

The syllabus and schedule are “living” documents and may be revised as needed throughout the course. Updates will be made in the class’s shared Google Drive folder via file with date of edit appended at end of file name.

EAD 966: Students in Postsecondary Education
Spring 2025: Tuesdays, 3:00–5:50pm (3 credits)
Bessey Hall 218

Dr. Bradley E. Cox [please feel free to call me Brad]

Email: bradcox@msu.edu

Office: Erickson Bldg., Room 426

Office Hours: By appointment, typically via [Zoom](#);
schedule meetings using [Calendly](#)

Personal Cell Phone: 814-404-8409 [please text first so I know who is calling]

[Google Drive Folder](#) (where most class material is located)

[Schedule](#) (updated as needed; it’s correct as of the date in the title/name of the file)

[D2L](#) (used primarily for class announcements and assignment submissions)

COURSE PURPOSE AND GOALS

This course will provide an overview of theory and research on students in U.S. higher education today. Topics will include changing demographics; college student development; the impact of collegiate environments; access, engagement, and retention; and improving outcomes for all students. Throughout the course we will consider the resulting realities, challenges, and opportunities faced by students and educators in various higher education sectors. As a community of scholars we will explore, discuss, and better understand:

- historical and contemporary demographics of college students in the United States, their changes, and likely trajectories;
- policies and socio-cultural trends that have affected and are likely to continue to affect students’ college experiences;
- theories and research that explain the context of students’ learning and development;
- the impact of collegiate environments on diverse student populations;
- how we, as educators, can improve outcomes for all students.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Three pairs of complementary ideas drive my approach to creating a learning environment:

Critical and *Respectful*. Courses should facilitate students’ inclination toward, and fruitful participation in, critical inquiry and reasoned judgment. I encourage students to ask difficult questions, examine underlying assumptions, challenge unsupported arguments, and draw conclusions based on the weight of the evidence. I also believe knowledge is evolutionary in nature yet pluralistic in application, so I urge students to remain conscious of the cultural, historical, and personal differences that can influence each other’s perspectives.

Intense and *Enjoyable*. Courses should require students to deeply engage with the material. I have high expectations for students and use varied assignments that provide opportunities for students to both demonstrate their competence and develop their confidence. By inviting students to share their own experiences, I offer students the chance to develop personal connections to the material. Similarly, I often share my own stories with students and find (or create) a reason to laugh during every class session.

Intellectually Rigorous and *Unmistakably Practical*. Many critics of educational research lament the apparent disconnect between research and policy, between theory and practice. However, I see these as complementary

