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# Generation for Equality: Applying to Post-Secondary School Toolkit

Native Women's  
Association of Canada



L'Association des femmes  
autochtones du Canada



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**Disclaimer:** *This toolkit is intended to provide general advice or recommendations for Indigenous youth intending to pursue post-secondary education in Canada. Everyone is responsible for using their best judgement when preparing, applying, and attending post-secondary education.*

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The Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) is a national Indigenous organization representing the political voices of Indigenous women in all their diversities in Canada. NWAC advocates for and works with First Nations – on- and off-reserve, status, and non-status, disenfranchised – Métis, and Inuit peoples across Canada. As an aggregate of Indigenous women’s organizations across Canada, NWAC works to enhance, promote and foster the social, economic, cultural, and political well-being of Indigenous women, in all their diversities, within their respective communities.

## Generation for Equality

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NWAC’s Generation for Equality (G4E) is a platform for Indigenous youth to gather information, ask questions, and connect with others working towards gender equality and gender diversity. The G4E platform represents an Indigenous youth-led movement which provides a critical space for Indigenous youth to engage on the issues impacting them the most. The Generation for Equality platform includes, and celebrates, the voices and experiences of Indigenous youth of all genders and gender expressions advocating for gender equality and gender-diversity.

## About This Toolkit

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Over the last decade, educational incomes have marginally improved among Indigenous peoples. Despite these improvements, educational attainment for Indigenous youth continues to fall behind that of non-Indigenous people.<sup>1</sup> In Canada, Indigenous youth face significant barriers to accessing and attaining higher levels of education, which are multifaceted and interconnected. Some of these barriers include:

- Inadequate financial resources
- Lack of culturally relevant curricular
- A lack of confidence or feeling unprepared
- Having other responsibilities
- Experiences of racism and discrimination
- Effects of intergenerational trauma.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Melvin, A. (Oct. 27, 2023). “Postsecondary educational attainment and labour market outcomes among Indigenous peoples in Canada, findings from the 2021 Census.” *Statistics Canada*: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2023001/article/00012-eng.htm>

2 Ibid., 2023.

The implications of lower educational attainment are well understood and are often connected with labour market access and success. For example, higher educational attainment is often with greater employment and earning opportunities.<sup>3</sup> In response to continued barriers facing Indigenous youth, several calls have been made to address the education gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth.

With funding from Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE), the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) was able to hold engagement sessions with Indigenous youth to explore barriers to postsecondary education and employment. In these sessions, participants highlighted financial challenges, their ability to balance work and school, the overwhelming need for Indigenous safe spaces on campus, and difficulty accessing relevant information about postsecondary school. Moreover, Indigenous youth emphasized the need for cultural resources to be made readily available at post-secondary institutions, underscoring the disconnect felt by many Indigenous youth attending post-secondary education.

## How to Navigate this Toolkit

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This toolkit is divided into three main components. Depending on where you are in your post-secondary journey, you can jump directly to the section most relevant to you. This resource was developed by NWAC based on insights from engagements sessions and aims to empower Indigenous youth in pursuing their educational and career aspirations. The three components are:

- 1. Planning for Post-Secondary School:** Asking important questions about your academic interests, understanding financial planning, exploring the application process, and making your decision.
- 2. Navigating Post-Secondary School:** Understanding campus life, accessing financial resources and opportunities, leveraging student services, and exploring other options.
- 3. Graduating from Post-Secondary School:** Completing your program and attending convocation.

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3 Ibid., 2023.

# Phase 1:

## Planning for Post-Secondary School

Deciding on what to do following high school can be extremely difficult and can cause considerable stress. Choosing the right path, let alone school, is not easy and requires an extraordinary amount of thought and life planning. In this section, we discuss the many factors and questions that you should consider when making your choice.

### Knowing Yourself and Understanding Your Interests

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It is important to think about your personal and career aspirations when deciding if to pursue post-secondary education. More broadly, it is important to take time and reflect on your interests, passion, skills, and knowledge and how they can be used to shape your future. Some good questions to ask yourself are include:


1. Who am I?
2. What am I passionate about?
3. What abilities, skills, and knowledge do I already possess?
4. What courses have I done well in? What courses have I enjoyed?
5. What is my dream job?
6. What is my plan for achieving my goals?
7. Does my goal require further education?

Although these questions may appear daunting, they are all important to consider when taking your next step. However, you **should not** feel pressured to answer these questions alone. Speaking to families and friends may help you navigate these questions and develop an understanding of the goals you have for your future.

### Picking a Program

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After completing some self-reflection and thinking, it is time to research the several types of programs that align with your skills, knowledge, interests, and career aspirations. Depending on your interests, you may have to research different post-secondary institutions that align with your interests (see *Types of Institutions*). Some things to consider when choosing a program include:

- Are you interested in entering a program that leads down a specific career path after graduation (Indigenous studies, Engineering, Social Work, Nursing, etc.)?
- 

- How well do your skills match the program? Do you have the pre-requisite courses to apply to these programs? \*
- Does this program offer electives to explore other subjects?
- Would you benefit from entering a general program, such as a Bachelor of Arts without a designation, and picking a designation after first year?<sup>4</sup>

## Prerequisite Courses

When applying to post-secondary school students may be expected to have successfully completed certain high school credits/courses, such as math and/or science, to be accepted into a program. Also known as a prerequisite course, the post-secondary school recognizes these courses as essential for the successful understanding and completion of the program.<sup>5</sup>

For example, the 2025-26 admission requirements for the University of Alberta's Physical Activity and Health program (Bachelor of Kinesiology) expects all students to have completed Academic/University grade 12 English and have completed one of the following prerequisite courses:

- Advanced Functions
- Biology
- Calculus and Vectors
- Chemistry
- Computer Studies
- Physics<sup>6</sup>

Make sure to identify any program prerequisites when picking a program to apply to.

4 Lakehead University Undergraduate Recruitment Office. (n.d.). "How to choose your program." *University Study*: <https://universitystudy.ca/how-to-choose-your-program/>

\*Some courses require specific high school credits, like math and sciences, for students to be considered for admissions.

5 Ministry of Education. (2024). "Course Descriptions and Prerequisites." *Government of Ontario*: <https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/course-descriptions-and-prerequisites/introduction>

6 University of Alberta. (2024). "Bachelor of Kinesiology – Physical Activity and Health." *University of Alberta*: <https://www.ualberta.ca/en/undergraduate-programs/bachelor-of-kinesiology-physical-activity-and-health.html>





## **Academic Bridging Programs**

Academic bridging programs help mature students (21 and older) fill the gap between prior education and the skills necessary for entering university. Often, Universities and Colleges will offer courses to students to help them refresh their academic skills in subjects like Math, English, and Science in preparation of future studies. Academic bridging is a full-time pathway that is often used by mature students committed to pursuing a Diploma or Degree.

Students looking to pursue their post-secondary education but may be lacking some of the pre-requisites high school programs for their preferred program should consider academic bridging opportunities. Bridging programs may also be a great option for students who took time off between high school and post-secondary school or may be missing program some requirements. We suggest looking at different schools and programs to learn about the different bridging options available to you. This could be an amazing opportunity to expand your skills and knowledge, while preparing your for your dream career.

In asking yourself these questions, and evaluating the different programs available, perspective students can begin to narrow what and where they are going to study. If you are having trouble pinpointing a program, consider talking to family, friends, high-school guidance counsellors, or other professionals.



## Key Terminology: Picking a Program

### Major

A major is the subject that is the focus of a student's study. Majors include subjects like: Biology, Business, Economics, Engineering, Mathematics, and more.<sup>7</sup> Students are required to complete a certain number of credits to earn a degree in their major.

