

ARE YOU CONSIDERING POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Are you currently thinking about post-secondary education? If not, should you be? Whether you are a guardian of a student or a student considering post-secondary education, the process can seem overwhelming. Consider this document as an introduction to selecting a post-secondary option that is best for the applicant. This document was not written to provide answers, but rather to highlight questions that are important to ask when beginning the exploration process of post-secondary education.

*Getting Prepared for
your Options*

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Are You Considering Post-secondary Education?

Are you currently thinking about post-secondary education? If not, should you be? At one time considering post-secondary education was something left until the final year of high-school. However, today more people see the importance of planning ahead and making such a consideration earlier. Because enrolling in post-secondary education may involve strategic goals for students such as: achieving academic grade point averages; establishing financial resources; reflecting on career path of choice; selecting an academic area of concentration and ultimately picking an institution which will assist a student in achieving their goals. Whether you are a guardian of a student or a student considering post-secondary education, the process can seem overwhelming and filled with many questions. How does the application process work? What type of educational program is right for me? What type support services are available at a post-secondary institution? Rest assured that these are common questions when discovering the best post-secondary avenue for the individual.

A misconception that many students hold is that post-secondary education only includes 4-year university and college programs. In fact, there are many different categories of post-secondary education: Post-secondary education can encompass a 3 or 4-year university program, a 2 or 3 year college program which can offer associates' degrees, vocational schools, online or distance education programs, and adult education and certificate programs. Adult education classes and certificate programs are typically offered through the community or local colleges and universities, and are non-degree oriented. Based on your individual academic and personal needs, one of the above categories of post-secondary education will be better suited for you.

Consider this document as an introduction to selecting a post-secondary option that is right for you. Each institution will offer many of the same programs and services with a unique campus flare. However, it is up to the student applying to reflect on personal educational wants and needs when researching institutions and determining which options best meet personalized needs. Becoming well informed will assist the transition from high-school to post-secondary education and ultimately help with academic and future career success. This

document was not written to provide answers, but rather to highlight questions that are important to ask when beginning the exploration process of post-secondary education.

The key to successful post-secondary educational experiences is that individuals become acutely aware and knowledgeable about their own accommodation needs. Because each person is unique and comes to the post-secondary educational environment with various backgrounds, specific needs, and particular future goals, there are a wide range of support services available to assist individuals as they enter and continue in post-secondary education. Individual student needs may include: financial need; a learning disability; attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder; hearing and/or vision disabilities; medical disabilities; physical disabilities; acquired brain injuries; psychological/emotional disabilities and many more. In addition to being cognizant of these needs, students must be able to articulate accommodation needs when communicating with their post-secondary institute. Being familiar with your personal needs in order to succeed in school is ultimately the responsibility of the individual however, if you share your needs with any of the service areas on campus you will likely be connected with the programs available to assist. Below is a sampling of questions we feel are important to ask yourself when researching different post-secondary experiences.

Getting Prepared for Post-secondary Options - Start Early!

Answering the questions below can help you decipher which post-secondary experience is right for you. Remember that these questions are designed to assist you with discovering what you want, as opposed to what you think is possible. At this stage of the process do not place any limits on yourself when answering the questions in this section. We encourage everyone to dream. However, we acknowledge that making dreams come true can be hard work. Give yourself plenty of time to plan, to establish goals to make your dreams of attending post-secondary education a reality. Frequently, the less time you leave for planning the more problems you will encounter later. For example, you may feel achieving a specific academic average will be difficult. However, if you know of the specific academic average range for the type of post-secondary education you are considering early enough, you can set goals and work to achieve that goal throughout high-school. If you do not research the academic average range for the type of post-secondary education you are considering until it is time to apply, it may be too late to set a goal and have time to achieve it. It is possible that post-secondary education seems unrealistic due to the costs associated however, if you know of the cost in advanced you can create a strategic financial plan early enough to help reduce the financial strain.

Questions to answer to help you determine what you really want in a post-secondary education:

- Why are you pursuing a post-secondary experience?
- Do you know what job/career interests you?
- Is it a career where a 2 or 4 year degree is necessary?
- Is it a job/career that requires a certificate from a technical or vocational school?
- Do you want to attend a small or large campus?
- Do you want to live in a big city or in a small town?
- If you desire a college/university degree, do you know what major you might want?
- What future job options will this degree lead to?
- Do you want to live at home with your guardians or away from home with or without a roommate?
- Do you think post-secondary education is a valuable experience for you? Do you believe it is an investment in your future?
- Have you done some background work (with a counselor or through self-evaluation(s)) to understand what type of career/position suits your personality?