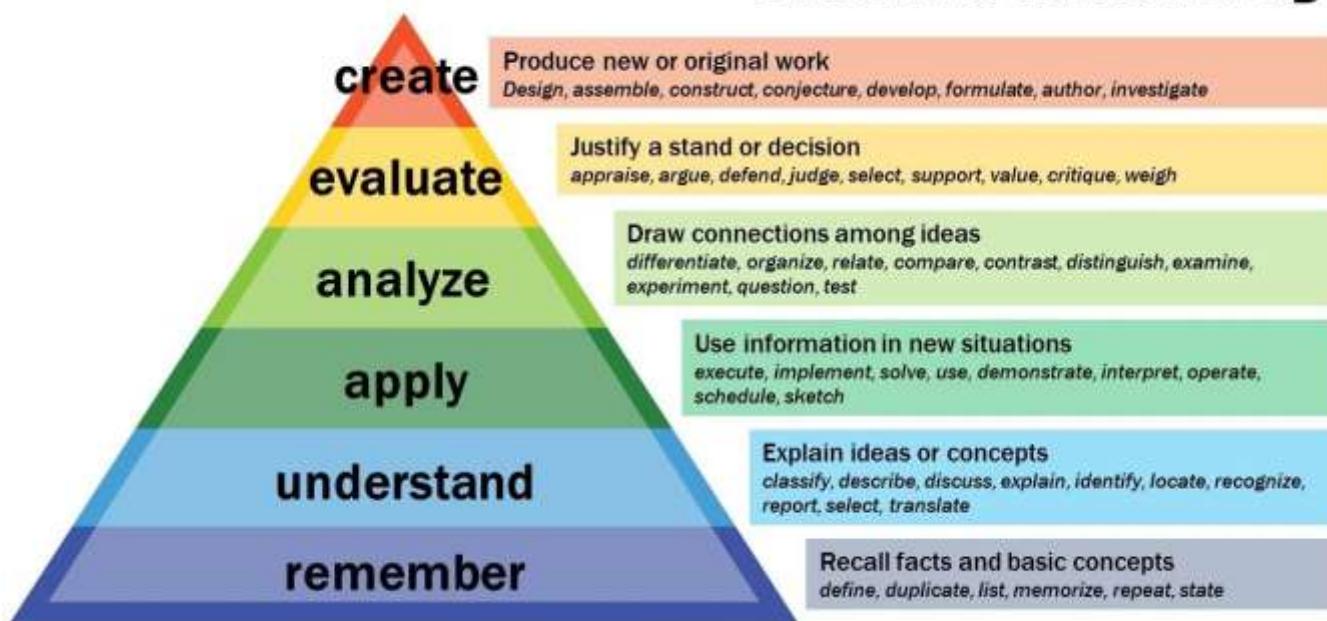
components of an integrated system of education. While we may often become captivated by the intellectual complexity inherent in a critical discussion of theoretical or philosophical topics, I regularly prod students to give equal consideration to the “so-what” question. In doing so, I remind students that their greatest contributions will come not by saying something impressive but by doing something important.

We are collectively responsible for each other’s learning. As the formal instructor, I will typically select readings, assignments, and activities designed to facilitate your learning. As a student, you will be expected to complete all assignments and activities to the best of your ability, engage the material with the intensity of an emerging scholar, share your insights with others in the class, and push yourself academically. Be thoughtful, humble, brave, open, flexible, bold, and responsible. Remember that we are all learning together, and learning in public. Pursue truth and understanding – not with malice but with wonder.

This is a small class, a doctoral seminar. The readings and resources provided during the class will be important to review; instructor comments will provide additional information and examples; assignments and activities will provide opportunities for critical analyses and application. However, the most influential factor affecting the quality of learning happening in this class is the well-informed, reasoned, respectful, and reflective engagement of the students in the class. There is no one way to effectively engage with the class. For example, students may meaningfully engage by leading a small group activity; thoughtfully asking and questions; respectfully challenging the ideas of readings, peers, or the instructor; sharing insights gained from personal experiences or outside resources.

Students will be expected to engage in specific behaviors throughout the class. These expectations are derived from Bloom’s Taxonomy of learning (Armstrong, 2016; Huitt, 2011). Each week students will be expected to complete assigned readings, view videos, and review other resources (both those provided by the instructors and those available from the library, websites, other books, etc.) in advance of each class session. The live class sessions will be highly interactive and students are expected to come to class having moved through the first two levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (*remember* and *understand*). Although there will be some opportunities to review basic understanding of materials during class times, our live sessions will generally focus on *applying*, *analyzing*, and *evaluating* the ideas raised by each week’s materials. Your final project will give you the chance to share novel insights of your own *creation*.

