



PROGRAM SELECTION

Finding a program that matches your strengths and interests is the first step in making the transition to a post-secondary education or training program.

Understanding Your Strengths & Interests

Knowing what your strengths and interests are can help you select a program that keeps you engaged in your courses and motivated even when the workload is demanding.

Strengths are skills, qualities, and characteristics that everyone has. Interests can include activities or hobbies that you enjoy doing in your spare time.

To better understand your strengths & interests, answer the questions below:

- What extracurricular activities, clubs or groups do you participate in?
- What subjects in school do you really like and get good marks in?
- What books, television shows, or movies do you like?
- What do you like to talk about?
- What would your family and friends say you really care about?
- What do you like to spend your free time doing?
- Have you taken any aptitude tests or career assessments in school? What did the results show?
- Do you do any volunteer or part-time work that you enjoy?
- What subjects interested you in high school (e.g., history, sports, computer science)?

Types of Post-Secondary

Below you will find descriptions of the 4 main types of post-secondary institutions, each of which offers different kinds of degrees, majors, and programs of study.



2 Year College

- Two year colleges can offer a combination of academic, technical, and continuing education programs. You can obtain a diploma, a certificate, or an associate's degree.
- To be admitted to a two-year college program you need to have either a high school diploma or a equivalency diploma (GED).
- There are many benefits to beginning post-secondary education at a two year college, including lower tuition costs and lower admission standards.

PROGRAM SELECTION

- Many students choose a two year college program as a “stepping stone”, and after completing the first two years, transfer to a four year university or college to complete their degree program.



Trade or Technical Institute

- Technical or trade institutes, also known as polytechnics, offer programs ranging less than one year up to four years.
- Technical and trade institutes grant licenses, certificates, diplomas, associate's and bachelor's degrees. They prepare people for specific careers in many areas including fields like welding, cosmetology, medical imaging, library and information science.
- Trade institutes provide students with hands-on application of the skills that are needed for a given career. Technical institutes tend to also teach the theoretical aspects of a given career.



4 Year College

- A four year college grants bachelor's degrees, such as Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Science (BSc), and sometimes associate's degrees, such as Associate of Arts (AA).
- Four year colleges can be specialized in the programs of study that they offer - such as colleges whose programs are limited to those in the field of nursing - or they can offer a broad range of programs, such as liberal arts programs in the humanities, sciences, or social sciences.
- Class sizes in four year colleges are usually smaller than universities, which allows students to receive more personalized attention and better access to college faculty.



4 Year University

- A university grants bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees and typically have a number of programs not found at the college level (e.g., law school, medical school).
- Universities are usually larger than colleges. They have a greater focus on scholarly and scientific research, have more options for course and program selection, larger class sizes, and more resources on campus (e.g., library, student support services).
- University professors are usually involved in research, and have graduate students that assist with research and teaching classes. These students are known as Research Assistants (RAs) and Teaching Assistants (TAs). The opportunity to work as an RA or TA in a university provides both financial assistance and helps to build your future career and resume.

PROGRAM SELECTION

Choosing the Right School for You

Choosing the right school for you is as important as choosing the right program. Consider the following questions.

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- What education and career goals do you have?
- What is your preferred class size?
- Can you afford the annual tuition costs?
- What financial resources do you have and can you apply for student loans, scholarships, and bursaries?
- Do you want to or do you need to move away from home to attend school?
- Is the institution well-regarded or well-ranked?
- Do you meet the admission criteria to be accepted?

You could also try:

- Talking with family members who attended post-secondary school about the things they liked and didn't like.
- Meeting with your high school guidance counsellor to talk about the admissions process.
- Reviewing program websites, catalogues, and course options at each school you are interested in.
- Attending post-secondary school fairs if they are offered at your high school or in your community.
- Touring post-secondary institutions you are interested in and attending open house events either in person or online.
- Talking with students who are currently attending post-secondary and ask them about their experience.

Cost & Budgeting

When choosing a post-secondary school, the cost of tuition, housing, and other living expenses are important things to consider.

Consider:

- Comparing and ranking the costs of different post-secondary schools and decide which ones are within your budget.
- Creating a draft budget to make sure that you can afford the cost of attending the post-secondary school and any other expenses you may incur (e.g., rent and food).

PROGRAM SELECTION

- Getting help from a parent or other trusted adult to create a budget that you can manage easily.

Available Funding

Receiving a bursary or scholarship can help students with the financial cost of attending post-secondary. You can apply for funding while you are still in high school or when you are in post-secondary.

Sometimes these applications are based on academic performance, but others based on specific needs (learning disabilities) or talents (essay writing or athletics).

Ask a guidance counsellor in your high school or staff in the admissions department about financial assistance options well in advance, as these applications can take time to complete.

Financial assistance options that may be available:

- Scholarships
- Bursaries
- Student loans
- Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP)
- Federal grants (for full-time or part-time studies, students with dependants, students with disabilities)
- Other awards such as prizes, competitive awards, and nominated awards

Full Time vs. Part Time

Taking a full course in post-secondary may feel overwhelming or stressful. Many institutions allow students to study part-time or take a reduced course load.

Part-time students typically take 2-3 courses a semester, instead of 4 or more that full-time may require.

Admission Requirements

Admission criteria for post-secondary can include the following:

- High school diploma or a general equivalency diploma (GED).
- Types of courses taken in high school.
- High school grades and your overall grade-point average (GPA).

PROGRAM SELECTION

- The scores on college or university entrance exams such as the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) or language tests like the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).
- GPA of any post-secondary school courses, if transferring from one institution to another or moving from undergraduate to graduate studies.
- Whether the prospective student is applying directly from high school, is applying after having completing courses at another institution, or is a mature student.

Consider the following:

- Admission requirements for two-year colleges are usually easier than at other types of post-secondary schools.
- Admission requirements vary between post-secondary schools and among each program.
- Certain high school courses may be required for science and engineering programs.
- High school grade point averages (GPA) may need to be higher for some undergraduate programs than others (for example, nursing may require a higher GPA than an arts or humanities program).
- Graduate school programs require a certain GPA for admission, which is typically higher than what is required for undergraduate students.
- Make sure you understand and meet the admission requirements before applying to your program of choice.

Touring Campuses

Taking a campus tour (either in-person or virtually) can be very helpful when choosing the right post-secondary school. It can be a chance to meet other students and orient yourself to the buildings and services on campus.

Some things to look for on a campus tour:

- The disability services office.
- The students' union or student center.
- The retail food operations and dining halls.
- The student career centre.
- The library and campus bookstore.
- Bulletin boards.
- Lecture halls and classrooms.
- Buildings and departments that are associated with your program.
- Student clubs.
- Other areas where social, recreational, performing arts, and sports take place.