PARENT HANDBOOK
This handbook is provided for parents as a reference guide for the Program’s policies and procedures. It is a supplement to the College of Charleston’s regulations and is not a complete listing of all policies, procedures, regulations, programs and services. Additional information about the College of Charleston’s guidelines can be found at cofc.edu.

The parents of students in the REACH Program are expected to know the information contained in this Handbook. It is your responsibility to ask the Executive Director of the REACH Program, Edie Cusack, to clarify or explain any policy or regulation you do not understand.

The information included in this handbook may be amended from time to time by the Executive Director of the REACH Program. Please continue to refer back to it over the next four years!

I have had an opportunity to review the College of Charleston website, along with this handbook, and discuss its contents. I have read the sections on FERPA, Financial Aid/Tuition, and Disability Rights and Services, specifically. I am aware that all policies and procedures are subject to change during my student’s course of study and recognize it is my responsibility to be aware of the changes*. I agree, as the parent of a student enrolled in the REACH Program, to adhere to the policies and guidelines described.

*Any changes to the Parent Handbook will be posted at: reach.cofc.edu.
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WELCOME
Dear Parents,

Welcome to the REACH Program at the College of Charleston! Your child is about to embark on an amazing adventure that will change your lives forever. Over the next four years, you will see your child grow academically and emotionally into an independent young adult.

The REACH Program strives to provide a genuine college experience where students have the opportunity to learn, grow and mature in an environment that prepares them for complete inclusion in the real world once they leave college. The program is designed to provide the support previously provided by families. However, as the student moves through the program, we fade our support as the student gains their independence. We teach students to understand their disability – not be defined by it. In order to live a self-determined life, students have to be free to have their own thoughts, dreams, and opinions; to be able to choose their friends, activities, and where and how to live. Most people have these freedoms, along with a system of support, and we expect our students to be no different.

Included in this handbook you will find information about the four key components of the Program: Academics, Independent Living, Socialization and Career Development. Please take the time to look over the material and use it as a reference over the next four years.

College is a very special time in your child’s life. They will face challenges, break boundaries, and achieve lifelong goals, all while discovering who they are. As parents, you will also grow and see your role in your child’s life shift from provider to parents of a young adult. Embrace this time and use the opportunity to grow yourself, both as parents and as individuals.

With Kindest Regards,

Edie Cusack
Executive Director
MISSION

The REACH Program is dedicated to ensuring students with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities have a quality postsecondary program that provides an inclusive experience in academics, socialization, career development, and independent living, honors their dignity and worth, and fosters self-determination.

VISION

The REACH Program at the College of Charleston is a four-year, fully-inclusive postsecondary certificate program for young adults with mild intellectual and/or developmental disabilities – students who would otherwise be unable to attend college with their peers. My vision was to take what the traditional college student experiences and add modifications so students with different learning needs could live and learn on campus and have a true college experience. This endeavor at the College of Charleston has been tremendously successful: students in the REACH Program have been able to participate in every aspect of college life and are learning how to become adults while being challenged and supported through the process. Students have become self-determined and actively engaged in creating and living their lives.

~Edie Cusack

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This handbook is designed to help you familiarize yourself with the REACH Program and the College of Charleston. Here you will find information about policies and procedures as well as your student’s rights, independences, and responsibilities. Moreover, you will learn about our expectations for you along with answers to many of the questions you may have. Please keep this handbook and refer to it over the next four years.
THE REACH PROGRAM

“I’m not telling you it’s going to be easy, I’m telling you it’s going to be worth it.”
~Unknown
KEY COMPONENTS

The REACH Program is a Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary (CTP) program. In keeping with federal guidelines and best practices, we focus on four key components:

1. Academics
2. Socialization
3. Independent Living
4. Career Development

COORDINATORS

The REACH Program has three types of Coordinators to support the students in the Program: Support, Career, and Mentor Coordinators.

- Support Coordinators are assigned to each cohort of students to ensure their needs are met. Coordinators monitor the students’ academics, social development, and activities related to independent living.

- The Career Coordinator develops internships based on each student’s interest, skillset, and Area of Concentration.