Bloom’s Taxonomy



(Armstrong, 2016)

What	How	When
Remember	Focused & complete reading of assigned chapters/articles; Review of source materials	Before class
Understand	Thoughtful processing of source materials; Engagement of discussion in class; Use of internet resources for supplemental information	Before Class; During class
Apply	Engagement in discussion and critical reflection during class; Reflection on how class discussion informs your current and future professional roles or research	During class; After class in your job / assistantship
Analyze	Compare, contrast, and connect concepts, theories, and data to each other, to yourself, and to the perspectives of others	During class; After class in your job /assistantship
Evaluate	Critical examination of... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidentiary support • Practical utility 	Before class, During class; Final project/paper
Create	Course projects	Specific times during semester in relationship with assignments

COURSE COMMUNICATION

Communicating and Meeting with Instructor

Any correspondence of a personal nature can be directed to my MSU email (bradcox@msu.edu). My goal is to respond to students within 24-48 hours during the work week; I try to keep my weekends free for research and family. So please don't email me on Thursday night with questions if you need an answer on Friday.

To ensure I recognize an email is about this class, be sure to make the subject line "EAD 966: [topic]". Note that I get a lot of emails and can fall behind. Generally, if your email is simple enough that I can answer in 3 minutes from my phone while waiting in the parking lot to pick up my kid, you'll hear back from me pretty quickly. If it requires me to read more than a paragraph, find additional information/materials, or give something a lot of thought, it'll get added to my rather long to-do list. If you don't hear back from me along the timeline mentioned above, feel free to send me a follow-up email with the subject line in ALL CAPS...that'll get my attention. If an issue is time sensitive, please text me! Just try to be respectful of nights of weekends.

To set a meeting with me, rather than emailing me, please use my [Calendly link](#) (also in my email signatures) to get directly onto my calendar. In an effort to remain available for meetings with multiple students, please sign up for the shorter (15-25 minutes) meetings unless we've already talked about the need for a longer meeting.

READING MATERIALS and CONTENT RESOURCES

Desire2Learn (D2L) Class Site and shared Google Drive folder

Information required for this course will generally be made available via our course's [D2L site](#) or our shared class [Google Drive folder](#). We will use D2L for course organization, general communication, and most assignment submissions. We will use the shared Google Drive folder to host the bulk of our course content files (e.g., slides, additional resources) and materials for certain in-class activities. If you are unfamiliar with D2L or need additional assistance, review the [help page](#).

Books

*Free digital versions of the following books are available online through the [MSU library](#). We will not use any book in its entirety, so students may decide for themselves whether to purchase a personal copy. Other materials (e.g., articles, videos) will be assigned as we move through the course. Unless otherwise noted, readings will be available electronically – through D2L, our Google Drive folder, MSU library, or other sources accessible by students. *Students* are responsible for acquiring the assigned readings in a timely manner.

You typically must be logged into your MSU account and/or using [EZProxy](#) to access materials through MSU library databases. If you are still unable to access the materials, please let me know as soon as possible.

*Mayhew, M. J., Rockenbach, A. N., Bowman, N. A., Seifert, T. A. D., Wolniak, G. C., Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2016). [How College Affects Student: 21st Century Evidence That Higher Education Works](#). Wiley. [Note: we might also consider the 1991 and 2005 editions by Pascarella and Terenzini]

*McNair, T. B., Albertine, S., Cooper, M. A., McDonald, N., & J. T. (2016). [Becoming a student-ready college: A new culture of leadership for student success](#). Wiley.

*Patton, L. D., Renn, K. A., Guido-DiBrito, F., & Quaye, S. J. (2016). [Student Development in College: Theory, Research, and Practice](#) (3 ed.). Jossey-Bass.

*Renn, K. A., & Reason, R. D. (2021). [College students in the United States: Characteristics, experiences, and outcomes](#). Taylor & Francis.

[[APA Style Guide](#) (7th Edition)] *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2020).

- If you do not own a personal copy, please acquire one ASAP. It will be necessary for nearly all of your courses, exams, papers, and dissertation. I suggest the spiral-bound version because it includes tabs that allow you to find the appropriate section quickly and allows you to lay the book flat for easy use.

