



NAVIGATING YOUR NEXT STEP:

# HOW TO CHOOSE WHETHER GOING BACK TO SCHOOL IS THE RIGHT MOVE



## Is Now the Time?

Before you begin weighing your options for going back to school, ask yourself, "Am I ready to pursue a degree?" Below is a checklist to help you make your decision.

### CAN YOU RELATE TO THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?

- I am sure that a degree is required for me to reach my ultimate goal
- I have a support system who believes this is the right decision for me
- I understand earning a degree can be difficult and will require a great amount of time
- I am comfortable with my current financial situation

# Finding Your Right Match

Choosing the right program and school is one of the most important steps toward earning your degree. Taking courses at the right school is essential to staying on track with your education, especially if you encounter bumps along the way. Here are some tips on how to find the right match for you.



## What to Consider

Before you start researching schools and programs, it's important to make a list of what you're looking for to help you narrow down your choices. Here are some things to consider for your list:

- What are your goals after earning your degree?
- Do you want to transfer credits from another school?
- Does the school provide all the necessary requirements to complete your degree?
- Is the program's schedule convenient for you?

**It's Worth It:** According to research done by Michael Greenstone and Adam Looney in Brookings Institution's "Where is the Right Place to Invest \$102,000 -- In Stocks, Bonds, or a College Degree?", the average college graduate earns roughly \$570,000 more over a lifetime than the average person with only a high school diploma.

# Check Financial Aid Opportunities

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Before you go any further, be sure to research all available sources of financial aid. FAFSA is the most well known and most frequently used by college students.

# FAFSA<sup>®</sup>

The U.S. Department of Education hands out over \$100 billion in grants, work-study and federal loans to qualified students attending college each year. Whether it be community college, four-year college, trade school or career school, everyone has a chance to receive financial assistance.



## Explore Your Options

Once you have made your list of essentials, it is important to research each program to see which ones match your criteria. While researching, it's also important to read reviews.

### Here are some questions you should look to answer:

- Does the program have favorable reviews in categories that are important to you?
- Did students enjoy their experience at this school?
- How successful have alumni been after graduation?
- Did alumni feel that they were prepared properly for their future career goals?
- Is there strong communication between students and faculty?

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## Connect with School Representatives

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After you have finished your research and examined all of your possible options, it is time to speak with a program representative or advisor. This is the time to ask in-depth questions about degree programs, graduation rates, and the enrollment process. Below are some important questions to have answered:

#### Why should I enroll in your school?

This is a straightforward question to ask an advisor. It's important to remember that you are the one who will be sacrificing your time and money. You need to be able to trust the school. Here are some good answers that you should be looking for from the advisor:

- Strong academic reputation
- Broad alumni base
- High graduation rates
- High career placement
- Plenty of financial aid opportunities
- Low cost of attendance
- Faculty committed to your success

#### What Is Your Desired Major?

We offer a large variety of different degree programs. Whether you aspire to be a Nurse or Video Game Designer, we can match you to a program that suits your interests and goals.

#### What programs do you offer in my area of study?

If you are looking to start a career in a specific field, it's a good idea to understand what specific programs are offered by the school. This will help you figure out whether there are more specific programs tailored to what you want to do after graduation.

### How long are the courses? When do they start?

Timing is another important aspect of deciding on which program to enroll in. Some schools may only offer courses for your major at specific times during the day or perhaps even at night. If you work full time or have other obligations, scheduling may be an issue. Make sure that the school offers convenient courses for your major. Also, check to semester start and end dates to see how long certain courses run for.

### What financial opportunities does the school itself offer?

This is an important question to ask, as many students who enroll in college are unaware of the scholarships and other types of financial assistance available to them. You are not guaranteed a scholarship, but it is never a bad idea to apply for them.

## Pick Your School

Now that you completed your research and spoken to advisors for each program, you are ready to apply for the program of your choice. Remember to make this decision for yourself. It is important to be comfortable with your decision so that you can achieve the goals you set for yourself. Earning your degree will not be easy, but your chances of success will increase if you take the time to choose the right path.



**Online More Effective:** A study by the U.S. Department of Education showed that students learning online performed better than students learning in a traditional classroom environment.

## Tips for Success

Now that you are enrolled and started classes, you need to focus on organizing your time properly and getting your assignments done on time.

Here are some tips to help you achieve high grades in your courses:



### Get A Planner

This may be the most useful tool to have in college, other than your computer. Having all of your assignments written down in a planner is essential. This is especially the case if you are taking a course online. In an online setting you won't have fellow classmates there to remind you of upcoming assignments. A planner will help you organize your time, ensuring you have plenty of time to finish your assignments.



### Start Assignments Early

Do not wait until the last minute to start your assignments. This tactic may have been easy to do in high school, but it will be more difficult in college. Assignments in college are more difficult and time consuming. It is always a good idea to look at an assignment as soon as it is posted so you can judge how much time it may take you to finish it. This way you can plan accordingly. Working on the assignment one day at a time is also a good idea. This way you don't have to try and finish an assignment in one day. It also gives you time to read over your work and ask your educator or fellow classmates questions about the assignment.

**Another Little Tip:** Take a look at some of your dream career postings online and make a list of what skills the employers are looking for in that position. While you are taking courses, be sure to try and develop those skills and learn more about what is needed in order to land your dream career.



## Ask Questions

Don't ever be afraid to ask questions. Your educators will always answer any questions. They may not always be available, but when they are don't be afraid to tell them that you're confused with an assignment or a topic being discussed in class. Make sure to write down what time your educators will be available. This will usually be displayed on the syllabus distributed during the first days of the course. Educators actually want students to ask them questions so that they know their message is getting through to them. So don't be shy.



## Network, Network, and Network Some More

Networking is an extremely valuable experience. Connections you make while in school can make a big difference in your career. These connections can help you enter careers that you never would have been considered for previously. All you have to do is interact with your fellow classmates and make some friends. Be an active participant and talk to as many fellow classmates and educators as possible.

## CAUTION

**Below is a list of things you need to look out for while researching programs and schools**

- A school does not provide enough information
- An online class that may require in person training
- Embellished/False financial aid information
- No request for high school, college or other types of academic records
- Guaranteed time frames of degree completion
- Lack of information on professors/educators
- Poor online reviews from former students

## Positives and Negatives of Online Learning



Some people prefer traditional, on-campus settings, while others prefer the convenience of taking online courses at home. Whatever your preference may be, it is a good idea to understand the positives and negatives of each setting:

### Positives

- Convenient
- Flexible
- Affordable
- Easily accessible
- No travel expense

### Negatives

- May have less interaction with educator and classmates
- May face fewer networking opportunities
- Lack of campus experience

## Positives and Negatives of Campus Learning



### Positives

- Face to face learning with educators
- In person group activities teach you to work with others
- Networking opportunities
- Cultural diversity

### Negatives

- Distracting setting
- Commuting to class
- Inconvenient schedules
- Extra costs if living on campus

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# Resources

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<http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2011/06/25-education-greenstone-looney>

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<http://www.pewinternet.org/2011/08/28/the-digital-revolution-and-higher-education/>

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<http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/tech/evidence-based-practices/finalreport.pdf>

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<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/Reports/2011/College-presidents/Report.aspx?view=all>

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Program completion varies by student due to class schedules, previous transfer credits or degrees, and the estimate is not guarantee of a completion timeframe. Outcomes vary according to each institution's specific program curriculum, and employment opportunities are not guarantee. Not all programs lead to initial licensure or certification