

INFORMATION FOR THE COLLEGE-BOUND STUDENT



Making Your Own Choices

As you make decisions about continuing your education be aware of the reasons behind your choices of post-secondary school, academic major, and career goal. Making these choices for the right reasons means, in part, avoiding making them for the wrong reasons—going to XYZ University just because your friends are going there; majoring in chemistry just because your mother is a chemist; becoming a Certified Public Accountant because your Uncle John is a CPA and he's your favorite uncle.

It would be a good idea to question your mother and your Uncle John about their careers and to watch them at work to see if either profession appeals to you. Discussing your career choices with others, including your parents, will help you see the possibilities and sort through the confusion. Always keep in mind the need to be realistic: base your decisions on facts and observations and on your own interests and abilities.

Choosing An Educational Program

The following questions will help you explore your academic and vocational interests.

What Are My Life Goals?

It's easy for someone to tell you, "You should analyze what it is you really want to do with your life." It's harder to figure out how to go about doing it. You probably daydream about achievements for which you'd like to be remembered.

- What do they reveal about yourself?
- Do they involve working with or helping others?
- Do they show you prefer to work on your own towards some accomplishment?
- Are they family-oriented?
- Do they reflect a desire to travel?
- Once you have an idea of the general direction you want your life to take, you need to consider how to achieve your goals.
- What skills, knowledge, and abilities must you acquire to realize your ambitions?

What Are My Career Goals?

Since so many adult waking hours are spent at work, life goals and career goals are often closely related. If you are unsure of your career or vocational goals, start with your high school experience. Consider what courses you are successful in and what classes you enjoy. Don't forget that your activities outside of class may also point to potential career interests.

There are a number of tests that measure interests and preferences. The PLAN is one example. The combination of responses you give on the test can be related to specific careers or areas of study.

- Ask your counselor if such tests are available to you.
- Also ask our librarian for books that can help you explore career possibilities and choices.
- Don't overlook adult relatives and family friends engaged in vocational or career fields which interest you as a source of information.
- Develop a list of questions you can ask them about their everyday work to see if it appeals to you. If it does, find out about the training they had to obtain to work in their fields.

What Type Of Educational Training Best Meets My Objectives?

If you like many of the classes you have taken, then a program which has a strong general education or "liberal arts" component in its curriculum may appeal to you. Such an academic program allows you, and in some cases requires you, to take humanities courses as well as social science and natural science courses. This type of program can help you determine an academic major and possibly a career objective.

If you have identified a specific trade—for example, if you want to be an electrician, carpenter, hairdresser, or brick mason—look at vocational, trade, or technical programs. Programs that prepare you for a particular vocation or trade generally concentrate on specialized coursework and are often shorter than programs geared towards an associates or bachelors degree. If you plan to enter a profession such as law, medicine, or business administration, you may need to take an undergraduate program with a major in a given subject area, and then continue your education at the graduate level. Other professions, such as engineering or teaching, may require a program combining liberal arts and specialized coursework for four or five years. Some professions, such as nursing, offer many different levels of training and education. You might be able to get a very satisfying job after just two or three years of study, but you might prefer the level of responsibility and specialization that requires four or five years of study.

Choosing A School

- Don't worry if you have not decided on a specific career goal, or even if you have not figured out your life goals.
- Goals serve as guideposts to help you explore your potential.
- You can always change your goals, but it's hard to choose a school if you have not at least narrowed down your choices somewhat.
- Once you have a general idea of the areas you'd like to study or receive training in, identifying post-secondary schools you would be interested in attending becomes a more manageable task.

What School Is The Best Fit For Me?

Here are some items to consider in your selection process:

1. Academic or training program offered.

Once you have identified your areas of academic or vocational interest, your first consideration will be whether a school offers the training or academic program you need. Having the relevant program and offering a quality education in that area of study should be your primary reasons for selecting a school.