Citation Management

I encourage you to use a citation management program or service. I personally have used EndNote for more than a decade but there are plenty of free alternatives. I have also used Mendeley, while many students prefer Zotero or PaperPile. Use whichever one works best for you. And do not rely entirely on the software to do in-text citations for your reference list perfectly. It is a useful tool and simplify/accelerate the use of citations in your work. However, please double check all entries in your database and confirm proper formatting of those citations in the materials you submit (the citations auto-generated by these programs often need minor cleanup). Check out the [citation management resources](#) made available through the MSU library for more details.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS / ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments are summarized here. More specific guidelines for various assignments will be made available in class or other documents as the course progresses. All assignments in this course must feature your original insights, arguments, and writing. Generative artificial intelligence (AI) may *not* be used in this course as a text generating tool for any assignments. You *may* use AI for idea generation, to find resources, or as a grammar and citation check. It is best practice to check in with me if you have any concerns about how you could be using these tools in this course. If I am concerned about how these tools are being used, I will reach out to you directly as a first step. You can find further guidance on generative AI from MSU in the Information and Resources section at the end of this syllabus.

Class Attendance, Preparation, and Contributions to Learning (100 total points)

This course is truly a doctoral “seminar” in which all members of the class, from first-year students to the instructor, share responsibility for course processes and outcomes. Students are full intellectual peers, and the instructor serves primarily as a guide, consultant, or facilitator. In these roles, I strive to create a classroom environment that is *critical* and *respectful*, *intense* and *enjoyable*, and *intellectually rigorous* and *unmistakably practical*. This course will use a combination of teaching strategies but will rely heavily on students’ active investment in the class discussions, overall course project, and the individual presentations and products.

Towards that end, students are expected to complete all readings in advance of the associated class session. Students should take notes, highlight text, etc. as needed while they read so that they can quickly refresh their memories when resources are referenced during class or used in assignments/activities.

You are expected to attend and engage in every class session, activity, and assignment. I will work with students if/when adaptations might be needed to accommodate unique or unforeseen circumstances. However, students must notify me as early as possible you are unable to attend a session (either planned or emergency).

PRE-flections and Reflections (20 points per submission = 200 total points)

PRE-flections: To ensure students are prepared to fully engage with the content during each class session, and to allow for adaption to in-class activities when needed, students are to submit a short “preflection” by 11:59pm the day *before* each class session. Submissions will occur via an online discussion board in D2L. Please use the following *italicized headings*, under which it’s ok to use bullet points (with complete sentences in each, please). Each submission should be about 150-250 words total.

- *Key Takeaways:* What are the 2-4 most important things learned about the topic? What do you think the class ought to remember moving forward?
- *Little Questions:* These are specific, technical, and/or methodological questions about the topic we are discussing. Think of these as “clarifying” questions narrowly tailored to the assigned readings. These questions are the type that might have straightforward answers (e.g., what does ____ mean, how is ____ calculated, to whom does ____ apply).
- *Big Questions:* The big questions should be broader, involving the extension, integration, or application of the authors’ analysis, argument, or suggestions. The point of the big question is to consider the readings within the broad context of education research, policy, or practice (e.g., would this theory still apply in ____ situation, what makes this ____ so difficult to address, how does ____ affect the conclusions /assumptions we have as a field, what if we combine ____ with ____).
- *Additional Resources (optional):* If you happen to know/find valuable additional resources (e.g., websites, articles, books) related to that week’s topic/readings, drop a link or file here so others can review them if they want to learn more about the topic.

Reflections: Following each of the sessions in which students will be giving formal presentations, students will write a 250-350 word reflection. Write one or two paragraphs for each of the three italicized headings below. This is not a formal paper in the traditional sense, does not have to be in APA format, nor include formal citations. Rather, it is meant as a mechanism to help students revisit, synthesize, and draw lasting insights from peers' presentations.

- *Presentation:* Which of the presentations were particularly effective, and why? Consider the presentations' structure/organization, slides/visuals, language/voice, style/mannerisms, etc.
- *Content:* What are some of the key conceptual, theoretical, and/or empirical things you learned? This is about the substantive content shared during the presentations.
- *Application:* How are *you* going to use or apply what you learned from these presentations? These applications could relate to your own presentation practices, job/assistantship, or research.

