stressful, especially after making a last minute decision on where I was going. The fact I couldn’t physically go to the financial aid, admission, or Visions office made things quite tough too, it made it harder to contact people and get a reply within specific times that worked with my COVID schedule.

Throughout the whole process, the people that I worked with on both sides of MWCC and Nichols were super helpful and knowledgeable and they really wanted to help you because they knew how stressful of a time it is. Overall, the process was hard and almost impossible at times, but everyone around me was able to work together to accomplish my goal for my education future.”

Dejia Rodríguez’s experience has been different because he has successfully made the move to a new school and been able to follow through with getting an apartment near campus in the Amherst area even though classes are fully online (including his science labs). In terms of making the adjustment to a new school with remote learning, Dejia says, “It feels a lot more smooth than the spring semester, and I like to have synchronous meetings, but...during the spring semester at MWCC, I had a very solid foundation to build off of, and we were just concluding the semester, not doing an entire semester’s worth of schooling online. Honestly, I expected to be navigating a big, crowded campus with a cute face mask and a matching backpack, but instead I’m sitting on a bean bag in my pajamas half the time trying to stay on top of all these new formats.” Making the transition to a new college can be challenging and anxiety provoking in the best of times. Dejia addresses the particular challenges of making this move during a pandemic. “It definitely has made the transition from community college to university more stressful, but in a different way. I had planned out my stress and anxiety, as strange as that sounds. I planned on being uncomfortable in lecture halls, and being anxious while running to the various buildings trying to find my new classes. I anticipated sitting in a room full of people, anxiously waiting to introduce myself and my pronouns, and meet new friends. I did not anticipate getting my face and room ready for a zoom call where 75 strangers could see my house.”

As for connecting with offices to get his financial aid in place and choose classes, Dejia’s experience was different from Kyle’s. Dejia remembers struggling to make the connection and it took 2 weeks of consistent phone calls and waiting on hold to speak with someone about a financial aid issue. As for classes “Picking my schedule felt so much more complicated and annoying than at MWCC, and I had no individual control over what I wanted. I had to have every class approved in real time, and I was forced to pick my classes next to last because the advisors had to be in an active call with you to pick. I would have liked to see those things handled more efficiently, especially since I’m in a class that has a huge workload and I have no interest in it whatsoever.”

Making decisions about transferring and making the transition to the four-year school you choose is tough no matter what. I think Kyle and Dejia would both agree that it was a little bit trickier to navigate remotely, but that it’s definitely doable and definitely worth it. If you’re planning to transfer for January or next September, you’ll be in for an interesting ride, but everybody is getting more experience with how to make the transition go smoothly every day. Reach out for help when you need it, and remember that transferring during a pandemic is just another part of the (temporary!?) New Normal.

MWCC Transfer Fair
Thursday, October 20, 2020
10:30a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
Talk to admissions representatives from Massachusetts State Institutions, Elms College and Nichols College.
The TRIO Staff are always on the lookout for high quality opportunities and events we can share with you. Even better, is when the experience is available on a sliding fee or free of charge. Recently, Amy LaBarge, our Coordinator of Disability Services at MWCC, forwarded me some information on an upcoming disability film festival. I immediately knew I wanted to share this with you all. So, please see below and click on some of the hyperlinks to register. If you do attend, please let us know!

**Managing Assignments:**

**Don’t**— set a reminders on your phone for each assignment

Why? Its time consuming and if it goes office while you’re doing another task you may forget to get it done

**Do**— Pick a time every day to look at your planner and see what needs to get done. Set an alarm at the same time every day until checking your planner become habit.

**Managing Time:**

**Good idea**— use a timer to remind you when to start or change tasks.

**Great idea**— have a specific methodology about how much time you give yourself to do a task, including timing your breaks.

**App Highlight: MultiTimer**

Pre-set a variety of timers for common activities. Color-code and add icons to your liking!

**Film Festival Highlighting Individuals with Disabilities**

*by Dawn Babineau*

*Visions Learning Specialist*

The TRIO Staff are always on the lookout for high quality opportunities and events we can share with you. Even better, is when the experience is available on a sliding fee or free of charge. Recently, Amy LaBarge, our Coordinator of Disability Services at MWCC, forwarded me some information on an upcoming disability film festival. I immediately knew I wanted to share this with you all. So, please see below and click on some of the hyperlinks to register. If you do attend, please let us know!

October 16th-18th marks this year’s Superfest Disability Film Festival! For more than 30 years, Superfest has celebrated cutting-edge cinema that portrays disability through a diverse, complex, unabashed and engaging lens and is the longest running festival of its kind. This year, the Longmore Institute on Disability is excited to be bringing it to more people than ever before, a benefit of taking the festival online.

This year’s festival is full of films and panels that discuss the intersection between disability, film, race, gender, sexuality, family, friends, and more.

Check out the Facebook event page: [https://www.facebook.com/events/1595401273974316](https://www.facebook.com/events/1595401273974316)

To view the lineup, visit: [www.superfestfilm.com/2020-films](http://www.superfestfilm.com/2020-films)

Tickets are on sale now, sold on a sliding scale starting at $0: [www.superfestfilm.com/tickets](http://www.superfestfilm.com/tickets)
Student Spotlight: Anthony Haimila
by Sara Pingeton
Visions Transfer Counselor

Anthony Haimila just started his second year at MWCC and is on track to graduate next May. Anthony is a strong student who has really found his stride in college and LOVES Mount Wachusett! You’ve probably seen him around campus, always smiling and always willing to stop and help. Here are a few quick questions with Anthony:

**Question (Q):** If you could go back in time and give yourself one piece of advice a year ago, what would it be?
**Answer (A):** If I could give myself one piece of advice when I first started at the Mount it would be to keep a detailed roadmap of when you will do work. It really helps.

