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Part II

Evaluating Your Educational Choices

Most careers require education and/or training beyond a general high school education. Some careers require four years of college. Others require only one year of training or education. In many cases, your career choice will determine which educational option is most appropriate for you.

You have seven educational choices from which to choose. The first option, *Career and Technology Education*, enables you to prepare for a career while you're still in high school. The other six educational options are primarily for high school graduates.



Educational Choice #1

Career and Technology Education

Most high schools offer a variety of career and technology programs. These are particularly appropriate for those students who prefer a more practical, “hands-on” approach to learning.

Students in career and technology programs spend much of their time “learning by doing.” Students studying data processing work on computers, those studying early childhood education work with children, and those studying auto body repair work on cars. Students in career and technology programs often have the opportunity to use the skills they’ve developed in a real work setting.

While students generally have the knowledge and skills to obtain a job as soon as they graduate, almost two-thirds continue their education beyond high school.

To prepare students for today's high-tech careers, many high schools have **Tech-Prep** programs. These two-year programs combine *technical* courses with college *preparatory* courses. Some Tech-Prep students look for employment after they graduate from high school and some go on to a four-year college. Most Tech-Prep students, however, continue their education at a community college.

Career and technology programs are primarily available to high school juniors and seniors. If you're interested in learning about the career and technology opportunities available at your high school, talk to your counselor.

Educational Choices #2 through #7 are available to high school graduates



Educational Choice #2 Community and Technical Colleges

Community and public technical colleges provide affordable, career-oriented programs that enable students to begin their careers after two years of college or less. Students completing short-term programs receive certificates or diplomas. Students who complete a two-year program earn an associate's degree.

Students can also start at a community or technical college and then transfer to a four-year college.

Students prepare for a specific career

Students in certificate and associate degree programs spend most of their time taking the courses they need to prepare for a specific career field. Students studying business, for example, take courses in math, communications, and accounting. Art students focus primarily on art courses, while engineering technology students spend the majority of their time in math, science, and engineering courses.

A variety of programs are available

Community and technical colleges provide a wide variety of programs. Below are just some of the career fields that you can prepare for by going to a community or technical college.

Accounting	Industrial engineering technology
Architectural technology	Interior design
Art	Journalism
Automotive technology	Law enforcement
Business administration	Legal assisting / paralegal
Business management	Marketing
Civil engineering technology	Mechanical engineering technology
Computer information systems	Medical administrative assisting
Court reporting	Medical lab technology
Dental assisting / dental hygiene	Mental health technology
Desktop publishing	Music
Dietetics and nutrition	Nursing
Drama / theatre	Occupational therapy assistant
Early childhood education	Office information systems
Electronics engineering technology	Physical therapy assistant
Emergency medical technology	Radiologic technology
Fashion design	Real estate management
Fashion merchandising	Respiratory therapy
Financial management	Surgical technology
Fire science technology	Tool and die technology
Hospitality management	Travel and tourism

To find out which programs your local colleges offer, visit their websites, talk to your counselor, or contact the colleges. For additional information, or to do an online search, go to www.collegeboard.org or to www.nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator.

Community colleges are affordable and classes are small

It generally costs much less to attend a community or technical college than it does a four-year college. While tuition and fees at a four-year public college average about \$7,600 a year, tuition and fees at a community or technical college average about \$2,700 a year.

Community and technical colleges keep their classes small and they hire instructors who have worked in a related career field. The law enforcement instructor, for example, might be a retired police officer. Because colleges and programs vary greatly, it's very important to visit any college that you're seriously considering. While you are there, check out their facilities, equipment, and accreditation.



All high school graduates are welcome

Community and technical colleges accept students who have not followed a college prep program in high school. These colleges also do not require the ACT or SAT. However, to ensure that all students enroll in courses that are appropriate for their ability level, many community and technical colleges require that all incoming students take a placement test.

While students need only a general high school education to enroll in most programs, some programs have additional academic requirements. For example, a nursing program may require that all students have a year of biology, chemistry, and algebra before they apply. Of course, students who haven't taken these required courses can take the ones they need, and then apply for the program.

Community and technical colleges also offer classes to help students who aren't ready for college level work. As a general rule, credits from these classes cannot be used to fulfill graduation requirements.

Community colleges meet the needs of local communities

Community and technical colleges usually have very diverse student bodies. While some of the students are recent high school graduates, many students are older. Some are first-time college students; others are there to update their skills or to prepare for a new career. To accommodate the students who work during the day, many classes are offered in the evenings and on Saturdays.

Community and technical colleges generally don't have dorms, and they seldom offer the social life and campus activities found at four-year colleges. These colleges, however, do provide athletic programs, clubs, and social activities, as well as a variety of support services such as counseling, career placement, and tutoring.

Students can transfer to a four-year college



Students who aren't ready to attend a four-year college can start at a two-year college, and then transfer after a year or two. Because they are less expensive, many students start at a community or technical college in order to save money.

As long as students choose their courses carefully, the credits they earn at a two-year college should transfer to a four-year college. It is, however, up to the four-year college to say which credits they will accept. While credits in traditional academic courses such as English and math generally transfer, four-year colleges usually do not accept credits in career-oriented courses such as welding or dental hygiene.