- The Mentor Coordinator recruits and trains Social and Fitness Mentors and fosters social skill development.

See page 23 for more information about mentors.

FINANCIAL AID

Students in the REACH Program are eligible for some federal student aid (e.g., Federal Pell Grants, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant, and Federal Work-Study programs). Additional information can be found at: https://studentaid.ed.gov/eligibility/intellectual-disabilities.

Students who are residents of South Carolina may be eligible for state funding, as well.
Information about federal and state funding is also available at the College of Charleston's Office of Financial Assistance: [http://finaid.cofc.edu/](http://finaid.cofc.edu/) or 843-953-5540.

The Department of Vocational Rehabilitation may provide financial assistance. Check with your local agency for more information as regulations vary by state.

The REACH Program does not have access to your student's bills or financial aid information. If you have questions about your bill or payment options, contact the Treasurer’s Office at: [http://treasurer.cofc.edu/](http://treasurer.cofc.edu/) or 843-953-5572.

It is your responsibility to:

- Fulfill all financial obligations by the due dates set by the Treasurer’s Office;
- Adhere to any changes in tuition rates or fees; and
- Contact the Treasurer’s Office prior to the start of each semester (for the duration of the student's enrollment), in order to negotiate a payment plan for the following semester, if needed.

If the initial tuition bill has not been paid, the student will not be able to move on campus.

**Disability Rights and Services**

Students in the REACH Program may be eligible to receive SNAP Services and accommodations though the College's Center for Disability Services. Being in the REACH Program does not automatically guarantee your student will qualify for services! The Center for Disability Services determines each student's eligibility.

For information about eligibility and the application process, contact the Center for Disability Services: [http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu/](http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu/) or 843-953-1431.

Keep in mind:

- Students are entitled to the accommodations received in high school if it is an accommodation offered by the Center for Disability Services.
- Students are under the laws of ADA not IDEA therefore, the level of accommodations may differ from what was provided in high school.
The REACH Program will provide accommodations not provided by SNAP (e.g., oral testing), that are deemed necessary by the Program.

- Students interested in receiving services **must** provide copies of their psychoeducational assessment along with their application. We have copies, if needed.

- Students **must** apply for services directly through the Center for Disability Services. REACH Coordinators will help them through the process.

**Due to the self-determined nature of the Program, if a full guardianship is established after a student is admitted, the student will be terminated from the Program.**

**FERPA**

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. Under FERPA, the rights you had to access your student’s information in the elementary and secondary school settings are transferred to your student once he/she turns 18 or attends a post-secondary educational institution (regardless of who pays for the student’s education). Your student has the right to add or withdraw consent at any time *without* informing you of the change. In keeping with the regulations issued under FERPA, the REACH Program and the College of Charleston **cannot** release information about your student without his/her **written** consent. We are bound by these rules.

Information about the College’s FERPA policy can be found at: [http://registrar.cofc.edu/ferpa/index.php](http://registrar.cofc.edu/ferpa/index.php) or 843-953-5688.
YOUR CHANGING ROLE

“Strength doesn’t come from what you can do. It comes from overcoming the things you once thought you couldn’t.” ~Unknown
NEW BEGINNINGS

College is a time for enormous growth and transformation and we recognize how difficult this process can be for you and your student as both of your roles change. Please realize our goal is to enable your student to become as self-determined and independent as possible while they learn the skills they need in a fully-inclusive environment. In order to do this, we need your commitment to the following:

❖ Do not compare your student's journey to anyone else's. Your student has different needs, interests, experience, etc. and will progress through the Program at his/her own pace.

❖ Remember, this is a 4-year progressive journey. Not all skills will be learned in the first semester or even the first year.

❖ Speak with your student about what he/she would like to gain from their time in the REACH Program and really listen to what they tell you. Realize their goals may be different from your goals for them.

❖ Part of becoming an independent adult is having the ability to choose your own friends. Students in the REACH Program are free to socialize with each other, if they want – it is not a requirement. Refrain from socializing and organizing activities with other parents in the Program. Parents of traditional college students do not plan activities for them or socialize with their roommate’s parents. It is not part of the typical college experience and will make your student feel set apart and different.