### Minor

A minor is a group of courses in a particular subject that complements your main program of study. Minors requires less course credits and can be added to your degree program during or after the completion of your program.<sup>8</sup>

### Option

Options provide more depth to a degree and are achieved through the completion of a specified combination of courses.<sup>9</sup> For example, an engineering student may complete options in artificial intelligence, biomechanism, computing, and entrepreneurship.

### Specialization

Typically available within a major, student is required to complete a few courses on a particular sub-topic. For example, a student majoring in English may pursue a specialization in Digital Media Studies.<sup>10</sup>

7 University of Waterloo. (2024). "What is a major? What is a minor?" *University of Waterloo*: <https://uwaterloo.ca/future-students/programs/what-is-major-minor>

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.



## Activity 1: Choosing a Field of Study

In this activity, identify your top three fields of study/programs that interest you as a student. Fill out the table and compare the pros and cons of each program and develop a ranking of each field/program.

If you would like to look at more programs, consider creating additional outlines on a scrap sheet of paper.

**Program Name (1):**

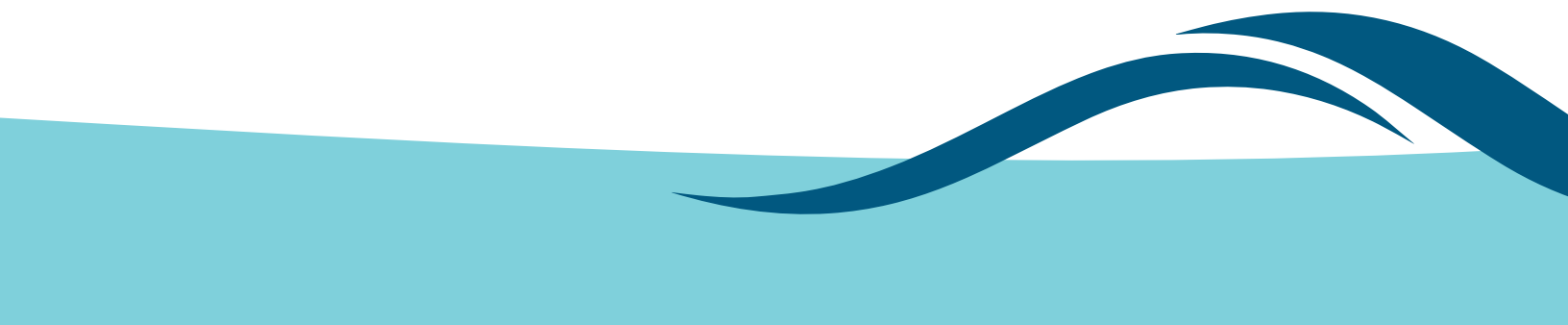
**Program Rank:**

Program Description:

Skills and Abilities:

Prerequisite Requirements:

Pros	Cons



**Program Name (2):**

**Program Rank:**

Program Description:

Skills and Abilities:

Prerequisite Requirements:

Pros

Cons

**Program Name (3):**

**Program Rank:**

Program Description:

Skills and Abilities:

Prerequisite Requirements:

Pros

Cons



## Types of Institutions

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In Canada, there are three types of post-secondary institutions: universities, colleges, polytechnic, and institutes. These institutions are often required to meet certain standards established by each province and territory to grant degrees, diplomas, certificates, or other certifications.<sup>11</sup> At most of these institutions, the school year is divided into three terms:

- Fall Term: September to December
- Winter Term: January to April
- Summer Term: May to August

The summer term is usually **optional** and is often used by students to retake courses or get ahead in their studies.

### University

Universities offer a range of programs to study at varying levels of difficulties, where students learn the theoretical aspects of a topic. Some programs found at universities include:

- Anthropology
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Computer Science
- Economics
- Engineering
- History
- Mathematics
- Legal Studies

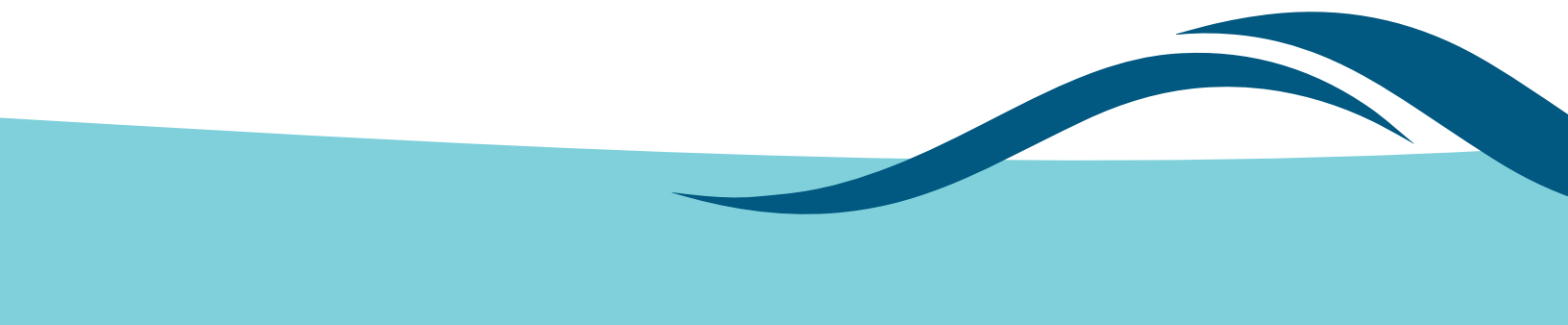
Recognized universities in Canada offer three types of degrees:

1. **Bachelor's degree** – The simplest degree takes between 3-4 years to complete.
2. **Master's degree** – An advanced degree taken after the successful completion of a bachelor's program. This advanced degree takes an additional 1-3 years of study to complete.
3. **Doctoral degree** – The most advanced degree offered by universities. This degree can take an addition 3-4 years of study and research following a master's degree.<sup>12</sup>

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11 Immigration and Citizenship Canada. (2022). "Education in Canada: Post-secondary." *Government of Canada*: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/new-immigrants/new-life-canada/education/types-school/post-secondary.html>

12 Immigration and Citizenship Canada. (2022). "Education in Canada: Post-secondary." *Government of Canada*: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/new-immigrants/new-life-canada/education/types-school/post-secondary.html>



Examples of Universities in Canada include:

- Dalhousie University
- McGill University
- Simon Fraser University
- Western University
- University of Alberta
- University of British Columbia
- Universite de Montreal
- University of Saskatchewan
- University of Toronto

### **College/Institute**

Colleges/Institutes offer several programs that typically take between 1 and 3 years to complete. College students typically garner greater hands-on experience for specific jobs. Those who successfully complete a college/institute program are issued a diploma or certificate that qualify graduates for specific jobs.<sup>13</sup> Programs offered at colleges in Canada include:

- Agriculture, Animal & Related Practices
- Business, Finance & Administration
- Computers & Telecommunications
- Education, Community & Social Services
- Health, Food and Medical
- Fire, Justice & Security
- Media
- Professions and Trades

**Certificate programs** offer short-term learning experiences that prepare students to work in a specific field or occupation.<sup>14</sup>

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13 Ibid.

14 Alberta Government. (n.d.). "Certificates, Diplomas and Degrees." *Government of Alberta*: <https://study.alberta.ca/plan-your-studies/credentials-programs/certificates-diplomas-and-degrees/>



**Diploma Programs** are more in-depth than certificate programs, often offering more technical skills and training to students.<sup>15</sup>

**Bachelor's and Master's Degrees** offerings are emerging at many colleges/institutes and are only available for certain programs. Colleges and Institutes Canada provides the ability to search degree and post-graduate degree programs offered at Colleges [online](#).

