



Beyond High School

A Guide for High School Students
Pursuing Higher Education and Training

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Introduction

The goal of this booklet is to help you choose a school based on what is important to you. There are thousands of institutions of higher learning in the United States, each with their own cultures, some with a balance between studies and extracurricular activities, and some more exclusively focused on the work of getting you trained for a career. There are also many different resources that provide information about these institutions and their available programs. How are students supposed to be able to know how to decipher it all, and most importantly, how do they use these resources to pick the college that would be the best fit for them and their career aspirations?



Don't worry. Over the course of this booklet we will lead you to some user-friendly resources. We will also give you a step-by-step process to make the most informed and educated decision about your academic future. After a little work, you'll go from an undecided high school student to an empowered collegiate scholar.

Let's work together to chart the course for your life beyond high school.

Career Interests and Assessments

Before you can decide which college to attend, you need to understand your personal career goals and aspirations. The right career decisions for you can help you know which educational programs and college degrees you need. Then you can find out which kinds of colleges can meet those needs. Fortunately for you, the state of Texas passed House Bill 5 in 2013, empowering you to consider your career (and educational) interests right now, in high school.



Including endorsements of special interest in your graduation requirements has allowed you to gain experience in class based on what you are interested in doing for a living. If you included more than one endorsement in your graduation plan, then you have already had the chance to explore multiple industries of interest.

In higher education, every class you take brings with it a personal financial responsibility. So, you need to commit to a major of study that you plan to see through to completion. The beauty of higher education is that you have the power to change your mind about your major at any time, but remember that any changes to your college major selection can increase your costs and delay your graduation.



If you are still unsure about what to major in, visit the Texas Career Check website at [texascareercheck.com](https://www.texascareercheck.com) and complete the Interest Profiler assessment. This will provide you with career options that best match your interests and values. Once you know your options, you can discover which degrees are needed to obtain those kinds of jobs. That will determine your best fit for a college major and courses to take.

While identifying your interests and corresponding programs, consider whether your interests and skills relate to a type of job that’s in high demand: middle skills jobs.

Consider Starting In The Middle

Help Fill the Skills Gap—

Small Advancements in Education/Training Credentials Can Add Up

With a rapidly growing economy, there is a significant shortage of skilled workers in Texas and throughout the country. Careers are available that require more than a high school diploma but less than a 4-year college degree, and there are not enough people with those credentials available to hire. This is a notoriously difficult gap to fill for employers. On the job market, these careers are sometimes referred to as “middle-skill jobs.” These occupations are in high demand and that need is expected to continue growing, which means they can be an attractive option for those interested in entering the job market more quickly. Training for these high demand jobs can include 2-year associate degrees, certifications, occupational licensing, or apprenticeships. Here are just a few examples of occupations that don’t require a 4-year college degree:

- Dental Hygienist
- Electrician
- Paralegal
- Police officer
- Massage therapist
- Phlebotomist
- Welder
- Cosmetologist
- Preschool teacher
- Human resources assistant
- Respiratory therapist
- Pharmacy technician
- EMT/Paramedic

It's important to know that many middle skill jobs often pay self-sufficient wages that are above the state median wage.

This means you have the potential to earn highly desirable wages in a shorter timeframe than it takes to earn a bachelor's degree, and often with a lower personal financial burden. These occupations can be a great starting point for professional growth opportunities that lead to higher-skilled and higher-wage jobs.

If starting in the "middle" with your career interests you, be sure to check the Career and Technology Education (CTE) programs and/or dual credit options you have available now on your high school campus as well as the programs in your local community colleges as these programs often award industry-recognized certificates, licenses or degrees relating to the skills and credentials sought after by employers. The high demand nature of these careers creates a unique opportunity for students coming out of high school to obtain gainful employment that provides a good living wage.



Workforce Readiness Through Training and Workforce Boards

Whether you know what kind of job you want, or which subject matters are of most interest to you, starting to figure these out will help you know what type of education or training you will need to pursue your career. Since we rarely follow the same path that we first imagine for ourselves, it's a good idea to choose three top interests to explore. There is no hard and fast rule regarding the number of interests you can explore, so if you need, it is okay to look into more than three. Just remember it is a good rule of thumb to choose subjects or roles that you enjoy most and spend most of your time doing or thinking about as it will likely be the most fulfilling type(s) of work to spend your time doing.

While considering which path you would like to take, it is important to know all of the options you have to prepare for the world of work. While a traditional college experience is the most common postsecondary path, it's not the only option available. The beauty of preparing for a career or job is that each person's path is their own—no two journeys are exactly the same, and the skills needed don't always need to be learned in a classic classroom setting. The following are alternative options and examples of each.

Apprenticeship

An apprenticeship entails paid on-the-job training under the supervision of experienced journey workers plus related classroom instruction. These training programs typically last from 3-to-5 years based on industry standards, but a key difference from the traditional college route is that apprentices are paid from the first day they begin training. Some examples of apprenticeship careers include electrician, carpenter, baker, accounting technician, chemical engineering technician, computer support specialist, computer programmer, dental laboratory technician, EMT, home health aide, and medical coder.



If apprenticeship is the route you would like to take, you want to ensure that it's a registered apprenticeship. Registered apprenticeship program's standards (curriculum, wage increments, and competency levels) are approved by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship, so when you complete this type of program you will earn a nationally recognized certificate.

Meeting that standard of quality is significant to future employers. Individuals who successfully complete a registered apprenticeship program become certified, highly-skilled workers.

Registered apprentices are full-time, paid employees who work a regular 40-hour week and attend related classroom training a few hours a week, which is the “earn while you learn” model of registered apprenticeship. As participants complete each year of the registered apprenticeship program, they usually earn an increase in classification and pay.

Statistics show that registered apprenticeship graduates earn more, have more stable work records, and are promoted sooner and more often than workers who have not been trained through apprenticeship programs.

Military Training

Joining the military is about honor and service. You get to protect your country’s freedom and way of life. You might also get to work with some cool hardware and software. Today’s military is more computerized than ever, offering many high-tech occupations. Individuals train to learn skills needed to perform specific functions while serving in any branch of the U.S.



military. The majority of the training is hands-on and in the field. As soon as individuals complete their service, they can transfer the skills they have gained to equivalent civilian positions in the workforce.

If you join the military, you will earn a steady paycheck, gain free training in a job specialty, and have access to free medical and dental care, free gym and exercise facilities, free on-base housing (if available), 30 days per year of vacation with pay, and more. After your tour of enlistment is over, you can use funds from the Montgomery GI Bill toward your education. For example, you could use the funds to attend a four-year university and obtain a bachelor’s degree. Depending on your length of service and other factors, your benefit amount will vary. Joining the military, unlike attending a university right out of high school, does not cost you money, just a commitment of time.

If you think you would enjoy being part of a team, learning new skills, earning money for education, and meeting challenges, the military may be for you. To find out more about what the U.S. military offers, talk to a local recruiter, your high school counselor, or check out the benefits for service online at **military.com**. Check whether your school offers the ASVAB military aptitude assessment. With it, you can explore occupational specialties that you may qualify for. There are over 140 enlisted and officer occupations, so you have a variety of options available to you. Use the resources below to see which branch of the military would best suit you.