❖ Respect your student's newfound friendships, relationships, and decision-making abilities.

❖ The labeling of your child is changing from being “a person with a disability” to simply being “a student” and a young adult.
CONTACT AND VISITATION

In order to help with the transition to independence, please do **not** call, text, or visit your student during the first four weeks of school. Visits and phone calls from you will lead to a decrease in your student’s engagement on campus, which is counterproductive. Your student may call/text you during this time. You may email once per day. Please limit your visits to campus (and your student’s visits home) to no more than once per month as this interferes with skill development.

MONEY

Before coming to campus, discuss with your student the amount of money you will deposit into his/her bank account (we suggest no more than $25 per week), and do not waiver from the amount decided! It is important for your student to learn how to live on a budget.

Once your student’s internship begins, we will notify you via the REACH Parent blog and ask that you stop sending money – usually the spring semester of freshman year. This enables us to teach your student how to manage/budget the money he/she has earned. Sending additional money is counterproductive and will prevent your student from learning this important skill.

PERSON-CENTERED PLANNING: PATH PLANS

Students participate in PATH planning every year where their strengths, supports, and overall goals are reviewed. Students are able to invite their “circle of support” – people in their lives who the student feels will help them achieve their goals. Students may or may not choose to invite you to their PATH Plan however, copies will be included in the End of Year Reports.
WHAT IF…

ANSWERS TO A FEW OF THE MOST COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

❖ What if my student has an emotional or psychological issue?

Should your student have emotional or psychological issues, he/she will be referred to Counseling and Substance Abuse Services, which offers a variety of services to students at the College, at no cost. Information about the types of services offered can be found at: http://counseling.cofc.edu/.

Should your student have more serious psychological issues, we will notify you and you will be responsible for locating a professional in the area and scheduling treatment.

❖ What if my student has a medical need or emergency?

Should a medical need arise, the College’s office of Student Health Services provides a range of services, at no cost. However, the types of services offered are limited. Information about Student Health Services can be found at: http://studenthealth.cofc.edu/.

Should a medical emergency arise, we will follow the College’s protocol.

❖ Who knows my student is in the REACH Program?

The College of Charleston offices of Counseling and Substance Abuse Services, Student Health Services, Victim Services, and the Department of Public Safety.

❖ What if my student has a conflict with a roommate?

Having conflicts with roommates is part of the typical college experience. Any problems that arise will be handled by the Residence Hall Director (RHD) along with the Support Coordinators. Students will not automatically have their rooms reassigned as this is an educational experience – there are lessons to be learned from conflict!
“All progress takes place outside the comfort zone.” ~Unknown
ACADEMIC ADVISORS

Entering freshmen are assigned an advisor from the Academic Advising and Planning Center. Students will meet with this advisor once each semester until the end of sophomore year when they declare an area of concentration and switch to an advisor in that department.

AREAS OF CONCENTRATION

An Area of Concentration is the REACH Program’s version of a major. All coursework and internships are geared toward developing skills in their chosen area. Once declared, an Area of Concentration cannot be changed. Students are able to take classes outside of the declared Area of Concentration if their advisor deems them appropriate (e.g., a student with an Area of Concentration in Hospitality and Tourism Management may take a course in Communication in order to help develop his/her skills for employment).

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Students in the REACH Program are expected to show satisfactory academic progress in all aspects of the REACH Program. Students are expected to participate in all courses, sessions, internships, and employment training and must abide by the attendance policy given in each class.

Students also participate in the regularly scheduled evaluations designed to measure their growth in academics, socialization, and vocational readiness.

Students are expected to maintain a grade point average (GPA) of, at least, 1.85 in all academic and support classes.

Students in the REACH Program are held to the same standards of academic honesty as every other student in the College of Charleston and will be held accountable for any violations. Therefore, it is essential that you (or any other family member or off-campus support person), do not do your student’s work for them. Do not pretend to be the student in emails and texts. Instead, if they need help, provide support by directing them toward tutors and other on-campus resources. Information about the College’s Honor System can be found at: http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php.
YOUR ROLE

Let your student learn to be responsible for his/her own academic process. Recognize that this program is designed to teach students how to take on that responsibility. We will not let your student falter as he/she is learning this process. Your intervention skews our view of what your student is or is not able to do.