Examples of Colleges/Institutes in Canada include:

- Algonquin College
- Makami College
- Assiniboine Community College
- New Brunswick Community College
- Aurora College
- Nunavut Arctic College
- Humber College
- Cégep André-Laurendeau

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15 Indeed, Editorial Team. (May 17, 2024). "Diploma vs. Degree (Definitions, Differences, and Benefits)." *Indeed*: <https://ca.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/diploma-vs-degree>

## Apprenticeships

Entering the trades is another pathway to a rewarding career, this can be done through an apprenticeship. Unlike the university and college route, an apprenticeship offers participants both onsite job training and classroom opportunities to gain experience.<sup>16</sup> During an apprenticeship, each individual works with and learns from experienced professionals in a trade. Some trades include:

- Automotive Service Technician
- Blacksmith
- Chef
- Electrician
- Hairstylist
- Heavy Duty Equipment Technician
- Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Systems Mechanic
- Plumber
- Welder

Trades across Canada often have different requirements for completion, depending on if they are a compulsory or non-compulsory trade. Certain trades may require the completion of an exam to earn a Certificate of Qualification. Moreover, some trades may require a Red Seal endorsement at the completion of an apprenticeship.<sup>17</sup>

Apprenticeship training provides access to jobs that require an important level of skill and enables participants to get paid while learning. Most apprenticeships take between 2 and 5 years to complete.<sup>18</sup>

**Red Seal:** An endorsement on your provincial or territorial trade certificate that demonstrates you have the knowledge and skills necessary to practice your trade across Canada.<sup>19</sup>

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16 Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. (2024). "Start an apprenticeship." *Government of Ontario*: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/start-apprenticeship>

17 Skilled Trades Ontario. (2024). "About Trades." *Skilled Trades Ontario*: <https://www.skilledtradesontario.ca/about-trades/>

18 Skilled Trades Ontario. (2024). "Apprenticeships." *Skilled Trades Ontario*: <https://www.skilledtradesontario.ca/apprenticeship/>

19 Red Seal Canada. (2024). "Welcome to Red Seal." *Red Seal Canada*: <https://www.red-seal.ca/eng/w.2lc.4m.2.shtml>





**Ultimately, choosing between university, college/institute, or apprenticeships depends on your specific academic and career aspirations. It is also worth considering your learning style and what you are looking to gain from the experience.**

1. Am I interested in a specialized field of study or a particular skill?
2. Do I have a career path in mind? Does this career path require a degree, diploma, or certification?
3. How do I learn? Do I prefer practical hands-on training or listening to a lecture?
4. Would a work placement or co-op be beneficial to my career advancement?
5. Can I meet the requirements and demands of a competitive program?
6. How much longer do I want to study for?
7. What type of community do I want to be surrounded by?
8. Is gaining work experiences and making industry contacts important to me?



## Co-operative education (co-op)

In Canada, about 80 universities and colleges offer students the opportunity to participate in co-op job placements, replacing an academic study term with a work term(s). As a result, students can leverage what they have learned in class and apply it to the real-world.<sup>20</sup> For many students, co-ops offer an important opportunity to test-drive their careers and apply their skills in a practical setting. Students participating in co-ops can also earn school credits and are often paid by their employer during their work term. However, it is important to note that students who do participate in co-op placements may take additional time to complete their degree, diploma, and/or certificate program. Students may benefit from co-ops in several ways, some examples include:

- Building a stronger resume.
- Networking with other professionals.
- Expanding their professional portfolio; and,
- Developing critical job search skills.<sup>21</sup>

When conducting research into your next steps, it is important to consider if a work placement would benefit your educational and career journey. If it would, it is important to identify the schools that provide co-op programs and understand the different requirements for entry. Many universities and colleges require students to maintain a certain grade point average (GPA) to access co-op programs.

When comparing co-op programs, consider asking the following questions:

- How many employers are there to apply to at this school?
- Does the school provide any special support services for co-op students?
- How many work terms can I take? Can each co-op term be taken with a different employer?
- Do I have to apply to a co-op program straight out of high school? Or do I apply to be a co-op student after my first year of school?
- What is expected of me to participate in a co-op?
- Are there advisors to help me understand the co-op program at my chosen school?

20 Justine. (n.d.). "What's the difference between co-ops and internships?" *University of Waterloo*: <https://uwaterloo.ca/future-students/missing-manual/careers/whats-difference-between-co-ops-and-internships>.

21 Jacqueline. (n.d.). "What to expect in co-op." *University of Waterloo*: <https://uwaterloo.ca/future-students/missing-manual/careers/what-expect-co-op>.



## Researching Schools

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After evaluating the differences between post-secondary schools and the multitude of programs they offer, it is time to conduct research into the schools that offer your preferred program. This could include looking at the school's academic and student satisfaction rankings, available student services, attending campus tours and virtual events, the school's location, and speaking to current students. Conducting this research will be vital in creating a short list of programs and schools to apply to.

### I. Ranking Systems

One way to look at a school is purely on how it ranks in comparison to others; this can provide a great understanding of the school's academic quality and strength, and insight into how students feel about their institution. For example, [Maclean's](#) publishes annual reputation surveys into the quality and innovation of Canadian universities. In 2025, the top 10 universities in Canada, according to Maclean's, are:

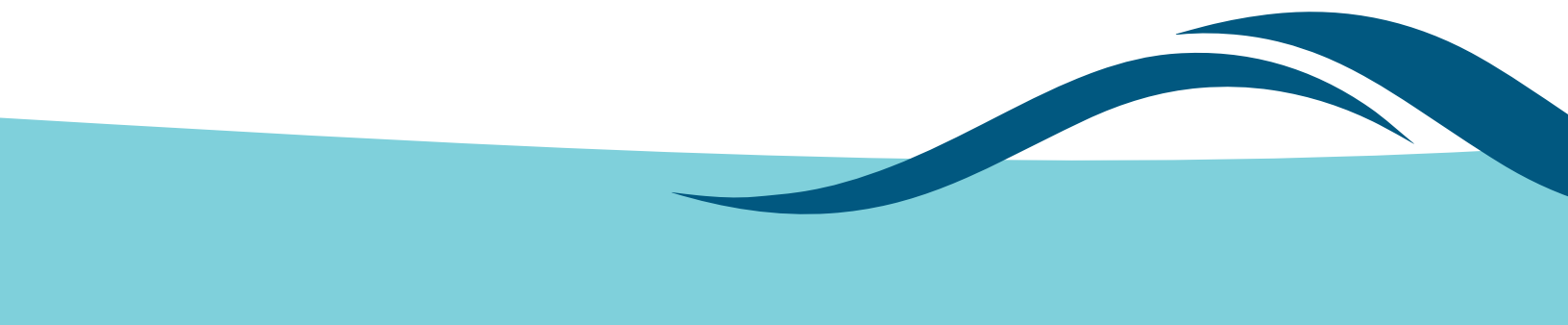
1. University of Toronto
2. University of British Columbia
3. McGill University
4. University of Waterloo
5. McMaster University
6. Université de Montréal
7. Queen's University
8. University of Alberta
9. Western University
10. Simon Fraser University<sup>22</sup>

In addition to each post-secondary school rankings, it is also important to see how schools rank on other factors (i.e., research funding, class size, student success, graduation rates, and student satisfaction). These indicators can aid you in identifying schools with the right fit for you as a student. For example, a school with a smaller faculty to student ratio could be a great fit if you prefer more one-on-one time with instructors. Or, if you prefer schools with lots of student activities it may be worthwhile looking into how satisfied their students are. All these factors can be helpful for students in understanding an institutions reputation and prestige.