- **Army.com**
- **Navy.com**
- **AirForce.com**
- **Marines.com**
- **GoCoastGuard.com**



Vocational Training

Vocational training refers to post-high school institutions that specialize in education and training for very specific occupations. They combine hands-on and classroom approaches. While the class size in these institutions can be small to promote ease of learning, these types of programs can also be quite expensive, and the training learned applies to specific occupations. For instance, you could attend a technical school to become certified or licensed in phlebotomy, but once you leave that institution, the credits you earned there might not transfer to other schools. You would have to return to a training program or college to earn advanced skills, and in many cases, that may mean you starting over.

Technical School

Technical schools are institutions of higher learning similar to traditional colleges, except that they focus on building technical skills that lead to very specific occupations. The state of Texas has one such public technical school district: Texas State Technical College (TSTC). Though there's only one district, TSTC campuses are located statewide. The programs offered at these schools are specific to the occupations and industries that are in demand in their local areas, so the programs differ on each campus. To see the variety of programs available, research these campuses, and don't forget to pay close attention to the costs of each program.

Remember, there are many other technical schools located throughout Texas, but TSTC is the only technical school system that is run and recognized by the state, meaning your credits are most likely to transfer and be recognized by not only other schools, but employers as well.



These campuses offer a variety of credentials to choose from, so you can select whichever specific program you need to get the occupation you desire. At technical schools, students often earn licenses, certificates, or certifications. For example, let's say you want to be a tax assessor. Some companies will hire you to work for them once you complete six specified courses and pass one certification exam. If you want to be a cosmetologist, you will have to pass a licensing exam after also completing 1500 hours of specialized

training and education in a cosmetology school and passing both a written and practical exam. If you want to be an athletic trainer, you need to earn a bachelor's degree in athletic training from a university, be certified in CPR, and pass a written and practical licensing exam.

To learn more about the requirements for the variety of occupations requiring certifications and licenses, take advantage of our publication, the Texas Directory of Licensed Occupations. You can find it online on the LMCI page at lmci.state.tx.us under "Products and Publications." Within LMCI Publications, select the "Books" hyperlink, scrolling to find the book title. Click on the title—also a hyperlink—to access the PDF.

When you're ready to look into campus options, if you need help picking the right campus, check out our publication Beyond High School and Into College. You can also find its PDF under LMCI Publications and by clicking "Magazines" on our publication page. This booklet helps you and your parents work through an 8-step process to narrow your options down and find the campus that is the best fit for you.



Workforce Training

Workforce Solutions offices or community college campuses in your community can offer training programs that will prepare you for very specific jobs (very similar to technical schools). Once you complete a program or programs, some programs offered also provide participants with licensing or certification in certain fields.



A potential benefit of workforce training programs is that they can be offered at a lower price than those provided through technical schools. There may be funding available to help you cover the cost of these training programs in some cases. Contact your local Workforce Solutions Office to learn more about these opportunities.

Learning On The Job

A proven way to learn new job skills is to learn them while you are on the job. For example, say you are working in an arcade as a floor attendant, but you want to learn how to manage the entire arcade. You can talk to your manager to let them know you are interested in doing so. When they are ready to expand their operational management staff, someone already doing the job can train you. Be aware that this method may take the longest to complete, as it takes time to get these kinds of opportunities from an employer. Also, this kind of training doesn't usually result in any industry-recognized licensing or certifications. Therefore, leveraging this experience or proving that you have this skill may be harder to do if you decide to change employers later.

Internships

You can also secure an internship opportunity to help explore an occupation or industry you may be interested in. An internship is a form of learning through experience that integrates knowledge learned in the classroom with practical application and skills in a professional setting. Internships give students the opportunity to gain valuable experience in fields they are considering for career paths. Internships also give employers the opportunity to guide and evaluate talent.



Students pursue internships because they want to gain professional experience that links their academic coursework to the disciplines they want to pursue for their careers. Learning by doing and being exposed to professionals working in the field provide valuable experience, a professional reference, and often leads to a position upon graduation. In fact, a recent Vault survey of U.S. employers with interns found that 73% of those interns received job offers after their terms were complete.

In addition to learning hard skills used to complete work tasks, internships help build soft skills needed to interact in a professional setting. Internships also help you hone communication, interpersonal skills, and experience, and understand organization/company culture. A great way to research internship opportunities across the state is to complete the Texas Internship Challenge by visiting txinternshipchallenge.com. Here you can explore internship postings, use the resume or cover letter builder, browse the scholarship finder, or explore career exploration tools.

Other Postsecondary Pathways

Entrepreneurship

Being your own boss and operating your own business can help you build all sorts of skills, but keep in mind you may need to learn some basic business concepts and skills to do this successfully. Jumping into this kind of undertaking without relevant training can mean you learning about how to run a business through trial and error, which often means loss of time and money. When you are the boss, and therefore the person financially responsible for the business, this can be an approach you want to avoid. That said, if you have a proper foundation and access to help when needed, being your own boss has great rewards.

One of the more exciting options is to starting a business on your own. It involves planning, making key financial decisions, and completing a series of legal activities. Here is a brief overview of the steps involved:

1. Conduct market research. Market research will inform you if there's an opportunity to turn your idea into a successful business. It's a way to compile information about potential customers and businesses already operating in your area. Use that information to find a competitive advantage.
2. Write your business plan. Your business plan is the basis of your business. It's a blueprint for how to structure, run, and grow your new business. You'll use it to prove to people that working with you—or investing in your company—is a smart choice.

3. Fund your business. Your business plan will help you figure out how much money you'll need to start your business. If you don't have that amount available to you, you'll need to either raise or borrow the capital. Fortunately, there are more ways than ever to find the capital you need.
4. Pick your business location. Your business location is one of the most important decisions you'll make. Whether you're setting up a brick-and-mortar business or launching an online store, the choices you make could affect your taxes, legal requirements and revenue.
5. Choose your business structure. The legal structure you choose for your business will impact your business registration requirements, how much you pay in taxes, and your personal liability.
6. Choose your business name. It's not easy to pick the perfect name. You'll want one that reflects your brand and captures your spirit. You'll also want to make sure your business name isn't already being used by someone else, especially a direct competitor. Your business name doesn't necessarily have to relate to your business, it just has to be memorable in a positive way.
7. Register your business. Once you've picked the perfect business name, it's time to make it legal and protect your brand. If you're doing business under a name different than your own, you'll need to register with the federal government, and maybe your state government as well.
8. Get federal and state tax IDs. You'll use your employer identification number (EIN) for important steps to start and grow your business, like opening a bank account and paying taxes. It's like a social security number for your business. Some, but not all, states require you to get a tax ID as well.
9. Apply for licenses and permits. Keep your business running smoothly by staying legally compliant. The licenses and permits you need for your business will vary by industry, location, and other factors.
10. Open a business bank account. A small business checking account can help you handle legal, tax, and day-to-day issues. The good news is it's easy to set one up if you have the right registrations and paperwork ready.

You can find these steps and learn more about each of them by going to the U.S. Small Business Administration website [sba.gov](https://www.sba.gov) and clicking on "Business Guide" at the top.

Volunteerism

No matter how you choose to train or educate yourself for your career choice, there is one additional method at your disposal to explore different career paths, ensuring you select the best fit—volunteering. This approach is so valuable because it is a low-stakes method that can provide numerous benefits. For instance, you can have the opportunity to experience a wide range of careers and industries; you can build a skill set that is as diverse as the variety of your volunteer experiences; you can “test out” working in different professional environments and make decisions about which experiences you enjoyed the most; and you can build a network of professional contacts that you can use as references on your resume or college applications.