Outcomes Update Project (3 components; 350 points total)

The *How College Affects Students (HCAS)* book series is the field's most comprehensive compilation of empirical evidence regarding student change during college. The 3rd edition of this book (Mayhew et al., 2016) synthesizes findings from 1,848 peer-reviewed journal articles, nearly all of which were written between 2002 and 2013. But a lot can change in a decade, and that's certainly been the case within higher education. For this assignment you will basically – on a small scale and in a very targeted way – update a portion of the book. To do so, you will conduct a targeted literature review that identifies, evaluates, and synthesizes empirical literature published since 2014. Your review will focus on a specific student population and a specific type/family of college outcomes (e.g., the influence of college on career/financial outcomes for racially minoritized students). There are 3 components to this assignment; comprehensive details will be shared during the semester.

This project includes three separate graded components. Each component builds on the one before it:

- Proposal (50)
 - 1-page max, double spaced; a mix of narrative and bullet points is OK
 - Defining your proposed population, outcome(s) of interest, and sources to explore first
 - *File: "LastName Outcomes Proposal YYYY-MM-DD"*
- Annotations (10 annotations x 10 points each = 100 total points)
 - Full annotation of articles to be included in synthesis presentation
 - Using template provided in class to review, summarize, and assess sources
 - *File: "LastName Outcomes Annotations YYYY-MM-DD"*
- Presentation (200)
 - 12-minute live presentation to class; slides submitted via D2L
 - Synthesizing findings from annotated articles; comparing/contrasting with pre-2015 findings
 - *File: "LastName Outcomes Presentation YYYY-MM-DD"*

Final Project: 2 Options (Each option has 3 components that collectively total 350 points)

Each student must finalize their choice before Spring Break

Option 1: Rethinking Theory (3 components; 350 points total)

Use emerging, discipline-specific, and/or "non-traditional" (as in, outside of the mainstream college student development theory literature) theories and/or data to present a clear, insightful, and evidence-supported argument about how student development theory and/or college effects models can be "rethought" in fruitful ways. Often, the need to rethink these topics is driven by disruptions to the status quo conditions in which the theories were originally developed/applied.

Typically, students take one or more of the following approaches...

- Revising a current/traditional theory or generating a "new" theory

- Creatively synthesizing / combining theories
- Providing a novel wholistic critique of a theoretical family/type/paradigm
- Articulating new ways to maximize the utility of student development theory over the next decade

The rethinking theory project includes three separate graded components. Each component builds on the one before it. Further details and examples from prior classes will be provided later in the semester.

- Proposal (50)
 - 1-page, 3-slides, 5-minutes (brainstorm with class)
 - *1-Pager File: "LastName Rethinking Proposal YYYY-MM-DD"*
- Presentation (100)
 - 12-minute live presentation to class
 - *Slides File: "LastName Rethinking Presentation YYYY-MM-DD"*
- Paper (200)
 - Scholarly paper targeting a specific publication outlet
 - *Paper File: "LastName Rethinking Paper YYYY-MM-DD"*

Option 2: Theory & Outcomes Case Study (3 components; 350 points total)

Develop a case study that could be used to demonstrate how theory and research evidence can be applied to improve understanding of and response to real world experiences, situations, observations, and/or incidents.

The final case study “package” will include a collection of documents, some generated by the student, others compiled from other sources. Some (but not all) the documents to be included...

- Case Description: e.g., description of the affected student(s), the environmental context, the incident or issue, and stakeholder interests.
- Applicable Theory and Research: e.g., citations, summaries, and short description of their utility to help make sense of the case
- Teaching Guide: e.g., case summary, discussion questions/prompts, in-class activities
- External Documents: e.g., news articles or videos about the case or to be used during facilitation

The Case Study project includes three separate graded components. Each component builds on the one before it.