It is quite possible for your student to receive a failing grade; although this would not be due to his/her disability. Each student’s work is modified and accommodated to ensure we get a true measure of what he/she has learned. Generally, if a student is failing a class, it is because he/she is choosing not to use the resources provided. Students will never fail classes because of their disability! College work is challenging and it is possible to make lower grades even with accommodations; just as all traditional students do not make A's. Students receive the grades they have earned.

REACH POLICY

In keeping with the regulations issued under FERPA, we cannot discuss your student’s grades or academic progress without his/her expressed written consent. Any questions or concerns should be addressed to the Executive Director, Edie Cusack. Parents are not to contact their student’s support coordinators, professors, faculty, staff, mentors, or tutors.

REACH PROGRAM COMPLETION REQUIREMENTS

Students in the REACH Program are expected to show satisfactory academic progress in all aspects of the REACH Program. Successful completion of the Program includes fulfillment of the following coursework:

- Inclusive College of Charleston courses
- REACH support courses:
  - Freshman Year: Transition to College/Writing Comprehension
  - Sophomore Year: Personal Finance/Career Explorations
  - Junior Year: Business and Personal Communication/Community Engagement
  - Senior Year: Advanced Personal Finance/Now What?! Preparing for Life After College
- Planning Forums – designed to help students organize, manage, and prioritize their time
Seven semesters of professional development (internships)

PATH planning sessions – students participate in PATH planning every year where their strengths, supports, and overall goals are reviewed

Participation in an academic advisory session each semester

Participation in educational groups (e.g., personal safety, internet safety, travel training)

Participation in regularly scheduled appointments with tutors, mentors, and social engagements

*Please do not make arrangements for your student to leave campus until final exams are over!*

**ACADEMIC PROBATION**

Students who do not achieve a GPA of, at least, 1.85 and/or do not maintain acceptable attendance in their classes, labs, study sessions, and trainings will be placed on academic probation. A meeting will be scheduled for you and your student to meet with the Executive Director and sign a contract detailing the requirements your student must meet in order to be restored to good standing.

Students on academic probation will automatically be restored to good standing if their GPA is, at least, 1.85 the following semester. However, students on academic probation who fail to achieve a 1.85 GPA by the following semester may be dismissed from the REACH Program.

**ACADEMIC DISMISSAL**

Students dismissed from the REACH Program based on academic performance will be notified in writing. The notice will be sent to the current residential address listed in the student’s record.

Students who are dismissed **must** follow the guidelines described in the College of Charleston’s Residence Life and Housing Contract Cancellation Policy: [http://reslife.cofc.edu/booklets/cancellationpolicy.pdf](http://reslife.cofc.edu/booklets/cancellationpolicy.pdf).
Students are strongly encouraged to discuss any disciplinary notices/actions with their parents and the REACH staff.

**APPELLING ACADEMIC DISMISSAL**

If a student is able to document the unsatisfactory academic performance was a result of extenuating circumstances (e.g., extended serious illness, personal crisis), an appeal for reinstatement may be submitted within 7 days of the dismissal date.

The appeal must be typed, signed, and must include the student’s full name and current address. A hard copy must be delivered to the Executive Director of the REACH Program. Appeals that are handwritten or faxed will **not** be accepted. The Executive Director’s decision **is** final.

**REQUESTING REINSTatement**

Requests for reinstatement must be made to the Program’s Executive Director. Students dismissed for unsatisfactory academic performance are not permitted to request reinstatement until the following academic year. Students will be interviewed and considered along with other applicants and there will be a reinstatement fee of $75. During the interview, students must be able demonstrate the steps they have taken while dismissed to ensure their successful completion of the Program.
SOCIALIZATION

“Forget all the reasons why it won’t work and believe the one reason why it will.”
~Unknown
MENTORS

Students are assigned a Social Mentor, a Fitness Mentor, and a REACH Mentor to help them become socially integrated into the campus.