Say you want to be a special needs school teacher when you grow up. After you graduate from high school, your next step will be to get into a four-year university to earn a bachelor’s degree in education. What do you think—if an admissions representative is comparing applications, could your chances of getting accepted into your university of choice improve if you volunteer five hours a week starting this year as an after-school tutor for special needs students?

Enter your zip code and your interest area (animal rescue, disaster relief, journalism, etc.) at volunteermatch.org and a list of volunteer opportunities in your area will populate. Other great sources to look for volunteer opportunities include your: place of worship, school or community center.



Don’t forget that you always have the option of gaining the skills needed for the jobs you desire by contacting your local Workforce Solutions office or community colleges to attend workforce training programs. Whether you are looking to enter a new industry or gain skills to expand your abilities, these programs may be just what you’re looking for.

While you also have the option of learning new skills on the job, this approach can only take you so far. Remember, if the occupation you want requires that you pass a state exam for licensing or certification purposes, you most likely will not gain the knowledge you need solely through the hands-on training you get on the job. Therefore, if you have your eyes on a specific occupation, browse texascareercheck.com to get more information; search the Texas Directory of Licensed Occupations publication at the LMCI site lmci.state.tx.us to learn which, if any, licenses are required; or talk to an expert at your local Workforce Solutions office to determine the variety of education and training options available to you, and take your time in determining your best approach.

This publication will reference, among others, four sources: Texas Reality Check, Texas Career Check, Texas CREWS, and TWC’s Career Hotline. Here’s how you can access these valuable resources.

Texas Reality Check texasrealitycheck.com

Don’t know how much money you will need to earn in the future? Don’t know which occupation to choose? No problem! Go to Texas Reality Check and find tools that will help you select the right career for your spending needs.



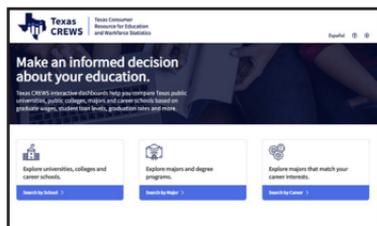
Texas Career Check texascareercheck.com

Texas Career Check is a program that allows you to explore different occupations, colleges and universities, career path information, and much more.



Texas Crews txcrews.org

Texas CREWS (Consumer Resource for Education and Workforce Statistics) helps you compare costs and outcomes for two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions in Texas.



Career Hotline 1-800-822-PLAN (7526)

Call the Texas Workforce Commission’s career hotline toll-free for information on careers, colleges and educational opportunities.

Other sources for this publication include
The Institute for College Access And Success and
the U.S. Department of Education

Defining the Types of Schools Available

There are several different kinds of institutions available for students to receive higher education. Review these short definitions and tips to get a general idea of each kind, along with their pitfalls or advantages.

Universities (Four-Year Institutions)

- These institutions are what most high school students think about when they imagine going to college.
- Universities can be either public or private institutions, and they offer a wide range of college degree options and programs.
- Universities grant:
 - Baccalaureate (or bachelor's) degrees
 - Graduate (or master's) degrees
 - Doctorate (or PhD) degrees
- Many universities offer on-campus housing options and meal plans.

Considerations	
Many options are available for financial aid: grants, scholarships, workstudy, loans.	Usually offer the widest variety in degree plan options.
Can be more expensive than other educational options.	Many of the "core curriculum" courses may be delivered in large auditorium-style rooms with hundreds of students in one class.
Can be located far from home, depending on special programs or degree plans you might need.	Students can live, work, and attend classes all in one place if they choose to.
Usually have a larger network of student-body organizations and social events as well as on-campus resources and services for students.	May require you to live on campus your first year of attendance.
Usually have large athletic and intramural programs.	Expect a competitive admission process compared to other types of post-secondary institutions.

Community, Technical, Junior and State Colleges (Two-Year Institutions)

- These institutions provide students the opportunity to take many of the same core curriculum classes (sometimes called “basics”) they could take at a university, but at a lower cost.
- Many offer numerous degree plans geared toward setting students up to transfer to universities.
- Community, Technical, and State Colleges grant:
 - Associate degrees
 - Vocational/career certifications and/or licenses

Considerations	
Cost to attend these institutions is much more affordable than a university.	Students can earn an associate degree and transfer their “basic” courses to a university to continue working toward a bachelor’s degree.
Not all campuses offer the same degree or vocational programs, so you have to vigilantly pay attention to that when enrolling.	Not all credits earned at these institutions transfer, so you need to talk to advisors, at both the community college and the institution you plan to attend, to see if your future institution will accept the credits.
Classes are much smaller, so student-to-teacher ratio is small.	Not as many student resources available as at universities.
The majority are commuter campuses, meaning there are no living quarters available, so students must travel to campus to attend.	Offer multiple degree and technical degree or certification programs/ options to choose from.
Many non-traditional students (older, married, parents, full-time employees, adults returning to school, vets, etc.) thrive at these institutions.	Not as many student organizations or social events as universities, though there are some.
Most have “open-door” policies admitting all applicants.	

What Do Community Colleges Award?

The following pages include multiple comparisons of community colleges with other institutions for you to consider. Before you dive in, there is some important information that you may not have heard about or even thought of.

You might not think that there are multiple types of programs offered at community colleges. Associate degrees come to mind when we talk about community colleges, but did you know that there are different types of associate degrees? Did you know there are other types of credentials you can earn from a community college? In fact, they award several different types of associate degrees, certificates and certifications. Below is an overview of the different types of credentials available at community colleges.

Associate Degrees

Associate degrees are 2-year degrees offered by community colleges. The most common types of associate degrees offered are Associate of Arts, Associate of Science and Associate of Applied Science degrees.

Associate of Arts (A.A.) – This degree provides students a general liberal arts education that prepares them for a bachelor’s degree program or 4-year university. The art-specific curriculum of an Associate of Arts track can include courses that are focused on English, history, humanities, psychology, philosophy, foreign languages, or theater.

Associate of Science (A.S.) – This degree also provides students with basic courses needed to transfer and continue pursuing a bachelor’s degree. The science-specific curriculum of the Associate of Science can include science, math, astronomy, biology, chemistry, physics, or engineering.

Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) – This degree can be considered a technical or career-oriented degree. It is designed for students who intend to enter the workforce immediately following graduation from their program. Program examples include accounting, administrative assistant, digital art, teaching assistant, paralegal studies, web design, and veterinary technology.

Certificates

Certificates are usually job-specific and generally require significantly less time than an associate degree. For example, an associate degree may require 60 or more college credits while certificate programs typically require 15 to 18 hours. Examples of certificate programs include welding, automotive technology, plumbing, accounting, and sonography.

Certificates vs. Certifications

Some community colleges have continuing education programs that offer industry certifications. These certifications differ from the above-mentioned certificate programs because they are not college credit. Many certification programs require industry-related work experience and the timeframe to complete programs can vary widely. Example certification programs include medical assistant, vocational nurse, project management, web development, Microsoft, and python programming.

Health Related Institutions (Health Science Centers)

- These institutions provide specialized degrees and certifications for students to obtain the credentials to practice a professional trade, such as: dentistry, surgery, nursing, medicine, law, etc.
- Many institutions provide residency and fellowship programs that students are required to complete to earn their degrees and certifications.
- Programs produce researchers in each field as well as practitioners, for example, biomedical researchers, engineers and medical doctors.