Although most university programs in Canada are competitive, it is worth considering where the school ranks among others for your preferred program. Is the program you are interested in highly competitive? Is the school ranked highly in the specific program you are interested in? It is worth considering how a school and/or specific program is rated as it can provide insight on if the institution aligns with your academic interests. For example, if you are interested in studying kinesiology, you may wish to focus on schools with well-respected and ranked kinesiology programs.

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22 Maclean's. (Oct. 10, 2024). "Canada's Best Universities in 2025 by National Reputational Ranking." *Maclean's*: <https://macleans.ca/education/canadas-best-universities-in-2025-by-national-reputational-ranking/>



However, it is important to remember that these scores offer broad representations of the school. It is also important to see how you fit in at a particular school and determine what school would be realistic for you based on factors including competitiveness of the application process, location of the school in relation to your home and family, and available financial aid. Other factors may be more important to you than the schools ranking. In this case, you may consider going to an institution that is more aligned with your interests and needs.

## II. Campus Location

For many, university and college may represent the first time living away from home, as many of Canada's academic institutions are in large urban centres (i.e., Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary, etc.). So, it is important to consider how comfortable you are living away from home. Sometimes students may feel more comfortable living at home, while others may choose to live at school away from their home, friends, and family. Each will give a unique post-secondary experience. Consider asking yourself several questions about the campus location:

- Do I want to live at home while at school?
- How far away from home do I want to live?
- Is it easy for me to get home?
- Do I prefer a school in a large urban centre?
- Is the school well connected to public transit systems?
- Is the school near an airport?
- Will I be able to afford living away from home?
- Can I access traditional foods and cultural programming at/nearby the school?

## III. Student Supports and Services

When looking at schools, it is important to gain an understanding of the different services and supports that are available to prospective students. Typically, universities and colleges will have an array of services and supports for students. Common services include:

- Academic Advising
- Accessible Learning Services
- Career Services
- Childcare Services
- Financial Aid
- Fitness Centres
- Health services
- Indigenous Support Services
- Information and Technology Services
- Mental Health Services



Information about student services can be found online, such as their purpose and contact information. It is advised that prospective students reach out to the services that they think will be helpful to learn more about. Understanding how to access and use these resources could influence your decision to attend a school. Some questions to think about when looking into student supports and services include:

- What services are available to students? Are they easily accessible?
- Have previous students spoke highly of these services?
- How do I reach a service provider?
- Were service providers willing to assist with your issue?
- What advice would you give to students who have not used these services before?

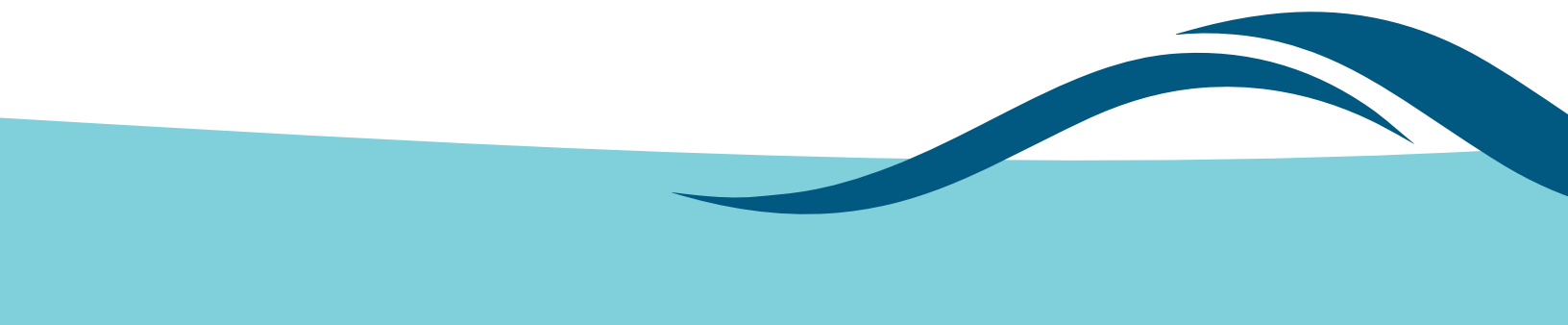
#### **IV. Student Life & Clubs**

It is important to remember that the university and college experience goes beyond the classroom. For many, participating in clubs, associations, and extracurricular activities as an important part of their post-secondary experience. These spaces provide students with opportunities to meet new people, explore their interests, pad their co-curricular record, and have fun. Depending on the school, organization and clubs may be listed online. However, reaching out to a school student union could be a fantastic way to learn more about the clubs, associations, and extracurricular activities available to students. Consider asking:

- What associations, clubs, and extracurricular activities are available on campus?
- Can students set up their own clubs? Is this difficult?

In addition to extracurricular activities, it is also important to know the environment around the school. After first year, many students choose to live off campus in rental housing, and knowing the local restaurants, grocery stores, and nightlife could improve your experience. When conducting research, it is worthwhile to reach out to students to understand life off campus. Consider asking them:

- Where do students go when they are off campus?  
Are there any places popular with students?
- What kind of nightlife is there around campus?
- Are there a lot of rental housing around the school?
- Is there a grocery store near campus?



## V. Campus Tours/Visiting Campus

A brochure or website can only teach you so much about a post-secondary school. This makes it incredibly important to visit a college or university before applying. This will allow you to walk around campus and get a real feel for the school, its community, and academic setting.

In Canada, most schools offer prospective students an opportunity to take campus tours, where a student body representative will help you learn about the school. Tour guides will often show guests unique styles of residence, academic spaces (lecture halls, classrooms, study spaces), dining areas, athletic facilities, and other on campus services. Moreover, tours are an excellent opportunity to ask questions about the school and/or student experience. Consider asking some of the following questions to your tour guide:

- What types of meal plans are available to students?
- What kind of extracurricular activities are available on campus?
- What is residence living like? What type of residences are available at this school (dorm style, apartment style, etc.)?
- Are there any resources or spaces available on campus for Indigenous students?
- What academic support services are available on campus? Does the school have a writing centre? Accessible learning office?
- What do you love about this school?
- What is it like to live here? Is there lots of housing for upper year students?
- What do students do on their free time?
- Is there a good public transit system surrounding the school?

### *Virtual Tours*

We understand that in-person tours may not be feasible for all interested students, making virtual tours a great alternative. This low-cost alternative is a terrific way to see a college/university campus from your home, while forgoing travel expenses and crowds. Many schools offer virtual tours through their welcome centre, where students can explore and learn about the different amenities on campus. For example, [the University of Ottawa](#) offers a virtual experience that allows students to take a general tour of the school, with additional tours for the different faculty at the school. Although virtual tours contain an incredible amount of information, we suggest reaching out to the school's welcome centre should you have any remaining questions.



## Activity 2: Ranking Post-Secondary Institutions

In this activity, identify your top post-secondary institutions that interest you as a student. Fill out the table and compare the pros and cons of each institution and develop a ranking of each.

If you would like to look at more programs, consider creating additional outlines on a scrap sheet of paper.

**Institution (1):**

**Rank:**

Location

Campus Experience:

Student Life & Clubs:

Student Supports and Services

Pros	Cons

**Institution (2):**

**Rank:**

Location

Campus Experience:

Student Life & Clubs:

Student Supports and Services

Pros	Cons

**Institution (3):**

**Rank:**

Location

Campus Experience:

Student Life & Clubs:

Student Supports and Services

Pros	Cons





## Financial Planning

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Part of preparing to apply for post-secondary school is understanding the costs associated with attending school. Each year, students must examine the costs of tuition, school supplies, living expenses, food, and other costs that may arise during the academic year. When planning how you are going to finance your post-secondary education it is important to consider the different financial aid, scholarships, grants, and bursaries available to students.

