Low GPA in the past doesn’t reflect your present

Perhaps you took some classes when you were younger. You were lacking direction and motivation, so your grades suffered. Now you are mature and organized, and you’ve found the path you want to pursue. But you’re worried your past grades might hold you back.

This experience is a common one, but it doesn’t need to stop you from pursuing your goals.

• Start with the Transfer Center.
  • NIU’s transfer admissions counselors are knowledgeable and available to answer your questions.
• Contact the Department or Program Advisor.
  • Every department or program at NIU has an advisor who is available to answer your questions – even before you enroll! Contact the advisor right away to make use of their expertise. Visit [www.niu.edu/advising/advising/who.shtml](http://www.niu.edu/advising/advising/who.shtml) for a list of NIU advisors.
• Consider (re)taking some courses – but always get advice from the program advisor first to make sure those courses count.

“Taking additional courses or re-taking courses can help raise a GPA. However, before taking those measures, we would have the student meet with an advisor.”

--- Katy Saalfeld,
Acting Associate Director &
Transfer Coordinator for Admissions at NIU

Making the Grade: Tips for Keeping Your GPA High

Your college GPA affects job prospects, scholarships and financial aid, and graduate school. So how can you keep your GPA competitive?

• Don’t over-schedule yourself. Going to school full time might seem like the fastest, most cost-effective option. But an overly full schedule can cause grades to suffer.
• Did you know? The University of Houston recommends that those working 30 to 40 hours per week should enroll in no more than 7 to 10 credit hours per semester. Take a look at their [convenient chart](http://uh.edu/technology.students/prospective-students/undergraduate-applicants/registration/course-load/) to see the recommended course load based on number of hours worked per week.

“It is natural to be nervous about returning to school. Rest assured that many students manage to return and be very successful despite a shaky start in their earlier academic life! If you are unsure about your level of preparedness, start on a small scale by taking one or two classes at a community college.”

--- Mandy Wescott,
NIU Student Success Specialist
Choose the right class format to fit your life. Online classes are perfect for some students. Others thrive on face-to-face interaction or rely on the predictable schedule of an in-person class. To make the most out of your college courses, be sure to choose the format that fits your needs and your schedule.

Here are some online learning pros and cons, from NIU expert John Cowan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pro</th>
<th>Con</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Many online courses have flexible deadlines. This is part of the benefit of online learning.</td>
<td>This flexibility makes it easy to fall behind. Students need to maintain a schedule of when they will accomplish tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online courses can allow a high degree of interactivity between students and faculty. It is easy for the professor to meet online with individuals or small groups over the course of an evening.</td>
<td>In an online course it can be harder for the instructor to know if you are having difficulty. Students should reach out early and often if they are struggling.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“When choosing your class style it is important to honestly judge the type of person you are. I tend to be pretty organized and on top of my work, so for me online classes are great. For someone who tends to crave that face-to-face interaction, or who isn’t good with self-guidance, preparation, and most importantly prioritizing, online classes would be a less desirable choice.”

– Kimberly Gartland, NIU alum

Get help right away if you need it. Your professor, a study group of fellow students, Access tutoring [niu.edu/access/], the University Writing Center [niu.edu/uwc/], or your Student Success Specialist [niu.edu/offcampusacademics/contact/index.shtml] – all of these resources are available to help you do your best work at NIU.

Tip: Especially if you are an off-campus or on-line student, you will have to work a little harder to build connections and get the help you need. Not sure who to call for help? Contact Mandy Wescott at mandy@niu.edu or (815) 753-5891. She will listen to your concerns, offer coaching, and connect you to NIU resources.

Meet Mandy Wescott: Your Student Success Specialist

Mandy Wescott is the Student Success Specialist for adult learners taking classes online or at NIU regional venues outside of the DeKalb main campus. Think of her as an academic life coach who can connect you to the resources you need to be successful or talk over how things are going with your studies. Whether you need assistance with specific issues such as time management strategies, or reading textbooks, or you just want to talk over how your semester is going, Mandy is here to help!

"Many adults find themselves changing direction professionally and going back to school," says Wescott. “No one expects them to know everything about how college works. That’s why I’m here to help!"

For resources and mentoring services, contact Mandy at mandy@niu.edu or (815) 753-5891.