- Proposal (50)
 - 1-page, 3-slides, 5-minutes (brainstorm with class)
 - *1-Pager File: "LastName Case Proposal YYYY-MM-DD"*
- Case Package (200)
 - Complete package of case study materials
 - *Case Folder: "LastName [Case Title] YYYY-MM-DD"*
 - *Case Files: "LastName [Case Title] [Document Type] YYYY-MM-DD"*
- Case Facilitation (100)
 - 30-40 minute class facilitation of case study
 - Materials to be shared and read by peers before facilitation

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING AND SUBMITTING ASSIGNMENTS

Unless otherwise specified, assignments are **due by 11:59 p.m. the Sunday before the associated class session** and must be submitted through the appropriate D2L portal. Written assignments (except PRE-flections and reflections) must be submitted in Word or PowerPoint format to facilitate easier review and feedback. Except in cases of emergencies, late submissions without advanced approval for an exception by the instructor will not be accepted.

Grading/Evaluation

Papers generally must be typed, double spaced, with a font size of 12, and margins of 1" all around. All written work should conform to the guidelines set forth in the current edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA). The Canvas site has an APA module for you to help you understand the requirements of APA style.

Organized (titles, headings, introductions, summaries, references) and well-written papers are expected. You may want to consult The Elements of Style (Strunk & White, 1979) and Brad's "[Writing: What Matters to Me](#)" document. All assignments should be submitted electronically (with formal papers in Word format) via the appropriate assignment portal/link.

Although each assignment may have unique components and mechanisms for assessment, three primary criteria undergird my expectations for each assignment: **Insight, Clarity, & Evidence**.

Insight	Clarity	Evidence
Insightful responses demonstrate a deep understanding of subject-matter complexities; present novel, efficient, and effective applications of theory and research; integrate concepts from multiple theories, viewpoints, perspectives, or fields of knowledge; and recognize areas of uncertainty , contradiction, and potential complications.	Clarity of presentation is critical to persuasion, teaching, and discussion. In both verbal and written communication, clear presentations are guided by logical, theoretical, or conceptual frameworks ; present accurate and relevant information ; limit superfluous , misleading, or redundant information; employ methods of presentation that most effectively convey the author's intent ; and meet professional standards for language and grammar.	All completed assignments will be subjected to the " how? " and " why? " tests: any assertion should explain <i>how</i> one reaches a particular conclusion and <i>why</i> that conclusion is the most appropriate. Successful responses will use source material (e.g., data, research findings, theoretical relationships) to build a cohesive and logical argument to support their conclusions. Complete responses will also anticipate and address potential challenges to and critiques of the argument/conclusion.

Final grades will be calculated based on total points earned in the course. As MSU uses a 4.0 grading scale, final grades will be calculated as follows:

Points	Final Grade
930-1000 points =	4.0
880-929 points =	3.5
830-879 points =	3.0
780-829 points =	2.5
730-779 points =	2.0
729 or fewer points =	0.0

IMPORTANT INFORMATION AND CAMPUS RESOURCES

It is important for students to know about MSU policies and resources. Please do not hesitate to ask questions about this information or to share additional resources with the class. Note that the information here is in a constant state of change due to periodic policy, practice, and/or organization changes. Contact offices directly to verify their hours and how they are able to serve students.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the highest standards of academic integrity. Please review MSU's policy for [Integrity of Scholarship and Grades](#) for information on student rights and responsibilities. Students who violate MSU policy will be subject to the specified policies and procedures.

Unless authorized by the instructor, students are expected to develop original work for this course; therefore, you may not submit work you completed for another course to satisfy the requirements for this course. You also may not use any essay writing/paraphrasing/re-writing software (e.g., QuillBot). Contact the instructor if you are unsure about the appropriateness of your coursework.