Community and technical colleges have counselors and advisors available to help students choose courses that will transfer. Students with specific questions about a course or program should contact the four-year college they plan to attend.



Educational Choice #3

Career and Trade Schools

Career and trade schools offer short-term training in a wide variety of career fields. While some programs last only a few weeks, others take up to two years to complete. Career and trade schools will usually accept any student with a high school diploma.

Career and trade schools provide hands-on training

Career and trade schools offer training for a number of careers. Students in these schools spend most of their class time in job-related settings where they receive hands-on training from experienced instructors. The student-teacher ratio is low, and students generally receive a substantial amount of individual instruction.

To find the career and trade schools in your area, go to <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator> or search for "career schools" in your local yellow pages at www.yellowpages.com.

On the following page are just some of the careers that you can prepare for by going to a career or trade school.

Accountant / bookkeeper	Interior designer
Air conditioning / refrig. technician	Legal assistant / paralegal
Artist, commercial	Legal secretary
Auto body technician	Licensed practical nurse
Barber / hairstylist	Massage therapist
Broadcaster	Medical assistant
Builder	Medical / dental receptionist
Carpenter	Medical lab technician
Child care worker	Medical secretary
Computer operator / programmer	Motorcycle mechanic
Computer service technician	Nurse's aide
Cosmetologist	Paperhanger
Court reporter	Pharmacy technician
Data entry operator	Photographer
Dental assistant	Plumber
Dental laboratory technician	Respiratory therapist
Drafter	Secretary
Electrician	Surveyor
Electronics technician	Tool and die maker
Fashion designer	Travel agent
Fashion merchandiser	Truck driver
Flower arranger	Upholsterer
Heavy equipment operator	Veterinarian assistant
Hotel-motel manager	Welder

Check schools out very carefully

While there are many excellent career and trade schools, not all of these schools are reputable. It is, therefore, very important for you and your parents to thoroughly investigate any school that you are considering. The following guidelines will help you evaluate a career or trade school.

- ▶ **Licensing and accreditation** - If a school is accredited, it means that it meets the minimum standards of the accrediting agency or organization. Check to see if, and by whom, a school is accredited. Be very wary of any school that is not accredited. You can get a list of accredited schools by state and/or program at www.rwm.org. You could, for example, get a list of all the accredited cosmetology schools in your state.

- ▶ **Facilities** - Take a tour. Is the equipment up-to-date and adequate for the number of students enrolled? Do students receive instruction on the same equipment they'll be using in the workplace? What are the buildings, classrooms, and other facilities like?
- ▶ **Placement** - Does the school help its students find jobs? What percentage of the school's graduates find a job in the field in which they received training? Who hires the school's graduates? What are their starting salaries?
- ▶ **Cost** - What is the total cost of tuition, supplies, and fees? What is their refund policy? Is financial aid available?
- ▶ **Quality of instruction** - What are the qualifications and credentials of the instructors? Are their courses and books up-to-date? Do students get actual hands-on training?
- ▶ **Reputation and stability** - Find out how long the school's been in operation and what percentage of the students finish the program. Talk to current students and recent graduates, call the Better Business Bureau, and check out what businesses think of the school.

These schools can be expensive

Career and trade schools are usually privately owned and in business to make a profit. While they can be expensive, costs vary depending on the type and length of the program. In some cases, students may be eligible for financial aid.

Credits usually do not transfer

Because career and trade schools vary tremendously in their requirements and in the programs they offer, their credits usually aren't accepted by two and four-year colleges. Students should, therefore, never go to a career or trade school with the idea of transferring.

Technicians and technologists take academic information and apply it in a practical setting. For example, engineering technologists work with both the engineer and the on-site worker.

You can become a technician or technologist in a variety of fields by attending a community college or a career/trade school.



Educational Choice #4

Four-Year Colleges

A four-year college education, or bachelor's degree, can open doors and prepare students for financially rewarding careers. While all colleges hope to attract bright, well-prepared students, colleges vary greatly in their size, costs, admission requirements, and in the majors they offer.

Four-year colleges offer a wide variety of majors

Four-year colleges want their students to receive a broad-based education, as well as an education in a specific subject area or major. To ensure that their students receive a well-rounded education, most four-year colleges require that all students take 25% - 50% of their classes in general education courses such as English, math, and history.

Students who go to college without having decided on a major can use their first year of college to take their required courses. This gives them time to consider all of the majors offered at their college.

Most four-year colleges have a wide range of majors from which students can choose. Below is a list of popular college majors:

Accounting	Computer science	Geology
Anthropology	Criminal justice	German
Architecture	Dance	History
Art education	Drama	Home economics
Art history	Economics	Information sciences
Biology	Electrical	International
Botany	engineering	relations
Business	Elementary	Journalism
administration	education	Management
Chemical	English	Management
engineering	Environmental	information
Chemistry	studies	systems
Civil engineering	Finance	Marketing
Communications	Fine arts	Mathematics
Computer	French	Mechanical
engineering	Geography	engineering