2. Size of the student body.

Determine your comfort zone. For example, do you want a relatively small academic environment or do you prefer a larger campus community? The advantages and disadvantages are based on individual preference. Small colleges may offer lower student/faculty ratios and easier interaction with all of the campus community outside the classroom. You may, however, feel more at home at a larger school, even if it takes more effort to obtain access to your teachers. Larger schools typically offer more extracurricular activities as well as a wider range of course offerings, but your classes may be larger.

3. Environment.

Do you want to go to school in a large city or a small town? Don't make the mistake of thinking that if you want to go to a larger school it has to be in a big city or vice versa. Whether you want to live on campus or commute to school while living at home will also affect your choice. Remember some colleges do not offer on-campus housing.

4. Family considerations.

How far away from home do you want to be? Some students feel that post-secondary school attendance offers the opportunity to be on their own for the first time. As a result, they

choose schools hundreds of miles away. You may find you can experience the same independence even if your school is closer to home. In addition, distance may increase transportation costs.

5. Admission requirements.

You may not meet the admission requirements of your first college choice. Make sure you have alternatives. Unless the school you have selected has an "open" admission policy, apply to more than one school. If you do well at your second choice school, you may eventually be able to transfer to your first choice school.

6. Athletic, recreational, and social programs.

Do you want to participate in intercollegiate athletics? Do you want to attend a school with a strong athletic tradition, even if you don't participate? Depending upon your skill you may be able to participate in a small college athletic program but not in a large university program. If sports are important to you, that will be a factor in your college selection process. Even if sports do not interest you, other recreational or social activities may carry the same kind of importance to you and should be considered.

7. Cost.

What schools can you afford to attend? This question is, for many students, instrumental in the college selection process. Never exclude a school from consideration for financial reasons without first investigating financial assistance programs which may help you cover your educational costs. When looking at the cost of attending any institution make sure you have a realistic picture.

Other Points to Consider

There are more students working while going to school than ever before. Studies done on student employment show most students who work part-time on campus do as well or better academically than students who do not work. Also, students who work part-time tend to withdraw from school less frequently. Why would this be? It appears that students who work are better at budgeting their time than students who do not. In addition, employers act in a support capacity for their student employees, providing an additional source of counseling and advice. In addition, students who work are more likely to feel that they "belong" to the school and that they are helping to finance their education.

Work on campus if you have the opportunity. Do not convince yourself that you are "too busy" to work. If your decision comes down to attempting a few more credit hours in a given semester or accepting a part-time job, consider the job. You may stand less of a risk of

"burning out" academically, and you may reduce your need to borrow. Further, you gain valuable work experience. Nevertheless, you should not allow employment to jeopardize your academic achievement. If your grades begin to suffer due to work, you may want to consider adjusting the number of hours you work each week. If you are involved in a time-consuming extracurricular activity, part-time work may not be the best option for you.

Long term educational loans are used by more students than any other type of aid to help finance an education. Don't automatically rule out borrowing money to finance your education, but only borrow what is necessary. Recognize that by borrowing you are deferring the expense of your education: the bill comes due eventually. You should also understand your rights and responsibilities with regard to your loans. Maintain accurate records of all loans, even to the point of calculating a monthly repayment for which you will be responsible for making upon graduation. It is never too early to begin effective debt management practices. If you take an educational loan, your school is obligated to counsel you about your rights and responsibilities and to suggest strategies for managing debt.

Summary

- Selecting the right educational program is one of the most important decisions you will ever make, so don't be afraid to ask for help in identifying your goals.
- Choose the school that best meets your own academic and personal needs.
- Learn about the costs of attendance and understand what the real expenses will be.

Don't rule out a school you like because of cost until you find out whether financial aid will make it possible for you to afford it.

- Find out early how to apply for aid. Be willing to consider employment and a reasonable amount of debt from educational loans.
- The Calendar Checklist on the following pages will help you plan and prepare for a post-secondary education. Don't be afraid to change it or add to it to reflect your personal situation.
- Investing in your education will provide both personal and professional rewards throughout your lifetime, as well as benefit the society in which you live. To those ends, we wish you success!