- Social Mentors – College of Charleston students who will help develop and enhance their social skills on campus.
- Fitness Mentors – College of Charleston students who share interests similar to your student’s and will help them access fitness and recreational activities both on campus and in the community.
- REACH Mentor – An upper-level student in the REACH Program who will help your student adjust to college life.

SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING

The REACH Program provides direct instruction in social skills for students needing extra support in interpersonal communication and appropriate behaviors (for internships, public settings, relationships, etc.), as needed. Everything is tailored to each student's level of ability.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES AND CLUBS

- Students in the REACH Program are able to participate in any social activity on campus, with or without mentors, roommates, or friends.
- Students can join clubs at any time but they must join during the first year.
- Participation in social activities is a requirement for successful completion of the Program.
UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY

Understanding the nature of their disability is an essential part of helping your student live independently. The REACH staff continually works with students to not only help them understand their disability, but to support them in developing strategies for finding their voice (e.g., asking for help when they need it). This empowers students and eliminates the need to have someone else intervene and speak for them.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Students in the REACH Program are required to participate in community activities beginning their junior year. Many of our students are used to receiving services and, therefore, do not know how to interact appropriately as an equal member of society. Volunteering enables the students to learn how to interact within the community and increases awareness in using social skills in off-campus activities.

STANDARDS OF CONDUCT


BEHAVIORAL PROBATION

Students are expected to follow the rules of the REACH Program and the College of Charleston. A violation of these rules will result in a written infraction. A continuous violation of these rules will result in behavioral probation and, eventually, dismissal from the REACH Program.

YOUR ROLE

Students are learning to socialize as “young adults”, not as “people with disabilities.” As we are teaching them how to socialize, parents should not facilitate their socialization. Let your student be responsible for his/her own social engagements. Respect your student’s newfound
friendships and decision-making abilities. Your student will have friends you have never met
and will participate in activities you know nothing about – and that’s okay! Support their steps
toward independence by removing yourself from their email and social media accounts, as well.

Refrain from introducing your student to new people or situations by tying the concept of
disability to them in any way. Most people do not need to know the intimate details of his/her
disability. For example:

Instead of saying: "I would like to introduce you to my daughter Jane, she has Autism."
Simply say: “I would like to introduce you to my daughter, Jane.”

REACH POLICY

Parents are not to contact their student’s support coordinators, professors, tutors or
Mentors. Any questions or concerns should be addressed to REACHParents@cofc.edu.
INDEPENDENT LIVING

“She turned her can’t into cans, and her dreams into plans.” ~Unknown
**HOUSING**

Students live together in a residence hall during their freshman year. The residence hall is equipped with a full-kitchen, free washing machines and dryers, several bedrooms, shared bathrooms, and a common living area. A Graduate Assistant (GA) and Student Assistant (SA) live in the residence hall to provide students with additional supports (e.g., instructions on cooking, cleaning, hygiene).

Students who have demonstrated the ability to get to class on time, maintain hygiene, and socially interact appropriately in the common living area, are generally able to move out of the residence hall after the freshman year. Not knowing how to cook or do laundry are not reasons for us to keep students from moving out. The REACH staff will continue to work with students to teach these skills even when they have moved into a different residence hall. The REACH staff evaluates students in February to determine if they are ready to move out the following fall.

The Residence Hall Directors in each residence hall know which students in the REACH Program are living in their building. There are no REACH staff in any other residence hall; however, students are still able to contact REACH Staff 24/7 via the on-call phone, if necessary.

Parents should know, residence halls are divided into tiers with different pricing and costs. Information can be found at: [http://reslife.cofc.edu/campus-housing/residence-halls/index.php](http://reslife.cofc.edu/campus-housing/residence-halls/index.php).

Students in the residence hall for freshmen in the REACH Program must be with another person if they are out after 6pm and must notify the GA of their whereabouts if they are out after 9pm. They also have a curfew of 12am, unless there is a group activity (e.g., basketball game, movie), that has been pre-approved by the GA. However, students living in the College’s other residence halls do not have curfew.