Considerations	
Much of the learning takes place in hands-on, practical settings.	Can sometimes be more expensive than other universities.
Provides the specialized training and education that is mandatory for someone to work in these fields.	These programs require students to also purchase specialized tools or clothing (such as scrubs) though they can be taken with them when they enter the workforce.
Programs normally take longer to complete than other degrees (but it is necessary to earn them to work in these occupations).	Many institutions set students up with residencies and fellowships that can help them get work in the field more easily after graduation.
Many are located in or around the medical centers of metropolitan cities, so they do not provide the kind of setting that traditional universities would.	Internships and fellowships provide students an opportunity to experience working in the industry of their choice before they complete school.
Expect a highly competitive admissions process for these types of higher-education institutions.	

Career Schools and Colleges

- Also referred to as “proprietary,” “for profit,” or “vocational schools,” these institutions offer specialized training for students who are seeking credentials to work in an occupation (or in some cases associate degrees) as opposed to a bachelor’s degree.
- Many of these programs are not accredited. This means that should you choose to transfer later to a community college or university, none of the credits you earn at the career school will transfer with you, so for all intents and purposes you will be starting over.
- These institutions grant:
 - Certificates
 - Licenses
 - Professional credentials

Considerations	
Provide specialized curriculum or hands-on learning that offers highly-focused training in less time.	Usually much more expensive to attend than community, technical, and state colleges (sometimes even more expensive than universities).
Some programs offer associate degrees (check transferability).	Many do not have accredited programs so none of the credits you earn here would transfer to a university or community college.
Offers technical or vocational credentials for an occupation rather than transferable credits to a university.	Not all institutions offer associate degrees, and even if students earn a degree, those credits may not transfer if the student seeks to pursue a bachelor’s degree later.
Do not offer athletic or intramural programs for students.	Admissions policies are usually “open-door.”

The at-a-glance table below compares the four different types of postsecondary institutions based on various selection criteria which this booklet will discuss. These are general comparisons. Remember: there may be exceptions to every rule.

School Types and Selection Criteria At-A-Glance				
Selection Criteria	Career School	Community College	University	Professional School
Cost	High	Low	Varies	High
Live Off- vs. On-Campus	Off	Off	Off or On	Off
Student Organizations	Few to none	Varies	Many (can vary)	Varies
Academic Majors	Varies	Many	Many	Few
Career-Specific Training	Yes	Yes	Varies	Yes
Class Size	Small	Small	Varies	Varies
Credits Likely to Transfer	No	Varies	Varies	Varies
Financial Aid Options	Limited	Diverse	Diverse	Diverse
Vocational Licenses offered	Licensing, Certification, Job Skills training	Licensing, Certification, Job Skills training	Varies	Advanced professional licenses
Degrees Offered	Varies	Associate's	Bachelor's, Master's, Doctoral	Examples: Medical degree, Law degree
Public vs. Private	All private	Varies	Varies	Varies
Distance Learning options	Varies	Yes	Yes	Varies
Admissions	Varies	Open-door	Competitive	Extremely competitive

Public vs. Private

In addition to determining the right kind of college for you, you need to decide if you want to attend a public or a private college. Private schools are also referred to as independent schools, so you will see both terms used in this publication. Public schools generally have less restrictive admissions requirements and cost less than their private counterparts. These are important factors to consider when deciding if you want to stay close to home or venture out-of-state for your education.

The Exploring Education section in the Texas Career Check website allows you to investigate your options by limiting your school search choices based on whether or not they are public or private, or even by the specific religious denominations of private schools. Once you narrow the options, you can compare costs side-by-side.

Let's take a look at some examples to see what this might mean in real numbers for tuition costs:

Average Tuition and Fees for Public and Private Institutions in Texas 2022-2023			
Institution Type	Resident/ In-District	Out-of-District	Nonresident
Public Universities	\$10,129	N/A	\$24,788
Independent Universities	\$33,407	N/A	\$34,111
Public Community Colleges	\$3,103	\$4,803	\$7,241
Independent Junior/ Community College	\$8,280	N/A	\$8,280
Public Health-Related Institutions	\$10,272	N/A	\$26,956
Public State College	\$4,054	N/A	\$16,804
Public Technical College	\$6,870	N/A	\$11,250

* Tuition amounts represent an average or fixed rate for 15 hours. Amount may change depending on the student's preferred program of study.

Note: While 12 hours is full time for financial aid purposes, to progress from year to year in terms of coursework (for example freshman to sophomore designation), students need to average 15 hours per semester.

Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board website, collegeforalltexas.com, College Costs App.

Community College vs. University

Another factor you should consider is whether you want to attend a community college or a university. If you are looking for a traditional college experience, then the university option is the way to go. On the other hand, if you are hoping for a slower transition into college, want to save money while taking your basics or core curriculum classes, want to explore your career and major options a bit more, or want to attend classes where the student body has a larger diverse population in terms of age and life experience, then community college may be your best bet.

See the table on page 21 to compare tuition and fee costs between universities and community colleges.

Other Questions to Consider when Comparing these Institutions	
1. Which institution can I earn a bachelor's degree at?	University (With some Community college exceptions.)
2. Which institution likely offers on-campus housing?	University
3. Which campuses will likely have smaller classes?	Community College
4. Which campuses likely offer more workforce classes?	Community College
5. Which institution likely hosts major sporting events?	University
6. Which institution likely fosters a research community?	University

Community College vs. Career School

If you're not going to a bachelor's degree-awarding college or university after high school, you need to consider whether you will enroll in a community college, or a career school. It is important to determine all your needs and options before deciding.

Are you in a hurry to start working? Or are you okay with taking a little longer to get a well-rounded education along with specialized training before moving into a career? Think about it. If attending a community college is an option you want to explore, learning about the types of degrees and certifications will empower you to make a more informed decision.

If you plan to ultimately earn a bachelor's degree, you need to find out if the two-year college or career school program you attend is accredited. Most community colleges are accredited, meaning their curriculums and degree programs are government-approved. However, many career schools are unaccredited, meaning you may not be allowed to transfer any academic credits from there to a community college or university. So if you leave the career school, or even finish with a certificate or degree, you will have to start over again at a community college or university you plan to attend later.

Many of the certification programs available at career schools are also available at community college campuses, and at a more economical cost. Research all your options carefully to ensure you make the best decision based on your specific career ambitions. Use the Texas Career Check website to search for the training and certification requirements for careers that interest you, as well as the schools available to earn those credentials.



If you decide to attend a career or technical school, the Texas Workforce Commission has several important resources to help you select one. Visit [texasworkforce.org/careerschoolstudents](https://www.texasworkforce.org/careerschoolstudents), and you can find which schools are accredited by the state, and a list of career schools or colleges ordered to cease operation in Texas.

Review the table below to compare some sample tuition costs.

Comparison of Tuition Fees for Program-Specific Areas of Study among Career Schools and Community Colleges with Similar Programs

Dental Hygiene/Hygienist (Associate Degree Program)

(Estimated costs include tuition, fees, books, equipment, and testing)*

College Name	Community College	Career School	Cost of Program
Coastal Bend College	37 hrs		\$12,553
Concorde Career College		88.5 hrs	\$70,800
Tarrant County College NE	68 hrs		\$19,677

Medical Assistant Program

(Associate Degree or Certification Program—as indicated)

(Estimated costs include tuition, fees, books, equipment, and testing)*

College Name	Community College	Career School	Cost of Program
Amarillo College, AAS	60 hrs + Clinical rotation		\$6,800
Brazosport College *Certificate Program	310 total contact hrs		\$2,841
Quest College, AAS		60 hrs + Clinical rotation	\$25,500
SW School of Business & Technical Careers *Certificate Program		58 hrs + Clinical rotation	\$29,640

* The career school tuition costs listed above represent only a few locations and programs. Costs vary widely depending on the school attended and the program of study pursued. To make the best-informed decision, please contact an institution of interest to verify their tuition costs.