Accommodations

Special needs or requests should be brought to the attention of the instructor as soon as possible so that timely arrangements that adhere to MSU policy can be made. If you have any questions, MSU's [Resource Center for People with Disabilities](#) can be an invaluable source of information and support.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Appropriate use of artificial intelligence within higher education remains unclear and is actively evolving. Policies regarding the use of AI in specific coursework is set by each instructor. MSU provides several additional resources for individuals looking for more information on the topic: [MSU Memo from the Provost: Generative Artificial Intelligence Guidance](#); [Generative AI Reminders and Guidance for Students](#); [Interim Guidance for Generative AI in Instructional Settings](#); [MSU Institutional Data Policy](#)

Limits to Confidentiality

Materials submitted for this class are generally considered confidential pursuant to the University's student record policies. However, students should be aware that University employees, including instructors, may not be able to maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues based on external legal obligations or that relate to the health and safety of MSU community members and others. Instructors are [mandatory reporters](#) and must report the following information to other MSU offices if you share it with them:

- Suspected child abuse/neglect, even if this maltreatment happened when you were a child;
- Allegations of sexual assault or sexual harassment involving MSU students, faculty, or staff; and
- Credible threats of harm to oneself or to others.

These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will contact you about the incident you have shared. In almost all cases, it will be your decision whether you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting, you are encouraged to make an appointment with MSU's [Counseling and Psychiatric Services](#).

Safe and Inclusive Campus

MSU is committed to fostering a culture of caring and respect that is free of relationship violence and sexual misconduct and to ensuring that all affected individuals have access to services. For information about reporting options, confidential advocacy and support resources, university policies and procedures, or how to make a difference on campus, visit the [Title IX website](#).

Student Health

Graduate school can be a time of stress and transition that can affect mental and physical health. MSU provides counseling, psychiatric, medical, and health/wellness services for students and employees. Learn about available resources at [Counseling and Psychiatric Services](#), [Student Health Services](#), and [on-campus recreational sports programs/facilities](#).

Food Bank

Chronic hunger and food insecurity affect about 1 in 5 postsecondary students. MSU has the oldest student-run food bank in the U.S. and serves students throughout the calendar year (all 12 months). Review the [Student Food Bank](#) website for more information. In addition, the College of Education has a small student food pantry located on the first floor of Erickson Hall. It will be open from 9am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. There is a small selection of grab-and-go items.

Emergency Care

MSU offers students and employees subsidized [backup or emergency care](#) for well or mildly ill children (ages 0–12) or dependent adults.

Writing Center

[The Writing Center](#) @ MSU provides one-on-one and group writing consultations, various writing-specific workshops, and writing groups for graduate students. There are various locations across MSU's campus, as well as online appointments, to serve the needs of students.

Student Affairs & Services

There are many student organizations at MSU that offer communities of learning and support. Check with the Division of Student Life & Engagement to learn about these groups and opportunities.

Restrooms

It is MSU policy that individuals may use the restroom that corresponds with their gender identity. Restroom users are expected to respect others' actions and privacy in this matter. An all-gender bathroom is located on the first floor of Erickson. A [map](#) of additional single-occupancy restrooms at MSU is available for your information.

Campus Emergencies

Emergency situations include severe weather, a long-term power outage, a fire, a tornado, human-made and natural disasters, or a declared “state of emergency” situation. In the event of a major campus emergency, the University will disseminate warning information through the appropriate media. For more information, review the [MSU Alert system](#) and signup for automatic messages.

Conflict Resolution

The [Office of the University Ombudsperson](#) assists students in resolving conflicts or disputes within the University. The Ombudsperson also assists students who want to file formal complaints and grievances, which is often the final step in a student's effort to resolve a dispute.

Legal Services

[Student Legal Services](#) provides MSU students free legal advice and representation on a range of legal issues such as criminal misdemeanors, civil infractions, landlord-tenant matters, and traffic offenses.

Please be sure to share any additional resources you know of that might benefit your classmates.