### Understanding Tuition and Fees

One of the largest costs associated with attending post-secondary school are tuition and fees. Tuition represents what the school charges to attend and take courses, the amount of tuition often varies between programs and level of study. In 2024/2025, the average undergraduate tuition cost in Canada was \$7,360<sup>23</sup>, however domestic student tuition can range up to \$12,000 depending on the institution and the program.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to charging tuition, post-secondary institutions also charge what are called "incidental fees," which cover an array of different operating costs. Incidental fees may include:

- Student Service Fees
- Dental Insurance
- Health Insurance
- Student Union Fees
- Student Centre Building Fees
- Transit Fees
- Athletics and Recreation Fees

In some instances, students may be able to opt out of some incidental fees, such as dental and health coverage, should they already have their own. When registering for school, it is important to understand incidental fees and opt out of certain fees where necessary.

### Living Expenses

The second largest expense students face when attending school are living expenses. Living expenses are made up of residence/housing, transportation, food, and recreational costs. These costs may be as high as \$20,000 a year for some students. However, this is dependent on where students are going to school and their personal spending habits.

In looking at different schools across Canada, the price of residence varies based on the school, with some institutions including meal plan costs in total residence costs.

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23 Statistics Canada. (2024). "Canadian and international tuition fees by level of study (current dollars)." *Statistics Canada*: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710004501>

24 Universities Canada. (2024). "Tuition fees by university." *Universities Canada*: <https://univcan.ca/about-universities-canada/facts-and-stats/tuition-fees-by-university/>

We recommend that students' budget approximately \$15,000 to cover the costs of residence and a meal plan for their first year. However, students should conduct further research into their preferred academic institutions to gain better insights into the costs of residence and meal plans. The table below demonstrates the variations in the costs of residence across Canada.

Institution	Average Cost of Residence	Average Cost of Meal Plan	Average Total
University of Toronto (Scarborough) <sup>25</sup>	\$11,425	\$6,115	\$17,540
Dalhousie University <sup>26</sup>	\$9,150	\$4,370	\$13,520
University of Prince Edward Island <sup>27</sup>	\$12,350*	-	\$12,350
McGill University <sup>28</sup>	\$10,750	\$5,800**	\$16,550
University of British Columbia <sup>29</sup>	\$16,300	\$7,250 <sup>30</sup>	\$23,550
University of Calgary <sup>31</sup>	\$7,930	\$5,100	\$13,030
University of Regina <sup>32</sup>	\$7,200	\$2,400 <sup>33</sup>	\$9,600
University of Manitoba <sup>34</sup>	\$6,690	\$5,450	\$12,140

25 University of Toronto Scarborough. (2024). "Student Housing and Residence Life - Fees." *University of Toronto*: <https://www.utoronto.ca/residences/fees>

26 Dalhousie University. (2024). "Residence - Costs & Fees." *Dalhousie University*: [https://www.dal.ca/campus\\_life/residence\\_housing/residence/halifax-campus/costs---fees.html](https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/residence_housing/residence/halifax-campus/costs---fees.html)

27 University of Prince Edward Island. (2025). "Residence Fees." *University of Prince Edward Island*: <https://www.upei.ca/residence/residence-fees>

28 McGill University. (2025). "Student Housing - Undergraduate Fees 2024-2025." *McGill University*: <https://www.mcgill.ca/students/housing/fees-applying/undergrad-downtown-fees>

29 The University of British Columbia. (2025). "Student Residence - Vancouver: Fees and Payments." *UBC*: <https://vancouver.housing.ubc.ca/applications/fees-payments/#:~:text=The%20typical%20cost%20for%20a,room%20type%20and%20residence%20area>

30 The University of British Columbia. (2025). "Food at UBC Vancouver - Residence Dining Plan." *UBC*: <https://food.ubc.ca/meal-plans/residence-meal-plan-all-access-dining/#:~:text=Our%20All%20Access%20Dining%20Plan,the%20Dining%20Plan%20is%20%247250.08>

31 University of Calgary - Residence Services. (2025). "Rates 2024-25." *University of Calgary*: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/ancillary/residence/live-us/places-live/rates-2024-2025>

32 University of Regina. (2025). "Payment and Fees - Master Your Payments and Fees." *University of Regina*: [https://www.uregina.ca/housing-services/payment-fees.html#fact\\_5\\_3](https://www.uregina.ca/housing-services/payment-fees.html#fact_5_3)

33 University of Regina. (2025). "Residence Meal Plans - Explore More About Ultimate Experience Group Meal Plans." *University of Regina*: <https://www.uregina.ca/foodservices/residence-mealplans.html>

34 University of Manitoba - Student Residences. (2025). "Residence Fee Calculator." *University of Manitoba*: <http://web.housing.umanitoba.ca/fees/>



Institution	Average Cost of Residence	Average Cost of Meal Plan	Average Total
University of New Brunswick <sup>35</sup>	\$10,000	\$6,000	\$16,000
Memorial University	\$10,650*	-	\$10,650
*Cost includes meal plan costs **Costs may vary depending on the style of residence			

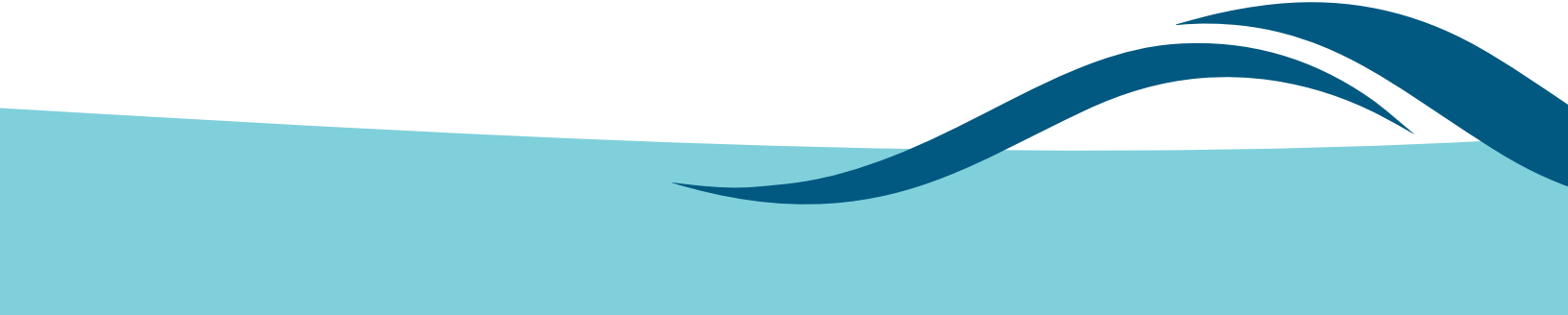
Students may also opt to live in off-campus housing instead of residence, which can be a more affordable choice for many students. Unlike residence, which is often all inclusive, students will have to budget for additional expenses (i.e., internet, hydro, etc.). Also, students will have to budget for a 12-month lease and may have to account for future rent increases. According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) the average 2-bedroom condominium apartment cost approximately \$2,200 per month in rent in the Fall of 2024.<sup>36</sup> However, the cost of rent can vary between different metropolitan areas, as demonstrated in the table below.