Cyber Security Program

(Associate Degree or Certification Program—as indicated)

(Estimated costs include tuition, fees, books, equipment, and testing)*

College Name	Community/ Technical College	Career School	Cost of Program
Lone Star College Cy-Fair Associate Degree	60 hrs		\$6,455**
Texas State Technical College (TSTC) Associate Degree	60 hrs		\$15,400
Lamson Institute Associate Degree Program		77 hrs	\$35,450

* Tuition and fees are representative of in-district students

** Program costs reflect tuition and basic fees only. Does not include books or program fees

Criteria for Selecting Schools

In addition to the guidelines we've already identified that can influence your selection, many other factors can help you make the best-informed decision. We've listed several different categories here. Think about what you prefer as you review each. Decide how important your preferences are to you.

As you go through these guidelines, pick the five criteria that matter the most to you. To be safe, and to ensure you narrow down your options enough, set aside a couple of backup criteria as well. Later, you'll be able to identify which schools match the preferences for your criteria using the Texas Career Check website. If you prepare correctly, this process should be easy.



Type Of Degree You Are Looking For

In addition to the detailed information we already covered around the type of school you can attend, now is the time to determine the kind of school you should attend based on the type of degree or certification you need to obtain to reach your career goals. Remember, the more certain you are of your career choice, the more certain you can be about your college options, specifically which type of school you should attend. These decisions will steer you towards the right kind of higher education institution that is best for you.

To help you make the most informed decision, take a look at the chart below to get a general idea of what kinds of degrees or training may be needed for specific occupations. To find information for the specific occupation you prefer, go to the Texas Career Check website.

A Brief Guide to Degrees			
Knowing the type of degree you want, and how much time you want to dedicate to earning it, will direct you toward the appropriate type of school			
Level of Education (Degree)	Time Needed to Achieve*	Example Occupation	School Type
On-the-job training	One day to a few months	Cashier	N/A
Certification/ License	Six months to a year	Firefighter	Community college or career school
Associate's Degree	One to two years	Paralegal	Community college or career school
Bachelor's Degree	Four years	Chemical Engineer	Four-year college or university
Master's Degree	Two to three years after a bachelor's	Counselor	College or university with a graduate program
Doctorate Degree	Four years after a master's	University Professor	College or university with a graduate program
Professional Degree	Two to three years after a bachelor's	Lawyer/ Dentist/ Medical Doctor	College or university with a graduate program

* The time needed to reach the degree indicated is an estimate and will change based on each individual's student schedule.

School Quality

Attending a high-quality school means you will obtain a superior education and be exposed to a broader range of ideas. This will ultimately make you more effective in the workplace. Here are some factors to consider when it comes to choosing a quality school.

Philosophy

Each school has its own philosophy of learning. Some focus on teaching undergraduate students. Some focus more on research. Some focus on athletics. Some are all three. The variety is endless.

Visit the websites for colleges you are interested in to view any promotional videos that may give you a good idea of their philosophy or mission.

Read what different periodicals have to say about different schools to get a sense of each school's focus. Be sure you understand why schools are considered high-quality, and whether those factors matter to you.

Also, pay attention to the percentage of graduate and doctoral students on campus. A high percentage may indicate that the school's focus is on research, not undergraduate teaching.

Accreditation

The school you attend must be accredited if you want to receive financial aid or transfer your credits to a different community college or university. To learn if a particular school you're interested in is accredited, visit the following website:
ope.ed.gov/accreditation/search.aspx.

Admission Requirements

All schools have admissions requirements—some are just more stringent than others. Some colleges require you to have a certain SAT score, write a personal essay, obtain letters of recommendation, and more.

Texas Career Check's Explore Education function allows you to look up the admissions requirements for individual schools.

Remember that admissions requirements are constantly changing, so check with your school of interest to confirm you have the latest information.

Examples of Common Admission Requirements

Rice University	University of Texas	Midwestern State University
Application: Common App or Coalition (Scolr) App	Application: Use Common App or Apply Texas App	Application Deadline: Apply Texas Application
\$75 application fee	\$75 application fee	\$ application fee
Official high school transcript and college (if applicable)	Official high school transcripts and college (if applicable)	Official high school transcript or GED
ACT or SAT scores optional	ACT or SAT scores optional	TSIA2 exam ACT or SAT not required
Recommendations: Three letters of recommendation: one from counselor and 2 from teachers	Recommendations: not required, but can submit up to two letters of recommendation	Recommendations: Not required
Essay: Not required	Essay: A written essay or personal statement is required for freshmen.	Essay: Not required
Interview with current Rice senior recommended, but optional	Additional materials may be required, depending on major.	

Faculty

Decide what you're looking for in faculty—whether it's depth of knowledge or willingness to serve students one on one. Look for schools whose faculty meets that standard. You can learn a lot about faculty members from the college websites.

Facilities

School facilities include classrooms, labs, libraries, dormitories, and more. Some schools' facilities are state-of-the-art. Others are not. You have to decide if that matters based on how frequently your chosen field of study advances. You should also consider how safe and accessible a school's buildings are. Texas Career Check's School Information section lists some of the amenities of each school.

Post-Graduation Results

Research how successful students from your schools of interest become. The Texas CREWS site at txcrews.org offers actual facts about what happens to people after they graduate different Texas schools, so you can judge for yourself. The information provided includes:



- how many students graduated from each institution
- the average loan amount students accumulated
- the three most popular programs of study on each campus
- student's average annual earnings over a decade after graduation



Quality Consideration for Bachelor's vs. Master's Degrees

One final consideration to keep in mind when contemplating the quality of a school, is to first solidify whether or not you will be required to obtain a degree beyond your bachelor's in order to work in your preferred occupation. If so, you may want to hold out on attending that really prestigious college until it is time for you to enter into graduate or professional school. Or you may decide you want to try to attend an elite school for both degrees. The choice, and the cost, will be yours. On one hand, you can obtain certain degrees from just about any four-year university. On the other hand, certain advanced degrees (like in law or medicine) from prestigious universities may make you more attractive to certain employers. If this is important to you, think about all of the aspects that are included in attending such a school.

Also consider that the admissions process for graduate-level programs (and beyond) is even more stringent than those established for undergraduate (four-year university) institutions because the competition to enter graduate programs is rather tough. So think about whether or not the reputation or quality of the school you go to for graduate studies is more important, equally important, or less important as where you attend for your bachelor's degree. Then consider the cost for all of the degrees you intend to pursue to determine if you can afford to attend more than one elite program.

Costs

Tuition and Expenses

Tuition covers the cost of the classes you will take at the school you attend, but school costs don't stop there. You must also pay for books, student fees, housing, parking on campus, food, and other living expenses. When you estimate a school's cost, you must take all expenses into consideration.

Texas CREWS also provides you with the average loan debt students have accumulated by the time they graduate. The data on Texas CREWS can even be broken down by individual college majors.

Guardian Contributions

Your parent(s) or guardian(s) may have been saving for college education since you were a baby, or not. They may be rich, or not. Find out exactly how much money they can contribute each year to your education. Honestly explore the situation with them. The ability to discuss finances objectively with your parent(s) or guardian(s) is a sign of maturity, and this information is vital to your college selection process.

