

CHOOSING **YOUR** UNIVERSITY

CHOOSING A UNIVERSITY CAN SEEM OVERWHELMING,
BUT THERE ARE LOTS OF RESOURCES TO HELP MAKE IT
EASIER FOR YOU. ↘



Finding the right university for you is important. The school you choose will not only be the one that grants you your academic credentials, it will also be the place where you live, learn, work, play and socialize for several years. Before you start filling out those university application forms, consider the many variables that affect the “fit” of a university to your unique personality and educational goals. Take a look at the following factors, and decide which ones mean the most to you.

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Once you’ve decided what you would like to study, one of the main questions you’ll ask yourself is whether you can get into a certain program. First you’ll need to check the prerequisites. Make sure you have the required high school credits and that you meet other criteria for your program of choice. The average marks needed for admission vary from year to year; some universities provide cut-off ranges on their websites. See how your marks fit these guidelines.

Your application will usually be reviewed based on more than just your marks, however. For some programs, such as fine art or journalism, you’ll need to supply a portfolio of work you have done. For other programs, you may be asked to write a statement about your interests, abilities and career plans. Check individual university websites for admission details, or ask a guidance counsellor for help.

PROGRAM AVAILABILITY

Make sure the university offers the program you want. Check program listings online at www.aucc.ca. Remember that your first year is often a time to try a variety of courses, and then choose the area in which you want to specialize. You could explore new fields of study that aren’t available in most high schools—courses like astronomy, philosophy or international studies, for example. Be sure to find out about the process for switching majors if you change your mind, which many students do after first year.

COURSE CONTENT

Have a look at the calendar for the universities you’re considering and read the individual course outlines. You can also compare how different universities design individual programs (such as course components), the structure of courses (is it group work or exam-based?), and how much flexibility students have in what they choose to study.

SIZE

Do you want a small university, where most of the students are undergraduates and live on campus? Or would you prefer a larger

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university, with access to a greater range of facilities and programs? Consider class size and your study preferences, too.

LOCATION

Do you want a university that’s downtown in a big city, close to restaurants and shopping? Or would you rather be on a campus that’s a world unto itself, set apart from the city? Your budget and a city’s cost of living (for food, rent and social activities) will influence your decision.

REPUTATION

A university’s reputation is a major factor in many students’ choice of where to study. That said, choosing a university should not be based solely on reputation. You must also consider the academic programs and overall environment. Also, an institution’s reputation is sometimes out of date or overstated, so first-hand experience is often beneficial. Prospective students can visit the campuses of their top university choices, spending some time talking with current students and getting a feel for the campus. Try to get a sense of how you’d see yourself living in that particular place for three or four years.

COST

The costs associated with attending university go far beyond tuition fees: your budget must also include housing, food, books, supplies and personal living expenses. These costs vary depending on the type of program, type of university, and size and location of the school.

DISTANCE FROM HOME

While it’s great to go away to university, living at home is much more affordable. If you’re going away, figure out how far you’re willing to travel. Remember that being far from home may have some benefits, but it also means you’re less likely to see your friends and family often during the school year. And get ready for at least a small bout of homesickness!

HOUSING

On campus or off campus? Single or shared apartment? Roommates or private room? Cooking for yourself or buying a meal plan? There are a lot of options when it comes to housing. Take a good look into what’s available at the university you’re considering. The Student Services office can help you find a place to live and will answer your questions.

ATHLETICS

If sports are important to you, make sure that your chosen university offers the sport you’re looking for. Many universities offer not only varsity-level (competitive) sports teams, but teams at all levels of ability, from the most basic beginner to competitive leagues among residences.

STUDENT LIFE

What kinds of clubs and facilities does the university have? Will you need daycare on campus? Are you looking for a special-interest club (e.g., students from a particular country or religion, politics, theatre, debating, lesbian or gay students)? If you’re hoping to hone your journalism skills, make sure there is an on-campus newspaper or radio station. If you want to become involved in more than just academics, check out opportunities to volunteer on campus. And if school spirit is important to you, remember that not all universities are the same in this regard.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Many universities now have scholarship grids. These incremental charts guarantee entrance scholarships to incoming students based on their final marks from high school. Don’t hesitate to ask about the scholarships that are available. Also check out other forms of assistance, such as special work-study programs or job opportunities for students who need to earn some extra money.

A number of other factors may be important to you as you make your decision about where to study. Ask about such things as professors, career preparation services, co-op programs, exam preparation and study skills workshops, orientation programs, and graduate programs and research.

Once you’ve identified the factors that are most important to you, you’ve taken the first steps to making a successful choice. And remember, while your parents, guidance counsellors, teachers and friends will give you lots of good advice, the ultimate decision is up to you. Make sure you pick a university that will serve your needs throughout your university career. **CO**

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