Fall 2024 Rental Market Report – Condominium Apartment Market <sup>37</sup>	
City	Average 2-Bedroom Rent
Vancouver	\$2,827
Calgary	\$1,970
Edmonton	\$1,466
Winnipeg	\$1,445
Greater Toronto Area	\$2,918
Ottawa	\$2,170
Montreal	\$1,724
Quebec City	\$1,355
Halifax	\$2,334

35 University of New Brunswick. (2025). "Rates and Fees – 2024-2025 Academic Year." UNB: <https://www.unb.ca/fredericton/residence/fees/>

36 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. (2024). "Fall 2024 Rental Market Report." CMHC: <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/professionals/housing-markets-data-and-research/market-reports/rental-market-reports-major-centres>

37 Ibid.



To help reduce off-campus housing expenses, many students choose to live together to reduce their monthly expenses. Students living off-campus with their peers should budget between \$12,000 and \$15,000 a year for housing expenses. However, those who choose to live alone may need to budget upwards of \$20,000 to cover their yearly housing expenses. Moreover, students living off-campus should expect to budget approximately \$350 per month on groceries, adding an additional \$2,800 per year.<sup>38</sup>

Students who choose to live at home or off-campus should also take the costs of transportation to school into account. In many university/college towns, students will have access to public transportation. In some instances, post-secondary institutions may provide their students with bus passes paid for through student fees; however, other students may have to pay for their own transit pass which can cost between \$80 and \$150 per month. For students who choose to drive to school their budget should account for car payments, insurance, gas, maintenance, and parking costs.

Additionally, students should budget for travel to and from school. In doing so, students should compare air, bus, and rail transit options to find the most cost-effective form of transportation for them. When looking at transit options, it is important to think about how often you will return home. For example, some students may only travel to and from school twice a year, while others may return home more frequently. Depending on how far you travel between school and home, your travel budget can vary greatly. For example, students who live in Northern and remote communities may have to spend thousands of dollars in travel, whereas students moving between two close cities may spend under one hundred dollars.

## Financial Aid

In Canada, students are eligible for a mix of financial loans and grants to assist in paying for tuition, fees, books, and living expenses while at school. Students can access financial aid through their provincial and territorial government. Financial aid comes in two forms:

1. **Grants** – Money received for a specific purpose, such as financing your education, which **does not** have to be repaid.
2. **Loans** – Money borrowed to help pay for your education, loans **must be** repaid with interest.<sup>39</sup>

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38 Royal Bank of Canada. (2024). "Where Did My Money Go?: The Rising Cost of Groceries in Canada." RBC: <https://www.rbcroyalbank.com/en-ca/my-money-matters/debt-and-stress-relief/struggling-to-make-ends-meet/where-did-my-loonies-go-the-rising-cost-of-groceries-in-canada/>

39 TD Bank. (n.d.). "Canada Government Student Loans & Grants." TD Bank: <https://www.td.com/ca/en/personal-banking/solutions/student-advice/government-student-loans-grants>



## How much financial aid can I receive?

There are several factors that provincial and/or territorial governments use when determining how much students may receive through loans or grants. Some of the many factors include:

- Your province/territory of residence
- Your family income
- If you have dependents
- Your tuition fees and living expenses<sup>40</sup>

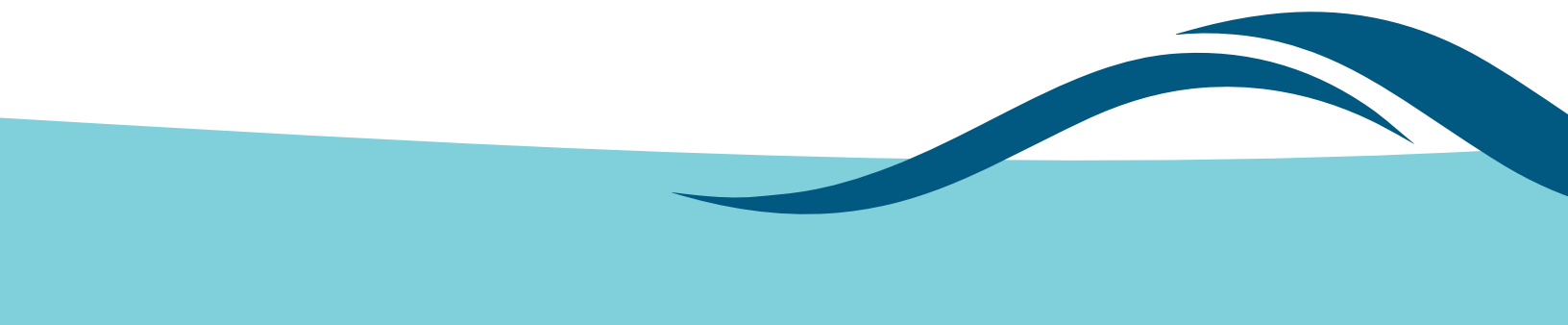
Further, financial aid is also influenced by a student's course load, with full-time students receiving greater funding than part-time students. By using the [Student Aid Estimator](#), students can gain a better understanding of how much they are eligible for through federal grants and loans. The list below can be used to access provincial/territorial student financial aid:

- [Alberta Student Aid](#)
- [British Columbia Student Aid](#)
- [Manitoba student Aid](#)
- [New Brunswick Student Financial Services](#)
- [Newfoundland and Labrador Student Aid](#)
- [Northwest Territories Student Financial Assistance](#)
- [Nova Scotia Student Assistance](#)
- [Nunavut Student Funding](#)
- [Ontario Student Assistance Program \(OSAP\)](#)
- [Prince Edward Island Student Financial Services](#)
- [Quebec Student Financial Aid](#)
- [Saskatchewan Student Loans](#)
- [Yukon Student Financial Assistance](#)<sup>41</sup>

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40 Employment and Social Development Canada. (2024). "Canada Student Grants and Loans - What student grants and loans offer." *Government of Canada*: <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/education/student-aid/grants-loans.html>

41 Employment and Social Development Canada. (2024). "Canada Student Grants and Loans - Apply with your province or territory." *Government of Canada*: <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/education/student-aid/grants-loans/province-apply.html>



## Scholarship and Bursaries

To support school finances, many students also apply for scholarships and bursaries. It is important to search for the scholarships and bursaries offered at your post-secondary institution and ensure you note the deadlines for these applications. There is no harm in applying for scholarships, so students should try and apply to as many as possible. Scholarships are often rewarded based on academic achievement, income, and community involvement, and **do not** have to be repaid.<sup>42</sup> Like scholarships, bursaries are given to students based on demonstrated financial need and academic achievement.<sup>43</sup>

Many post-secondary students apply for scholarships and bursaries to support them on their educational journey. Typically, scholarships and bursaries provide students with additional funds that do not require repayment. More specifically:

1. **Scholarships** are financial aid provided to a student to help fund their academic studies and are granted based on criteria outlined by the person or institution granting the award (i.e., academic merit, financial need, extracurricular activities, etc.). In some instances, students may be automatically considered for scholarships when enrolling in post-secondary school.<sup>44</sup>
2. **Bursaries** are a type of aid awarded based on financial need and/or other factors. However, less emphasis is placed on academic achievement.<sup>45</sup>

Most scholarships and bursaries are application based, meaning that students will have to prepare and apply to be considered.