Questions to Ask Your Guardian

1. How much can they (or others) contribute?
2. How can they pay—in a lump sum, for example, or monthly?
3. Will your parent(s) or guardian(s) count you as a deduction on their taxes? If so, you can't take a deduction for yourself if you work while in school.
4. Will you be covered by their medical insurance? If so, for how long? If not, you may need to purchase insurance elsewhere.
5. Are there conditions to the contributions? Your parent(s) or guardian(s) may assist you financially only if you attend a particular school, for example, or maintain a certain grade level. Be clear that you understand exactly what their expectations are. You might even ask your parents to put it all in writing.

Financial Aid

Financial aid can offset the cost of an education and/or training program. It comes in many shapes—grants, loans, scholarships and work-study programs—so ask about them all. It also comes from many different sources—the federal government, private organizations, businesses, foundations and schools themselves.

Since some aid depends on financial need, you'll have to know your guardian/parent income to determine whether you qualify. Not everyone does. Many “middle class” students, for example, find that their guardian(s)/parent(s) income disqualifies them from aid despite the fact that their guardian(s)/parent(s) can't afford to pay for everything. Some well-endowed schools will pay for almost everything for needy students.

Submit Your FAFSA as Soon as Possible

Completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the first step to getting any financial aid, including grants, loans and work-study programs. A report of your data will be sent to each school that you request on the FAFSA.

To learn more or apply online, visit fafsa.ed.gov.

Remember: applying for financial aid is FREE. Beware of services that offer to do it for you for a fee.

Not All Aid Depends on Need or GPA

Many types of financial aid are based on need or merit, while others are reserved for targeted populations or for students who have specific interests, abilities, or career plans. Be sure that you select a school that offers a wide variety of financial aid options—or at least the type of aid that you need.

Like parental aid, financial aid often comes with conditions. Many times financial aid, particularly scholarships, depends on maintaining certain grades once you are in school. If your grades drop, the money disappears as well. You must decide whether you are up for the challenge. If you're not, don't count on that money.

Texas Career Check's School Information section indicates, in general, other types of aid available to students at individual schools. Funding opportunities at colleges and universities are constantly changing, so check with your school of interest to confirm you have the latest information.

Student Loans

A student loan can be an asset today that allows you to go to college. But it can turn into a major liability for you down the road. The amount you borrow for your education must be paid back in full plus interest.

According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, student loan debt averaged **\$25,101** for public universities and **\$15,625** for public two-year colleges in **2021** with **47%** owing money following graduation in total. Students who borrowed money and did not complete a degree owed **\$11,640** accounting for **34%**.

If you must take out a student loan, choose your program of study wisely to make every dollar count. Your degree plan may affect how much you borrow. Make sure your education will prepare you for a career that will cover your debt.

Six months after you graduate or stop attending school, you must begin making payments to your student loans unless you've made an arrangement with the lender. For more information on student loans, you may access the Federal Student Aid website at studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa.

Find Specific Loan Amount Information at TXCREWS.org

If you are interested in collecting information on student loan amounts specific to individual colleges and degree programs, visit TXCREWS.org. From the homepage:

1. Search by major
2. Select ONE preferred major, area of study, occupation, or institution.
3. The chart on the far left will tell you the average loan amount for graduates in your selected major, institution, occupation, etc.

Did you know?...

Student Loans have Staying Power!

- There are few ways to legally get out of paying back student loans, and they are often rigorous and costly. Even when exceptions are made, many cases only reduce the amount of loan debt rather than remove the debt completely.
- Even if you declare bankruptcy later in life, your student loan debt will not be absolved or removed from your credit score.
- In all cases of default, your default will be reflected in your credit score and credit history. Depending on your overall credit score, you may have difficulty in obtaining loans to purchase cars or homes, finding a job, renewing any government or professional licenses, or joining the military.
- If you are in default on your student loan and you decide to return to school at a later date, you will not be eligible to receive any more federal financial aid (including loans, grants, or federal scholarships).
- Renewal of state licenses (such as cosmetology, real estate, or optometry) may be withheld if you are in default on a loan.
- Your school may not release certain academic records (such as enrollment or attendance records, transcripts, certificates, or degrees) if your loan is in default.
- Lastly, student loans are also the only kinds of loans for which the government has the right to garnish your wages, keep your federal and state tax refunds, or withhold your social security payments if you default on paying your loans back.

Be sure to research all your options in paying for your education, and make the decision that is best for you.

Future Indicators

Enrolling in school is very different from completing a program of study. Many people drop out by choice, by circumstance, or by failure to meet the program's demands. Some schools strive to help students succeed. Others show less concern for their students' personal progress. Obviously, you want to attend a school where you'll succeed. Here are some factors to consider.

Retention Rates

Retention rates indicate how many people stay in the program. If the rate is low, it may be that the school services are not helpful, the program is extremely rigorous, or a particular program has poor teachers. Find out the retention rates for schools—and the particular programs that interest you.

As always, be careful with statistics. Community colleges, for example, have an “open entrance/open exit” policy. People often take one course and leave, which lowers the community college's retention rates. Even though the student didn't drop out, they never planned to stay in.

Average Time to Earn a Degree or Certificate

School takes time. How much are you willing to spend? How long does it actually take for students to earn their degree or certificate if they attend this particular school full-time? Check out your institution of choice's statistics on the Texas CREWS website, and decide how much time you're willing to invest. Remember: the longer you take to get your degree, the more money it will cost you.



Graduation Rates

It's important to consider graduation rates for schools and programs that interest you. The graduation rate shows how many students graduate from a given school out of the students who attend it. Remember that some schools, such as community colleges, may have a low graduation rate because students attend only temporarily before transferring to a bachelor's degree-awarding college or university.

Go to the Texas CREWS website to find out how many students graduated from Texas two and four-year institutions. You can find data based on the school attended, industry of interest, or even break the search down to see the numbers based on individual majors.

A "cohort" in this example is the group of students who started college in Texas in the Fall 2008. They were tracked for six years in an effort to collect the following data.

Public Universities Fall 2014 Cohort Cohort total: 80,785		
Of first-time degree-seeking students who enroll	100	
	Full-Time	Part-Time
Enroll	95	5
Graduate in 4 years or less	37	1
Graduate in 5 to 6 years	25	1
Total Graduates	62	3
Still enrolled after 6 years	8	1
No longer enrolled, no degree	26	2

Number of every 100 Texas public university students who earn a postsecondary degree within six years:

65

Note: Rounding may affect sum totals

Source: 2021 Texas Public Higher Education Almanac

Loan Default Rates

A school's loan default rate shows how often students fail to repay their student loans. Schools with high default rates may be barred from offering federal student loans. To find out about a school's loan default rate, call 1-800- 4FED-AID.

Visit the Texas CREWS website to see how many students graduate from specific programs, based on their major, and how much average loan debt these students accrue by the time they graduate.

National Loan Defaults Compared to Enrollment

Fiscal Year 2018 Official				
	# of School	Borrower Default Rate (%)	# of Borrowers Defaulted	# of Borrowers Entered Repayment
Public	1,644	7.0%	160,696	2,288,352
Less than 2 yrs	146	8.7%	747	8,563
2-3 yrs	772	11.5%	66,638	577,591
4 yrs (+)	726	5.4%	93,311	1,702,198
Private	1,703	5.2%	53,460	1,020,296
Less than 2 yrs	47	11.9%	585	4,890
2-3 yrs	126	12.1%	3,402	27,965
4 yrs (+)	1,530	5.0%	49,473	987,441
Proprietary	2,261	11.2%	86,187	763,856
Less than 2 yrs	1,253	12.5%	15,353	121,978
2-3 yrs	640	13.9%	25,613	183,233
4 yrs (+)	368	9.8%	45,221	458,645
Foreign	388	2.5%	282	10,873
Unclassified	0	0.0%	0	0
Total	5,996	7.3%	300,625	4,083,377

Source:

U.S. Department of Education, IPEDS 12-month enrollment for FY2018 for schools in the 50 states plus DC, 3-year cohort default rates (CDRs) (Partial).