Getting Prepared with your Grade Point Average

It is recommended that you meet with your guidance counselor at your high-school and become informed about the different academic requirements associated with the different categories of post-secondary education. This will give you a better idea of what types of grades you should be working towards. Knowing the academic requirements early can help you set academic goals throughout your years at high-school and assist you when it comes to applying for post-secondary. If you need academic accommodations to be taking into consideration when applying to post-secondary education, you should research the institution you are interested in attending policy for incoming students pertaining to academic accommodation for potential students. Each institution will have a different policy and process.

Selecting a Program or Area of Study that Interests You

Before choosing a college/university or other post-secondary program to attend, there are questions you should ask yourself about what you want to study and/or what major you want to pursue. When choosing a four year university program, many students do not choose a major until after their first year is completed and/or a certain number of course credits have been successfully completed. Your choice of a major or course of study may help to pinpoint the type of school you want to attend. There are two- and four-year programs as well as technical and specialized training schools available depending on the program/major chosen. Some schools have entrance requirements such as test scores that need to be met. Some individuals have intense interests and strengths that make the selection of an area of study very easy, some individuals select a program which will best help them in an ideal future career path.

Some questions to consider when choosing a major or area of study include the following:

- What are your interests and strengths?
- What is your career goal? In other words, in what field do you envision working? For example, if you are interested in working on or for a newspaper, you may want to think of a major in journalism.
- What career areas are projected to be hiring when you graduate?
- What are the entrance requirements for the program(s) that interest you?
- How many credits/classes are required to complete the major/program with a diploma and/or other certificate?
- What is the average length of time that it takes students to complete the program?
- What courses (if any) are all students required to take, regardless of their major/program?
- Is there support offered to students who need to take remedial classes?
- Does the institution offer first year seminar classes?

Understanding Financial Options Available to You

Finances are a factor for many students when choosing a post-secondary experience. Overall, it is important to plan well in advance if you are going to require financial aid. You may not need financial aid for tuition or even housing. You can also see the cost associated with post-secondary education as an investment for your future. Paying the tuition for post-secondary education or paying back a student loan after your post-secondary education can allow for you to achieve different career goals, which could ultimately allow your earning potential to be higher. Managing finances is an individual choice to consider, however, post-secondary institutions will assist with identifying areas for assistance such as: OSAP; Bursaries; Grants; and Loans.

Questions that you might want to ask yourself are as follows:

- Are finances a primary consideration when I think about post-secondary education?
- Will I need to take out a loan to cover educational expenses?

- Am I eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services?
- Will Vocational Rehabilitation be willing to support a part of my education? If so, what are their terms?
- What scholarships are available? Please note, many scholarships have certain criteria (e.g., certain score on ACT or SAT, certain grade point average). Therefore, you may want to be knowledgeable about the criteria while going through high school.
- Is there a financial aid office affiliated with the program you are considering? If so, what financial assistance is offered through the financial aid office?

Determining the Distance that is Right for You

Deciding whether you want to leave the area you currently live is one of the first decisions you need to make. Perhaps, dealing with post-secondary life and expectations will be enough of a challenge that you don't want to bring about other life changes. All of the above are considerations for people to think about as they explore post-secondary education. The decision about where you want to live will help define the post-secondary opportunities that will be logical for you to choose from.

- Do you want to leave the area you live currently?
- If so, how far away do you want to go?
- How often will you want to travel back to visit friends? If you are thinking about traveling out of province or a fair distance, will going visiting at Thanksgiving, Christmas, and spring break be sufficient for you?
- Will travel home be possible from the school that you are thinking about?
- If commuting, how far will you need to travel daily?
- Are there online or distance education programs available?
- Do you have the supports (e.g., financial, other person) in place to allow such travel on a regular basis?
- Do you have a reliable vehicle or reliable public transportation?
- Do you receive supports within your home that would need to be recreated if you were to leave home? If so, who might provide that support? Who might fund that type of support? Are you open to receiving personal support from individuals with whom you are unfamiliar?
- Do distance education classes or correspondence courses appeal to you?

Selecting a Campus and Community Environment Right for You

The size and location of the campus you are going to attend should be decided. What is right for you? Choosing the size of the school that you wish to attend is an individual choice. A size that is good for one person is not necessarily going to work for another. Some people prefer very small schools where it is possible to know everyone who attends. Other people like the variety that a large school offers. Some people who are shy and have difficulty making social connections may favor smaller post-secondary experiences. Questions to answer about the size of a school include the following:

- How many students are enrolled?
- How many students live on campus?
- How many students commute?
- What is the average class size?
- How many academic buildings are on campus?
- Are the buildings on campus large with many floors or small with one or two stories?
- Are there specific buildings or areas on campus for specific majors?
- What atmosphere are you looking for (e.g., a place to hide in the crowd, a place with more individualized attention to students)?

