



ADVICE



Recently, we asked career services professionals working in colleges and universities across Canada what advice they would give high school students on these topics:

1. Selecting a post-secondary institution
2. Transitioning into post-secondary
3. Choosing a career

from the Experts

HERE'S WHAT THEY HAD TO SAY...

1. SELECTING A POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTION ↘

"Look for one that offers a balance of academic and experiential activities—post-secondary is so much more than just academics."

– **Angie Paisley, Durham College/University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT)**

"Go for a campus tour well ahead of time and, if possible, speak to someone in the program area you're interested in. Ideally, try to talk to grads or current students to get their take on the program you're considering."

– **Sue Thompson, George Brown College**

"Don't let your friends influence you. Go check out the schools for yourself and speak to current students!"

– **Shari Kurgatnikov, University of Toronto**

"Visit the schools to get an idea if you feel comfortable learning in that environment and that city. Do you think both are a good fit for you? Employment opportunities often stem from employer visits on campus—if you want to work in this city after graduation, then take advantage of attending the institution."

– **Lorrie Quigg, Desautels Faculty of Management, McGill University**

"Consider all factors when choosing a school, including the campus and the facilities, the city, the quality of education, the size of classes, the distance from home, etc. Choose a school that suits your personality and has potential to nourish you in all areas of your life. It will be your home for several years. Your surroundings will be a huge factor in your overall satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with your post-secondary education."

– **Dawn Murray, University of Western Ontario**

"When selecting a post-secondary institution, students should attend university open houses, sign up for sessions, meet professors, take a walking tour of the campus (these are usually offered for free), look into the student-professor ratio in first year and following years, compare apples with apples (make sure you're comparing the same things among universities), and use the resources that are available to you (e.g., career centres, co-op offices). In the sciences, look at universities that are doing great research, which usually means more research opportunities, and thus an increased opportunity for you to be hired during the summer and throughout the school year part-time."

– **Theresa Maya, Dalhousie University**

2. TRANSITIONING INTO POST-SECONDARY ↘

“Give yourself time to get settled into a routine and become comfortable with being a student. Attend all of your classes and get to know your professors. Take advantage of first-year support services on campus, including orientation, learning communities and academic support services such as math, reading and study skills workshops.”

“Once you’ve mastered your student role, branch out and try new things. Become an involved student by enlisting in extracurricular activities both on and off campus. Choose some electives other than your major to ensure that you’re looking at all of your career possibilities. Research internship and co-op experiences within your discipline to gain the hands-on experience you’re looking to acquire.”
– Kim Matheson and Shari Thompson, University of Saskatchewan

“Look at what types of on-campus employment programs can help offset student debt. Look at whether your program of interest contains a co-operative education element, as this provides work experience and also helps offset debt. Get involved... volunteering, student unions, on-campus jobs, sports, information sessions, career fairs, etc. This will make your experience more rewarding and help define a possible career path.”

– Chris Hounsell, Memorial University

“Concentrate on your studies from day one. Taking part in orientation week will introduce you to many new friends, but don’t go so overboard that you begin your post-secondary career a week or two behind others due to exhaustion or a hangover. Begin with the end in mind.”

– Dawn Murray, University of Western Ontario

“Make a financial plan and stick to it. Avoid over-indulging in too-easily-obtained credit. Take advantage of all the services available to you, such as counselling, peer tutoring, fitness centres, etc. Don’t wait until you’re in crisis to seek help. Contact someone at the earliest signs of academic or personal stress.”

– Sue Thompson, George Brown College

“Be sure to register right away with your campus career and employment services, and keep your eyes and ears open for employer visits, job search workshops, career fairs and other events. Even though first year may be early in your post-secondary education, you can begin now to make contacts that will enhance your coursework, lead to great networking, and ultimately increase your chances of launching a successful career.”

– Pat Slatten, British Columbia Institute of Technology

3. CHOOSING A CAREER ↘

“Know that there is help available. As a college student, you may enter a program and discover that it’s not a fit with your values, skills and interests. Visit your career services office to get help from advisors who are trained to help you find areas that play to your strengths. Remember that finding out that a program isn’t for you is just as valuable as finding one that is.”
– Angie Paisley, Durham College/University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT)

“Your career plan will likely change, perhaps many times, and that’s okay. All the twists, turns, sideroads and valleys that life will throw at you can end up being some of the most important experiences in helping you discover your place in this world. In fact, 70% of high school and university students say that at least one “chance event” influenced their educational or career path—70%! If you’re feeling uncertain or confused, it’s perfectly normal, but don’t go it alone. Seek out support from Student Services at your high school, or your career centre on campus.”
– Kim Matheson and Shari Thompson, University of Saskatchewan

“Take full advantage of placement, volunteer and internship opportunities. Work with an employer that will provide you with a truly valuable experience, so that you’ll get an accurate sense of that field and if it’s right for you. This could also provide you with admirable experience for your résumé. Don’t take the easy road—take the road that will give you good insight and training. It may be a little more effort, but will be well worth it!”
– Alison McGeorge, University of Guelph-Humber

“Career decision-making should begin in high school. Take advantage of resources such as guidance counsellors and career cruising, and attend presentations given by college and university reps. Try job shadowing in the field that interests you, or conduct an information interview (ask your guidance counsellor about that) with someone working in a career you’re interested in.”

– Sue Thompson, George Brown College

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“Take the first year of your academic career to discover. Never stop asking questions from the professionals around you. Knowledge is power and can help you intelligently plan your next course of action.”

– Lorrie Quigg, Desautels Faculty of Management, McGill University

“Recognize your strengths, build on your interests, and follow your dream! People are always happy to help—from your high school guidance counsellor to the many Student Services departments available in a post-secondary institution. Don’t be afraid to ask questions and get the advice you need to make a decision that will bring you closer to that great career.”

– Joanne McDonald, Algonquin College

“Love the courses you are taking. Make your own choices regarding career decision making and take advantage of academic counselling.”

– Lianne Gagné, Nipissing University

“You can change your mind, change direction. Don’t stress out trying to get it perfect the first time, because you probably won’t. That’s okay—it’s not failure, it’s learning.”

– Paul D. Smith, Queen’s University

“When beginning university or college, make time to experience your degree outside of the classroom. By getting involved in volunteer endeavours, part-time work and student clubs or leadership initiatives, you not only build skills but gain the experience necessary to make informed career decisions. This will allow you to view career decision-making not as a question—“What will I do with my diploma/degree?”—in your final year, but as a process that is fun and meaningful. Visit Career Services during your first year to find out how they can support you along the way.”

– Kim Pedlar, McMaster University **CO**