<https://www2.ed.gov/offices/OSFAP/defaultmanagement/schooltyperates.pdf>

School Size

Total Enrolled

The total number of students enrolled at a school affects many aspects of campus life. Large schools can be intimidating, but also exciting. Smaller schools offer intimacy and more faculty contact, though they're usually not as intimate as high school.

It comes down to personal preference. Do you want to go to a large university with many social groups and clubs? Do you prefer a small school where you're more likely to recognize the faces in your classes or play leadership roles that interest you? Do you want lots of personalized attention, or would you prefer to blend into the crowd? You decide.

Texas Career Check allows you to limit your school choices based on the number of students enrolled at a school. Under the Explore Education tab, you can also compare schools!

An example of a comparison of schools is below.

General Information		
Category	Baylor University	The University of Texas at Austin
Description	baylor.edu/about/	utexas.edu/about/overview
Institution Control	Religious Control	State Control
Location	Waco, TX	Austin, TX

Enrollment		
Undergraduate Only	Baylor University	The University of Texas at Austin
Male	5,791	17,716
Female	8,608	22,332
Total	14,899	40,048
Undergraduate, Graduate & First Professional		
Male	7,654	22,994
Female	11,643	27,482
Total	19,297	50,476

Class Size

Whether you prefer large, lecture-style classrooms or small discussion groups, don't assume that class size always corresponds with the school size. It also depends on areas of study, since some majors are more popular than others. Progression in your program of study.

In general, freshman classes are larger than those for students farther along their program of study, like juniors and seniors. Even when a class is huge, smaller group classes like "labs" meet (sometimes with graduate students), often providing a sense of connection and intimacy. The bottom line is this: ask about class size in detail. Find out if you'll be in the type of setting that will meet your individual needs.

University Classroom



Though the student ratio at some universities can be as low as 22:1 (see Texas Career Check for more data) keep in mind that is more common in upper-division (junior/senior level) courses and post-graduate courses. Many freshmen lecture courses may actually resemble the photo at left.

Community College Classroom

Resemble high school classrooms, with the exception of some science labs or small lecture halls. However, the student-to-teacher ratio of 20:1 is common for most classes.



Career School Classroom



The student-to-teacher ratio of many career schools is also commonly low as teachers need to pass along specialized skills through hands-on learning. Class size will vary depending on school and program of study.

Location

Your school's location is very important for many reasons, so consider the following factors when exploring your college campus options.

Local Community

What type of setting would you prefer while at school? Do you want to attend classes in a "college town," in a big city, or in the middle of nowhere on some rural campus? Before you say "who cares?" think about it carefully. If visiting museums is important to you, for instance, a small-town location may not satisfy you. If, on the other hand, you hate crowds, you may not want to attend school in a big city.

In-State vs. Out-of-State

Do you want to attend school in Texas or out-of-state? Your decision may affect your costs if you attend a public school because public schools in other states will have to charge you the more expensive out-of-state tuition. Remember, independent colleges (or private schools) generally charge the same rate for all students no matter which state in which they are residents. Depending on whether or not you have already decided if you want to attend a public or private college, this may affect whether or not you could shop around for in-state or out-of-state campuses. Also consider, however, the length of time you may be required to live and work full time in a different state before you can gain in-state residency status and forego the out-of-state tuition costs.

Texas Career Check allows you to limit your school choices based on which state you prefer. Check with your school of interest to confirm you have the latest information.



Texas In-State Tuition vs. Out of State

Tuition and Other Costs		
In-State Cost (Per Year)	Texas A&M University	University of Rhode Island
Tuition	\$9,208.00	\$13,250.00
Room and Board	\$11,550.00	\$13,269.00
Fees	\$3,970.00	\$2,082.00
Out-of-State Cost (Per Year)		
Tuition	\$36,117.00	\$31,272.00
Room and Board	\$11,550.00	\$13,268.00
Fees	\$3,970.00	\$2,082.00

Out of State Tuition for Public Universities

Tuition and Other Costs		
Out-of-State Cost (Per Year)	Hunter College of the City University New York	University of California, Berkeley
Tuition	\$18,600.00	\$41,196.00
Room and Board	\$14,067.00	\$19,516.00
Fees	\$450.00	\$2,784.00

Distance from Home

Do you want to strike out on your own? Would you prefer to (or must you) continue to live at home while attending school? The distance from home you're willing and able to go will help you determine school location. Remember to consider travel costs if you attend school far from your home. Will you be able to afford to visit for breaks and holidays, or will you be forced to find alternatives? Distance does matter.

Climate

Climate may influence your choice of school as well. If you hate winter weather, you might think twice about attending a school in the northeast. If you love the change of seasons, on the other hand, the desert Southwest might not be right for you. What kind of climate do you prefer?

Post-Graduation Residence of Choice

Where do you think you might want to live after school? It may be too soon to decide, but if you already know, it can influence your choice. If you plan to live in your home town, for instance, you might want to attend a school nearby. Or, alternatively, you might want to enroll in a school across the country to “see the world” before you “settle down.”

Distance Learning

Learning your college selection may also be influenced by whether or not your institution offers distance learning or other alternative learning methods. For instance, many schools offer online, public access television, or video courses. Colleges offer evening and weekend courses, too.

Distance learning offers a kind of learning environment that allows students to complete courses online (sometimes without ever having to meet your professor or classmates in person). Consider this aspect of learning if regular travel to-and-from school would be problematic for you, but also keep in mind that utilizing any sort of alternative learning methods requires a great amount of self-discipline and motivation in order for students to be successful.



Campus Environment

Some people view school as just a job, and they are indifferent about extracurricular activities or the campus environment. For others, the social life that surrounds a school is important. Your preference affects your school choice.

Setting

Visiting the school itself is the best way to learn what it's about and how it really looks and feels. Is it in an urban or a rural setting? How active are the students? Your physical surroundings can affect your attitude and productivity, so think about what you prefer.



Housing

Where do you want to live when you go to school? Available housing arrangements can vary from campus to campus.

If you live on campus, how difficult is it to reserve a dorm room? If you live off campus, how much does housing cost in the surrounding community? What kind of public transportation is available? It all comes down to what you want and are willing to accept and pay.

2022-2023 On-campus Housing Costs (Room & Board)		2022 Off-Campus Housing Costs in the Same Areas	
Name of Institution	Annual Costs	Name of Institution	Annual Costs
Incarnate Word University, San Antonio	\$12,500	1-bedroom apartment in San Antonio	Average= \$961/month
St. Edward's University, Austin	\$13,876	1-bedroom apartment in Austin	Average= \$1,236/month
Texas A&M, Corpus Christi	\$10,868	1-bedroom apartment in Corpus Christi	Average= \$909/month
University of Dallas, Irving	\$13,810	1-bedroom apartment in Irving	Average= \$1,150/month

*Room & board includes housing and meals for fall and spring semesters (1 academic year). Apartment averages do not include costs for meals.