Most people feel comfortable in an environment that feels familiar. Choosing a program location that offers a comfortable atmosphere should also be addressed. Questions to answer about the location of a school include the following:

- What size is the community? Small, mid-size or large?
- What opportunities for recreation are offered on campus? In the community?
- What opportunities for entertainment are offered on campus? In the community?
- What opportunities for shopping are available on campus? In the community?
- What transportation, if any, is needed or offered on campus? In the community?
- Is student parking for bikes and cars easy to access?
- How long is the average walk from one class to the next?
- How safe is the campus? The community?

Thinking about the campus and community environment of a college or other post-secondary program is important to the comfort and success of your experience.

Selecting a Student Population that is Right for You

Post-secondary programs are not mandatory and not all people are motivated or interested in training for jobs or careers after completing high school. Students enrolled in post-secondary programs may have a variety of interests and expectations about a social life with fellow students. Questions to ask about the student population of a particular program may include the following:

- Would you prefer a program where your gender (or the opposite gender) dominates the student population, or is a more even ratio of male to female students important?
- Is the racial and/or ethnic diversity of the students a factor in your decision?
- Do you want to attend a school that has a particular secular focus?
- Is building relationships with other students important to you?
- Are there clubs, study groups or other organizations on campus that were developed around a particular theme or interest?
- Are there extracurricular activities offered that are purely social in nature? Are these activities designed to specifically support meeting other students?
- Are there fraternities/sororities or service groups on campus where students may live together and/or in the same vicinity?
- How large is the student body in general? Do you want a situation where it is easier to know most/all people in your chosen field of study?

Understanding the Support Services Available to You

Many post-secondary schools and training programs provide auxiliary aids, accommodations, and support services that enhance the educational experience of students. As stated earlier, it is essential that students take ownership for their accommodation needs and understand their educational responsibilities. Each individual comes to college/university with a unique background and specific needs to help them succeed in the post-secondary environment. When speaking with the Coordinator that organizes support services, it is important to understand what services and supports are routinely offered. While exploring the world of post-secondary education, here are some questions that you may find helpful when meeting with support service staff:

- Is pre-registration, registration assistance, or priority class registration available?
- Is there flexibility in scheduling classes?
- Is there flexibility in course requirements such as class substitution or waivers if a student's disability impairs his/her ability to take a particular required course?
- Is it reasonable to expect to work part-time while taking a full class load?

- Is extended time available for taking exams, doing term papers, and completing other assignments? In addition, are time extensions allowed for completion of the entire course or class?
- Is there a special orientation for new students?
- Is it more affordable to live on campus or off campus?
- What on-going programs/workshops exist to help with my transition to post-secondary education?
- What is the physical accessibility of the campus? You need to check this out for yourself? Who can you talk to about accommodations?
- Is job/career placement support available after program completion?
- Are readers, books on tape, classroom note takers or transcriptions available?
- Are interpreter services available?
- What types of financial assistance is available and what are the requirements of such assistance?
- Are there tutors or study groups to assist with ongoing classwork?
- Are their jobs for student available on campus? Will they accommodate my class schedule?
- Is adaptive technology such as assistive listening devices and talking computers available?
- What office or department is responsible for supporting students with disabilities? What type of supports are available through this program?
- Is counseling available for assistance in accessing disability benefits such as Vocational Rehabilitation and Social Security benefits?
- What type of Dental and Health Benefits am I entitled to when registering as a student?
- What additional fees do I pay for in addition to tuition? What services do I receive from paying these additional fees? Which fees are optional and which fees are mandatory?
- Are there mentorship or apprenticeship programs available?
- What opportunities are available to volunteer or get involved in leadership experiences?

Selecting a new Living and Learning Environment that is Right for You

Where will you live while pursuing your post-secondary program? What is realistic? Is living at home most important? Or is living away from home a goal? If social activities and meeting others is important to you, living on campus or in a dorm might be the best choice. If you want to live away from home, then there are questions to ask yourself which include the following:

- Do you want to live on campus, or off campus?
- What housing is available on campus? What housing options are available off campus?
- How much will housing on or off campus cost and how are payments made?
- Do you want or need a roommate(s)? Reasons for wanting/needing a roommate could be to help financially, socially, or for other reasons. If you want a roommate, what are your reasons?
- Do you need/prefer to have meals prepared for you versus meals prepared by yourself?
- How/where is your laundry to be done?
- Is your housing close enough to your classes?
- Do you want to live where there are planned activities for residents to do together?
- Do you want to live where there are rules such as visiting hours for guests?
- Do you have to sign a contract or lease and if so, for how long? How much notice is required if you want to move out?

Life after high school is a major transition for all individuals. Gathering information and preparing ahead can ease the anxiety and stress of planning for a post-secondary educational program. With careful planning and the proper supports, students can avoid some of the struggles and enjoy a successful and meaningful post-secondary experience.

The ideas and questions proposed in this document are suggested to assist individuals in addressing important aspects of choosing a post-secondary educational program. The ultimate goal is a successful educational experience which prepares the individual for a productive and meaningful job or career.