**FREEDOMS**

- **Campus Freedom** – Students **must** complete the 50-Steps to Campus Freedom (a campus geographic awareness checklist) before being able to leave the residence hall alone.

- **Off-Campus Freedom** – Students **must** complete Off-Campus Freedom (an off-campus geographic awareness checklist) before being able to leave the campus alone.
Travel Training – Students **must** complete Off-Campus Freedom before being able to practice navigating the Charleston area with public transportation.

**PERSONAL SAFETY GROUPS**

The REACH Program provides mandatory semester-long safety groups for students on topics such as personal safety, internet safety, and dating. Run by REACH staff, the students are divided into small groups based on gender and experience.

**MONEY AND TIME MANAGEMENT**

The REACH staff will begin teaching money management to students at the beginning of their sophomore year.

The REACH staff will continuously work with students to help them develop time management skills (knowing what time to be someplace, estimating how long it will take to get there, etc.).

**ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY**

The REACH Program has a representative from the SC Assistive Technology Program at the University of South Carolina’s Center for Disability Resources meet with students each semester to see if any assistive technologies could help them become more independent.

**YOUR ROLE**

During phone calls with your student, be aware of anything you say/do that could perpetuate dependence. For example, **continually** asking questions like: “Are you brushing your teeth every day?” or “What clothes did you pick out?” increases their dependence while we are trying to create independence.

When your student comes home on break, have a higher expectation for their independent living skills.
REACH POLICY

Parents are not to contact their student’s GA, SA, support coordinators, mentors, tutors or professors. Any questions or concerns should be addressed to REACHParents@cofc.edu.
CAREER DEVELOPMENT

“Mistakes are proof that you are trying.” ~Unknown
**INTERNSHIPS**

Students are placed in internships based on their interests and strengths beginning the second semester of freshman year. Internships are paid and are changed each semester to increase the student's employment skills, develop new areas of interest, and reinforce generalization of skills. Seniors may stay at the same internship which will enhance their résumés for competitive employment post-graduation.

Internships are **not** provided over summer breaks. Students are strongly encouraged to network and use their system of support (families, etc.), to secure summer employment. Students should begin to look for summer employment during winter and spring breaks.

The REACH Program does **not** guarantee a job for your student post-graduation.

**JOB COACHES**

Job Coaches are provided to students needing assistance at internship sites, as deemed necessary by the Career Coordinator.

**YOUR ROLE**

Listen carefully to what your student is saying about his/her internships, experiences, and interests – keeping in mind the placements are based on each student’s interests and strengths.

In helping students gain summer employment, use your network. Create the opportunity but have your student make the contact. Do **not** seek a position specially-created for someone with a disability! The goal is for them to have a true employment opportunity.

**REACH POLICY**

Parents are **not** to call the internship site or the Career Coordinator. In the employer’s mind, the moment a parent calls the student’s ability to perform the job is completely undermined. Sometimes even the best intentions can be counterproductive. Any issues/concerns should be addressed at REACHParents@cofc.edu.
CAMPUS SAFETY RESOURCES

“Decide that you want it more than you are afraid of it.” ~Bill Cosby
**COUGAR SHUTTLE**

The College of Charleston provides a free shuttle service for students that operates every evening from 11:00pm – 3:00am. Students can be picked up and taken to any destination on the Charleston peninsula. To use the service, students must call 888-960-2227 and have their Cougar Cards to board the van. Additional information can be found at: [http://president.cofc.edu/community-relations/cougarshuttle.php](http://president.cofc.edu/community-relations/cougarshuttle.php).

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

The REACH Program is dedicated to ensuring your student’s safety and works collaboratively with the College’s Department of Public Safety.

The Department of Public Safety offers a Campus Escort Service Program 24/7 if students need an escort to/from class. More information can be found at: [http://publicsafety.cofc.edu/services/campus-escort/index.php](http://publicsafety.cofc.edu/services/campus-escort/index.php).

**SAFETY GROUPS**

The REACH Program provides mandatory semester-long safety groups for students on topics such as personal safety, internet safety, and dating. Run by REACH staff, the students are divided into small groups based on gender and experience.