**Q:** If you could have given yourself one piece of advice before this fully remote semester started (so like, back in August), what would it be?
**A:** If I could give myself a piece of advice before this semester started it would be to print out the syllabus so you have it always.

**Q:** What is your favorite thing about MWCC?
**A:** My favorite thing about the Mount is the people, so it stinks I don't get to see too many of them now that we are online.

**Q:** What clubs and activities are you involved in?
**A:** I am involved in the Human Service club and I work for Student Life.

**Q:** What made you want to get involved on campus? Was getting involved easy?
**A:** What made me want to get involved was the atmosphere of being around people in college and yes it was pretty easy.

**Q:** Are you staying involved virtually?
**A:** It's tough, but I am staying involved virtually by keeping up with the Vision newsletters.

**Q:** What are your plans for the future with regard to your education?
**A:** I want to go to a four year college to study History with a focus on Latin to become a teacher or historian someday.

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Keep Calm & Practice Self-Care
by Alaina Luchetti
Visions Transfer Counselor

As exciting as the start of the new school year can be, you can quickly burn out if you are not careful. While your course work is important, it is crucial you find time to prioritize yourself and to incorporate self-care. So how do you manage the stress of balancing assignments, virtual meetings, remote homeschooling, work, and your personal life? We might not have all the answers but here are some tips to help you manage your overall well-being and mental health.

**Control Your Mindset**
Adjusting to online learning can be overwhelming. It can be easy to lose control over your positive mindset. It is worth the time to focus on how you are managing your stress and make changes when needed. Think of what you would say to a friend who was feeling the way you are. What advice would you give to them? Now focus on all of the things you can accomplish and the tools you have to help you reach your goals.

**Get Organized**
Read the syllabus. Now is the time to take out your planner and mark when your assignments and exams are due. Now more than ever it is important to plan ahead of time when you will be able to write your papers or study for your exams. Prioritize your schedule and try to balance your activities across each week and make sure to complete the most important tasks first. Don’t wait until the due date to cram all of your assignments. If you are having trouble understanding due dates, talk with your instructor, they’re here to help!

**Make Time for Yourself**
Take breaks from studying, step away from the computer screen, and do something just for you. It is important not to get run down or overwhelmed. If you are running on fumes, you are no help to yourself or others. Break up long study sessions with short walks or pleasurable tasks. Never study for more than four hours at a time and try to give yourself goals or milestones to work towards, such as learning 20 new vocabulary words, or two pages of your paper.

**Take Care of Yourself**
To avoid physical illness stress and fatigue, make sure to nourish your body. Remember your body needs 6-8 hours of sleep per night to function properly. Make sure to fuel your body with the nutrients it needs to operate at maximum capacity. Exercise regularly by incorporating movement breaks into your routine. Physical health is a huge factor in your overall wellbeing. Set realistic goals for yourself and start by creating small, daily habits.

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Self-Care Workshop:
Getting Out of the House
Guest Speaker, Melissa Manzi, MWCC Mental Health Counselor
Tuesday, October 6
10:00-11:00 a.m.
Putting Your Best Foot Forward on Zoom
by Lauren Clifford
Visions Retention Specialist

Finding a quiet place to zoom that also gives a professional appearance can be difficult! Here are some tips to help you overcome common Zoom background problems:

**Problem #1** - The only quiet place I have to zoom is my bedroom or my bathroom but I’ve been told that’s not a professional setting!

By draping a solid color blanket over the edge of the bed and sitting on the floor the background becomes less distracting and not overly personal. You can do the same by sitting in front of a solid wall or in front of a solid color shower curtain.

**Problem #2** - My house is a mess and I can’t clean every time I have a zoom meeting!

ME TOO!

If you zoom with me on a regular work day this is what you see vs. what I see.

I picked a place with a not too busy background. The room gets good light, but there are now windows directly behind me.

In real life I have paperwork, snacks, and other stuff everywhere. You can even see I’m using the other end of the table for other projects.

**Problem #3** - I set up this beautiful study area but when I zoom all you can see of my mess!

If you have the space for it, consider flipping your desk so you sit between the desk and wall. This gives you a solid background.

**Bonus Tip:** Think about what others will see when they see your background. This is a list of things to consider. These aren’t all things that you NEED to get rid of, but rather things that I want to ensure you’re comfortable with others seeing and commenting on:

→ Political/Religious information
→ Other people in the room
→ Personal Pictures
→ Drug/Alcohol paraphernalia
→ Identifying information
## October 2020 Calendar of Events

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If you have a disability and require accommodations in order to participate fully in program activities, please contact the Program Director to discuss your specific needs.
Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Institution

The Visions & Rx Programs are funded by TRIO Student Support Services grants through the U.S. Department of Education

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**Success Tip:**
Transcribe this page into your planner, or print this page and put it in a place where you’ll see it every day!

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**Join Us on Zoom**
All workshops, seminars and events will be hosted on Zoom. See your weekly e-letter for the Zoom links for upcoming events

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**Your October Checklist**
- Schedule your mid-semester check-in and four-week assessment review
- Attend and participate in all classes
- Complete your 2021-2022 FAFSA
- Attend your program’s Mid-Semester Gathering
- Attend at least one seminar
- Read the weekly eletter
- Check your email daily
- Think about your Spring 2021 Registration, which begins Nov. 2

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**TRIO Pets**
Working from home means we get to spend quality time with our pets! Can you match the following pet with their TRIO parent?