*Source for off-campus housing costs: https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2023_code/2023state_summary.odn

Safety

All schools are required to report the campus crime rate, from theft to assault. Obviously, you won't want to attend a school with an extraordinarily high crime rate.

When you compare schools' figures, however, keep them in perspective. First, they are self-reported data, and not all schools report in the same way. Second, school location may play a big role in crime rates. Urban schools may naturally have a higher crime rate than rural schools, for instance, because there are more people around.

Be safe, by being smart and well-informed. If you are concerned about crime rate information, visit the website of the campuses you are interested in attending to see their statistics.

Athletics

If you enjoy athletics and team sports, but are not interested in high stakes intercollegiate competition, you might consider whether your campus of interest offers intramural sports programming. These are athletically-driven student clubs within the school. The clubs compete amongst each other rather than other colleges.

If you prefer to watch sports as opposed to playing them, then you might consider what kinds of sports teams your campus includes and the size of their organizations. You may prefer a school with a prominent football program, steeped in traditions of pep rallies and tailgating attended by tens or hundreds of thousands. Or maybe you prefer less-crowded, less-publicized, but still enjoyable sporting events. The choice is yours. But remember, whatever your preference is in this area, it should not decide whether you attend a particular school.

Special Services

Do you have physical, emotional, or learning challenges that require special services? All colleges and universities are required, by law, to provide such services, but the quality or availability of their amenities can vary greatly depending upon funding and the size of the institutions. Find a school that can readily accommodate your needs. There's no sense in setting yourself up for hardship when a little research can tell you what you need to know.

Social Activities and Clubs

Most schools offer a wide range of activities, clubs, and organizations. If organized extracurricular activities interest you, decide what's most important.

First, consider the number of activities and organizations. The bigger the school, the more you'll find happening. The smaller the school, however, the greater the chance you'll get to play a leadership role in the groups that do exist. Next, consider whether there are specific organizations that really matter to you. Do you want to be in a fraternity or sorority? How about an ROTC program or choir? These are important considerations because not all schools offer these. Decide if they're critical to you.



Student Body

Schools attract people of all races, religions, cultures, genders, etc. In fact, people from all over the world come to the United States to attend college.

How well you “fit in” at school depends in part on whether you like the mix of people there.

Try to imagine the kind of experience you want to have, and choose a school that fits that image.

Sampling of Student Body Gender Statistics		
Name of Institution	% Male	% Female
The University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley	41	59
Amberton University	37	63
Blinn College, Brenham	47	53
Lone Star College, CyFair	44	56
Tyler Junior College	27	73



The School Selection Process

Now that you've reviewed the criteria, let's talk about how you can collect all the information we've already discussed in this booklet to help you narrow down your college options so that you can select the campus that you feel would be the best fit for you. Follow this step-by-step approach to weed out the options that do not serve your needs or requirements.

1. Choose Criteria

The first step is to determine if your career path requires you to attend a career school, a two-year college, or a four-year university. Once you can determine the proper destination, based on your career choice, you can then begin to consider the specific aspects of a college that would most persuade you to select attending that institution above others.

Using the criteria we just covered in the previous pages, select your five most important measurements, and write them down before making comparisons on institutions. Write down a couple back-up criteria as well. Ensure that the criteria you select for comparisons are in line with your desired outcomes for both the college experience as well as your expectations for obtaining an effective career preparation experience. You are really the only person that can speak to those desires and expectations, so don't allow others to persuade you about what they think is most important in the college selection process.

2. Identifying Limits

Talk to your parents, teachers and guidance counselor about finances, your grades and other possible limits on the schools you can attend. Add them to the criteria you've already selected.

3. Narrowing Down Your Options

Identify schools that meet your five criteria and fit within your limits. If you are left with more than ten schools, add your back-up criteria to shorten the list to ten or fewer. These are the institutions you want to focus on for the remainder of the steps.

4. Analyze Your Options

This is the point where you get to dive into the information you collect about each institution so you can know them well.

Here's how to do it:

- Read about each school at their websites
- Verify accreditation at Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)
- Go to college fairs at your school or community centers.
- Visit the schools' campuses if you can (or at least their websites).
- Talk to alumni or current students.
- Ask each school to send you literature (and read it!).
- Review college guides or the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's (THECB) Education Almanac that rank schools and see where your ten options fall.
- Visit Texas CREWS's (txcrews.org) or the THECB's (txhighereddata.org) websites to learn about what happened to students after they graduated.

Finally, get a gut feeling about each place: you'll use that intuition in the next step.

5. Selecting Your Top Five Options

Select your top picks by narrowing your list to roughly five schools. You can do this by systematically comparing your qualifications with the schools' admissions requirements if you haven't already. Eliminate any school that just strikes you wrong for some reason. You may not want to attend a school that has a particular religious affiliation, for instance. It may not have been a major criterion before, but now it may come into play. You can also rely on your intuition if you feel like a school isn't a good fit for you. If you have trouble making cuts, repeat Step 4 to gather more information.

6. Prepare To Apply

Take the actions necessary to meet the schools' requirements. For example, if you must submit SAT scores, take the exam in plenty of time to meet the school's deadlines.

7. Apply

Complete and submit your application on time. Schools charge a (sometimes hefty) fee for you to apply; that's why you narrowed your list to just a handful. Do your best on your applications and read all the instructions before you start. Don't give them a reason to eliminate you.

8. Decide Your Winner

If you were fortunate enough to have multiple schools accept you, now is the time to decide on the one you will attend.

- Compare the similarities and differences among the schools that accepted you.
- Reevaluate which criteria mean the most to you, and listen to your intuition about which fits you the best.
- Make your selection, and once you've decided, don't second guess yourself!

If only one institution accepted you, your choice is obvious.

If none of your preferred institutions accepted you, you might consider alternative options, such as a different type of school, an apprenticeship or on-the-job training. A community college, for example, won't turn you down because they are all bound by "open-door" policies. This means everyone who applies, gets accepted!

Your Final Steps

Now that your selection is made and you will soon begin to attend an institution of higher learning, don't forget to think about the TWC resources we talked about in this booklet in case you decide to change up your plan in the future, need to consider college statistics for any reason, or later decide to work on a graduate or doctorate degree and need help narrowing down your program options.

Regardless of your plans after high school, we wish you the best of luck!

Remember to check out:

Texas Reality Check texasrealitycheck.com

Don't know how much money you will need to earn in the future? Don't know which occupation to choose? No problem! Go to Texas Reality Check and find tools that will help you select the right career for your spending needs.



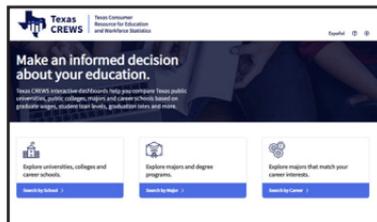
Texas Career Check texascareercheck.com

Texas Career Check is a program that allows you to explore different occupations, colleges and universities, career path information, and much more.



Texas Crews txcrews.org

Texas CREWS (Consumer Resource for Education and Workforce Statistics) helps you compare costs and outcomes for two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions in Texas.



Career Hotline 1-800-822-PLAN (7526)

Call the Texas Workforce Commission's career hotline toll-free for information on careers, colleges and educational opportunities.



Texas Workforce Commission
Education Outreach
101 East 15th Street, Room 380
Austin, TX 78778-0001 1-800-822-PLAN
www.lmci.texas.gov

Equal Opportunity Employer/Program.

Auxiliary aids are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

Relay Texas: 800-735-2989 (TTY) and 711 (Voice).

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