It is important to start your search for scholarships and bursaries early, ensuring you understand the requirements and have enough time to meet deadlines for each application. Moreover, students should also search for different scholarships and bursaries online as companies, charities, governments, and private individuals may host their own competitions. A great resource for students looking into applying for scholarships or bursaries is [ScholarshipsCanada.com](https://www.scholarshipscanada.com), which helps students access relevant competitions to support their studies.<sup>46</sup> Another great scholarship resource for Indigenous students is the [Indigenous Bursaries Search Tool](https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1351185180120/1351685455328) provided by Indigenous Services Canada. This resource provides a searchable database of over 500 bursaries, scholarships, and incentives intended for Indigenous students across Canada.<sup>47</sup>

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42 TD Bank. (n.d.). "Get Canadian scholarships and chase your dream." *TD Bank*: <https://www.td.com/ca/en/personal-banking/solutions/student-advice/student-scholarships-grants-and-bursaries>

43 Wilfrid Laurier University. (2024). "Bursaries." *Wilfrid Laurier University*: <https://students.wlu.ca/registration-and-finances/scholarships-and-bursaries/bursaries/index.html>

44 Ontario Universities' Info. (n.d.). "Scholarship." *Ontario Universities' Info*: <https://www.ouinfo.ca/glossary/scholarship>

45 Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development. (2017). "Bursary." *Government of Ontario*: <https://osap.gov.on.ca/OSAPPortal/en/Help/Definitions/PRDR007783.html>

46 ScholarshipsCanada. (n.d.) "About ScholarshipsCanada.com." *ScholarshipsCanada*: <https://www.scholarshipscanada.com/About/Site.aspx>

47 Indigenous Services Canada. (2022). "Indigenous Bursaries Search Tool." *Government of Canada*: <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1351185180120/1351685455328>



After identifying several competitions that interest you, it is important to review the bursaries/scholarships criteria to ensure you meet the eligibility requirements. This will also be a crucial time to note if you must prepare an application, essay, or references. Should you choose to take on a more thorough application, make sure to start early to give yourself enough time to complete the application.

### **Tips: Applying to Bursaries and Scholarships**

1. Start early and give yourself plenty of time to complete your application.
2. Spend time researching the different scholarships and bursaries available to you.
3. Be informed by knowing everything about the award(s) requirements before you apply.
4. Consider the level of competition for the award. For example, competitions that provide less funding or require more work tend to attract fewer applicants making them great competitions to target.<sup>48</sup>
5. Set aside time to review and proofread your application for spelling, grammar, and sentence structure issues. It may also be worth having a peer review your application to notice errors you may have missed.

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48 "How to find and apply to scholarships." *University of Waterloo*: <https://uwaterloo.ca/future-students/missing-manual/money/how-find-and-apply-scholarships>

## Activity 3: Cost of Post-Secondary School

In this activity, create a budget by investigating the costs of attending your preferred post-secondary school program. Make sure to include all expenses and related costs that you will have when attending school.

In this activity, it is okay to provide rough estimations in some categories (i.e., groceries), as prices will vary from week-to-week. As financial support is not guaranteed, we also suggest calculating your estimated total budget without financial supports first. This will provide a better idea of total costs of post-secondary school.

### Institution:

#### Academic Expenses:

- Tuition:.....
- Student Fees.....
- Textbooks and Supplies:.....
- Computer:.....

**Subtotal** .....

#### Living Expenses:

- Residence/Housing.....
- Meal Plan/Groceries.....
- Utilities.....
- Internet.....
- Phone.....
- Clothing.....
- Entertainment.....
- Transportation .....

**Subtotal**.....

#### Financial Support\*

- Grants.....
- Loans .....
- Scholarships.....
- Bursaries .....

**Subtotal** .....

**Estimated Total Budget** = Subtotal Academic Expenses + Subtotal Living Expenses

**Estimated Total Budget with Financial Support** = Estimated Total Budget – Financial Support Subtotal

*\*For information on financial support use online estimators to gain a sense of how much funding you may be eligible for.*





## The Application Process

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After researching and weighing your post-secondary options, it is time to apply for the next step in your educational journey. In Canada, every school uses a different system for taking applications and evaluating students. During the application process, schools will collect academic, personal, and volunteer information that will guide their decision-making process. This section includes information on the application process and the different considerations students should make when applying.

### Narrowing Your List

Applying to post-secondary school can be a strenuous process, in which you must evaluate each school to determine which is the best fit for you. However, schools usually charge prospective students an application fee for their application to be considered. Therefore, it is important to have a narrowed list when applying to school, as it can become quite expensive to apply to every school you have considered. In doing so, we suggest narrowing your list of schools and programs down to your top six. This narrowed list can include multiple programs at one school and should identify your top programs/schools.

This is where our previous research on programs, post-secondary institutions, and basic finances come into play. This research should help us narrow our lists down, as it provides us with an idea of the student experience at each school. To help organize your thoughts, consider making pros and cons lists for each school, this list does not have to include much depth, but may consider things like:

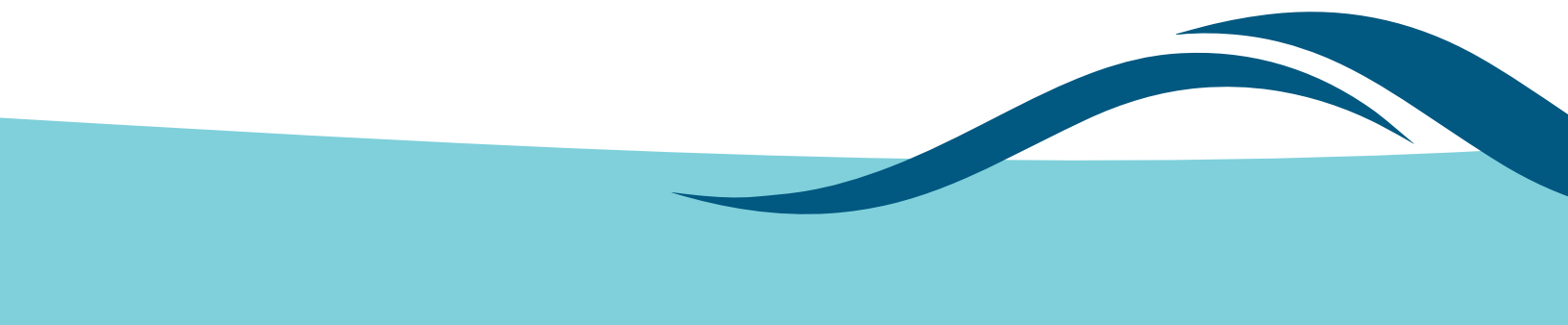
- Student experience
- Dining options
- Living arrangements
- Academic Standing
- Research Opportunities
- Student Clubs and Extracurricular

In making these considerations, you will hopefully be able to determine which schools/programs are best suited for your academic and personal success.

Another way many students narrow down their list is by sorting schools into safety schools, target schools, and dream schools. Through this evaluation, students compare the academic requirements for being admitted into a program.<sup>49</sup> Students will usually send applications to a range of schools of each type of school.

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49 Campus to Career Crossroads. (2022). "How to Narrow Down Your College List." *Campus to Career Crossroads*: <https://campustocareercrossroads.com/narrow-down-college-list/>



Safety Schools	Target Schools	Dream Schools
<p>A safety school is a post-secondary institution where your academic achievements exceed the programs average acceptance.</p> <p>Like target and dream schools, these institutions should offer a strong student experience, programs, services and extracurricular that entice you as a student. Just because these schools are considered “safety schools,” does not mean they should not live up to your expectations.</p>	<p>A target school is one where your academic achievements are well within the school’s acceptance average. While there are no guarantees, competitive target schools can be an excellent choice for pursuing your interests.<sup>50</sup></p> <p>Target schools should be places you would be happy to attend. Make sure these schools meet your needs before you apply.</p>	<p>A dream school is a post-secondary institution where your academic achievements may fall in the lower end of a school’s average acceptance.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, dream schools could also be more costly and further away from home deterring you from applying.</p> <p>Although these schools may feel like a longshot, they are still worth applying to! As a student, you have access to several academic resources to improve your grades, or even financial aid resources, that can help bridge the gap between your application and the acceptance requirements. With some hard work, dream schools are still in reach and should not be forgotten!</p>

By producing a shortlist of schools, this can make the post-secondary application process much easier. Moreover, knowing which programs and schools you are applying to will help to determine the different requirements and supplementary documents needed to support your application. However, if you are still trying to narrow your school shortlist, consider asking the following questions:

- Does this school offer the program I want?
- Can I afford the costs of going to that school? Will I need to apply for financial assistance?
- Can I see myself at this school?
- Do I fit in with the people on campus?
- How does this school align with my final goal?

