



ADULTS RETURNING TO SCHOOL

Today, many adults are going back to school. In fact, adults are no longer the non-traditional students they once were, as the average age of undergraduate students continues to increase. The numbers and types of programs available to adult students is also increasing, with a variety of options including evening and weekend programs, telecourses, distance education and others available throughout the area. Choosing the best school for you can be a confusing process! We have provided some questions and information to get you started on your search. If you need additional help, ask one of our advisors for assistance.

Here are some things to consider:

WHY DO I WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL?

It is important that you think carefully about why you want to return to school so that you pick the best program to suit your needs. Your motivation might be:

- C career advancement or change
- C to learn more about a particular area of interest
- C to complete a degree you began years ago
- C to motivate your college-aged children

Your reasons for returning to school may have an impact on your choice of schools or the type of program which best meets your needs.

WHICH SCHOOLS SHOULD I APPLY TO?

Choosing which schools to apply to can be a confusing process. Here are some questions to help you narrow your options:

(1) What are the Entrance Requirements?

Requirements vary from school to school so you will need to consult the college catalog or admission advisor for each of the schools you are considering. Because you are an adult, there may be special requirements that apply to you. For instance, you may not be required to take the SATs.

Keep in mind that many colleges and universities publish separate catalogs or admission applications for adult students. Also, many of the published college guides, such as [The College Handbook](#) or [Peterson's Guide to Four Year Colleges](#), generally contain information about requirements for traditional students who are going directly from high school to college. If you are interested in a particular college, call the admissions office and ask about special programs for adult students.

(2) What will I study?

If you have a very specific idea of what you want to study, you should choose schools that have a strong program in that area. If you are not sure, you may want to consider liberal arts schools that offer program that give you a good general education or larger university that offers a variety of majors and programs. Most schools offer career counseling services to enrolled students to help you select career options that match your interest and skills.

(3) Does the school have a special program for adults?

It may be to your advantage to attend a school that has a special program for adults continuing their education. These programs may offer a variety of services for adults, including flexible schedules, accelerated degree programs, credit for prior learning or for life experiences. They may also have a special admissions process that will allow you to apply closer to the beginning of the semester.

(4) Can I transfer credit?

If you've already earned some college credit you should check to see if the schools you are applying to will allow you to transfer the credits you've earned. This will help you to earn your degree faster and avoid paying more than necessary. In addition, some schools allow you to earn additional credits by taking an exam or developing a portfolio which highlights skills you may have acquired working. CLEP (College Level Examination Program) is a testing program which many colleges and universities use to award credit in a variety of subject areas. Also, ask about special application deadlines or financial aid for transfer students.

(5) Does the school have a part-time program?

If you want to work at a job while you are in school, you should find out if you can complete the program you choose on a part-time basis. Talk with an academic advisor to help plan a schedule that will enable you to complete your course work while maintaining a job and family. Many schools now offer flexible schedules which allow you to take courses on weekend or evenings or in a condensed time frame such as six or ten week classes rather than a traditional 15 week semester. You may want to go slowly at first by taking a similar course load your first semester while you adapt to your new responsibilities.

(6) How much will I have to pay?

The answer to this question varies a great deal depending on the school you attend and your financial situation. Most federal and state financial aid programs are not based on age but on financial need. You will apply for the same programs as students who recently graduated from high school. Your school may also have specific scholarship for returning adult students. Call the financial aid office at the schools you are considering and ask them for financial aid application materials and information. You should also research private sources of funding for college. The College Info Center has both print and computerized resources to help you. Did you know, for example, that the Orville Redenbacher company (yes, the popcorn folks) offer scholarships for adults returning to school?

(7) Where do I plan to live while I attend school?

Find out what your housing options are. If you want to live on campus, ask the admissions office about housing availability. Some schools offer special housing for adult or married students. Other schools may have more traditional housing options in dormitory style residence halls. Depending on space, some schools may limit housing to freshmen and sophomore students. If you already have a home, or want to live off campus, that's usually no problem. However, check with the school for any housing requirements, especially if you are planning to relocate to a new city or town to attend school.

(8) Do I want a two year degree or a four year degree?

The type of degree you choose depends on your career goals and plans. The following information offers a brief description of various degrees:

- Associates degree - generally two years of full time study or 60 credits. Associates degrees may be in career areas (registered nursing, automotive mechanics, accounting) or in transfer areas (humanities, general education, liberal studies, business).
- Bachelors degree - generally four years of full time study or 120 credits.
- Certificates - generally less than one year of study. Certificate programs may be offered at the pre-associates level (for example, a certificate in secretarial studies) or the post-baccalaureate level (for example, a certificate in conference management for students who have already earned a Bachelor's degree).

(9) What types of schools should I consider?

- Community College - generally offer certificate or associate degree programs; most are state and/or county supported and offer classes in locations and times that are convenient to the geographic area they serve. Most are open admissions which means that anyone who has earned a high school diploma or GED can be admitted. However, if your previous grades are low or it has been many years since you graduated from high school, you may be required to take course to increase your skills in reading, math and English before you can enroll in college level courses. Tuition and fees are usually low for residents. However, tuition for non-residents may be lower than comparable costs at private colleges or universities. Check with the admissions office for assistance.
- Public Colleges and Universities - are supported with state funds. Tuition and fees are lower for state residents. Public colleges and universities may be large, small, in urban, suburban or rural areas and offer a wide variety of degree programs. Admission requirements vary from school to school.
- Private Colleges and Universities - are independent institutions which do not rely on state funds for their support. Tuition and fees do not depend on state residency and will generally higher than costs at public institutions. However, private colleges and universities may have additional sources of financial aid to help meet the higher costs. As with public colleges and universities, they may be large, small, located in a variety of environments and offer many different degree and programs. Admission requirements vary from school to school.

(10) What size school would be best for me?

The size of the school may be important to you. If you prefer smaller environments where people know you and are concerned with your welfare, you may find that a smaller college is a better fit. If you like lots of activities, services and options and a very diverse, busy environment, a larger college may be a good choice. Keep in mind, however, that even within a large school, you may find academic departments or organizations that provide the feeling of being in a smaller community. Try to visit the colleges you are considering and talk with students in programs similar to the one you are considering.

(11) Is the location of the school an important fact in my decision?

Can you relocate? Does the school need to be within easy driving distance? Should it be closer to your home or your work? Does the school have satellite campuses that are more convenient and can you take all of your courses at that site?

(12) What other services are available on campus?

Will I need child care (some colleges have child care facilities on site)? Are there career counseling and job placement services available to adult students? What about tutors? If it has been many years since you were last in school, you may need additional assistance with specific subject areas. Are internships a part of the degree program? Opportunities to work in your chosen field may be helpful in finding a job once you graduate.

IT IS TIME TO BEGIN!

Now that you have a clearer picture of your own requirements, you can begin to search for schools that meet your needs. Start with the college guides and computerized programs at the College Info Center to identify potential schools. Then contact the colleges, attend open houses and information sessions, and talk with admissions and financial aid advisors at your prospective schools. If you need help gathering the information or sorting through all of your options, visit the College Info Center and talk to one of our advisors.