50 The Princeton Review. (2024). “How to Choose Dream, Target, and Safety Schools.” *The Princeton Review*: <https://www.princetonreview.com/college-advice/dream-match-safety-schools>

51 Ibid.



## Where do I apply?

Every province, territory, and post-secondary institute has their own system for applying for further education. For example, Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario each use a centralized system to assist students in applying to school. However, in other provinces students may be required to apply directly with the school. Below is a list of where students apply in each province.

Province/Territory	System	Institutions
Alberta	<a href="#">ApplyAlberta</a>	Colleges, Universities, and Technical Institutes
British Columbia	<a href="#">EducationPlannerBC</a>	Colleges, Universities, and Technical Institutes
Manitoba	Applicants must apply directly to their chosen learning institution.	
Newfoundland and Labrador	Applicants must apply directly to their chosen learning institution.	
New Brunswick	Applicants must apply directly to their chosen learning institution.	
Nova Scotia	Applicants must apply directly to their chosen learning institution.	
Ontario	<a href="#">Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC)</a>	University
	<a href="#">Ontario College Application Service</a>	College
Prince Edward Island	Applicants must apply directly to their chosen learning institution.	
Quebec	Applicants must apply directly to their chosen learning institution.	
Saskatchewan	Applicants must apply directly to their chosen learning institution.	
Nunavut	Applicants must apply directly to their chosen learning institution.	
Yukon	Applicants must apply directly to their chosen learning institution.	
NWT	Applicants must apply directly to their chosen learning institution.	

## Application Deadlines

Application deadlines vary depending on the program, level study, and school. In most cases, schools will begin taking applications 8 to 12 months in advance of your programs start date. For example, for admission to fall term students will be able to start submitting applications in the October of the prior school year. In some instances, application deadlines may have a final deadline for 2 months before the start of term. However, applicants should try and apply well in advance of the application deadline, making sure to consult their programs website to take note of important deadlines.

## Application Requirements

Each school and program have its own admission requirements that should be considered when applying to post-secondary school. Admission requirements may also change depending on if you are applying as a mature student or straight out of high school. A high school or secondary school diploma is required for admission to either a college or university. Those who did not graduate from high school may be able to apply as a mature student.<sup>52</sup>

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52 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. (2021). "Welcome to Canada - Post-Secondary Education in Canada." *Government of Canada*: [https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/documents/pdf/english/corporate/publications-manuals/welcome\\_to\\_canada\\_post-secondary\\_education\\_in\\_canada\\_e.pdf](https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/documents/pdf/english/corporate/publications-manuals/welcome_to_canada_post-secondary_education_in_canada_e.pdf)



## Mature Students

Although the definition of a mature student can vary between different institutions, this is often a designation that is dependent on the self-identification of older student. For example, York University considers mature students to be:

- At least 20 years old by the end of the calendar year when the student was admitted.
- Have been out of full-time, high-school studies for at least two years **or** have returned to upgrade after a two-year absence.
- Have completed less than one year of college- or university-level courses.<sup>53</sup>

Comparatively, the requirements for mature students at the University of Saskatchewan include:

- Being 21 years of age by the first day of classes.
- Be entering the first year of study.<sup>54</sup>

When applying as a mature student, make sure to look up the schools' mature admissions requirements, as some schools may have different processes for regular and mature admissions. Schools may also require mature students to submit:

- Proof of their age
- Written request for mature admissions.
- Current Resume
- Proof of credentials

For students applying to post-secondary school out of high school, the institution will consider your academic credentials (are your grades in good standing), non-academic credentials, repeated courses, or any other academic special considerations.<sup>55</sup> This means students will have to provide a copy of their high school transcripts when applying. In some instances, post-secondary institutions will automatically receive high school transcripts when a student applies, while others may require applicants to submit their own transcript. Transcripts can be accessed through your high school guidance office, school board, or a province/territories ministry of education.

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53 York University. (2024). 2025-2026 Undergraduate Handbook. York University: <https://futurestudents.yorku.ca/sites/futurestudents/files/2024-09/YorkU-2025-2026-Undergrad-Handbook.pdf>

54 University of Saskatchewan. (2022). "Mature Students." University of Saskatchewan: <https://admissions.usask.ca/requirements/mature-students.php>

55 University of Toronto. (n.d.). "How We Make Decisions." University of Toronto: <https://www.utoronto.ca/admissions/how-we-make-decisions>

## Supplemental Documents

In some instances, schools may require additional supporting documents from applicants. Depending on the program, supplemental documents may include:

- Resume/CV
- Statement of Purpose
- Test results (GED Test results, English/French language proficiency, etc.)
- Program specific documents (portfolio, audition, etc.)

These additional documents provide post-secondary schools with additional opportunities to evaluate students before they are accepted. For example, students applying to Sheridan College's Theatre and Drama Studies program will have to provide an audition that the school can use to assess the applicants' acting skills.<sup>56</sup>

It is important to contact the programs admissions coordinator to understand the programs application requirements.

## Graduate Studies

Master's and Doctoral programs offer students further opportunities expand their knowledge and refine the skills developed during their undergraduate degrees. At graduate school, students focus on more specialized topics and research in a field of interest. Like preliminary degrees and diplomas, it is important to research the different programs and school offerings. However, the application process for higher education is typically more strenuous and places greater onus on potential students.

Graduate students will often have to provide schools with:

- A transcript from each post-secondary institution attended.
- References, typically from professors who can speak on a student's behalf.\*
- A sample of written work.
- List of publications.
- Resume/CV.<sup>57</sup>

Graduate applicants may also have to complete supplemental questions or testing to be considered for a program. Post-secondary schools usually have a graduate office that can assist with the application process.

*\*Graduate applicants who have been in the workforce for a significant amount of time may also use professional references.*

56 Sheridan College. (2024). "Collaborative/Joint Degree - Theatre and Drama Studies (Honours Bachelor of Arts)." *Sheridan College*: <https://www.sheridancollege.ca/programs/theatre-and-drama-studies#tab=admission-requirements>

57 Western Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies. (2024). "How to Apply." *Western University*: <https://grad.uwo.ca/admissions/apply.html>



## Personal Statements

A personal statement is a persuasive form of writing which demonstrates who you are and why you deserve funding or admissions into a program.<sup>58</sup> A personal statement is used during the application process for graduate or professional studies, being used to aid selection committees in making their decisions. However, personal statements may also be used by scholarship selection committees.

The personal statement is an essay in which the applicant is the main subject. This is the applicant's opportunity to set themselves apart from other perspective students. In doing so, it is incredibly important to write a compelling statement that outlines your skills, knowledge, and interests. As such, a personal statement may fall into two categories:

1. **General Format:** Applicants are provided with a broad prompt that provides considerable freedom as to what they can write.
2. **Question Format:** Applicants are asked specific questions that should be responded to within the personal statement.<sup>59</sup>

In both formats, it is important for to ensure that the answer in the personal statement responds directly to the questions/prompts provided. This can be done by preparing an outline to assist in writing the answer. Moreover, this will be beneficial to ensuring the conclusion drawn at the end of the personal statement is arrived at logically. In the *Personal Statement Guidebook by the University of Alberta's Career Centre*, they outline three examples of prompts/questions asked to students. These examples include:

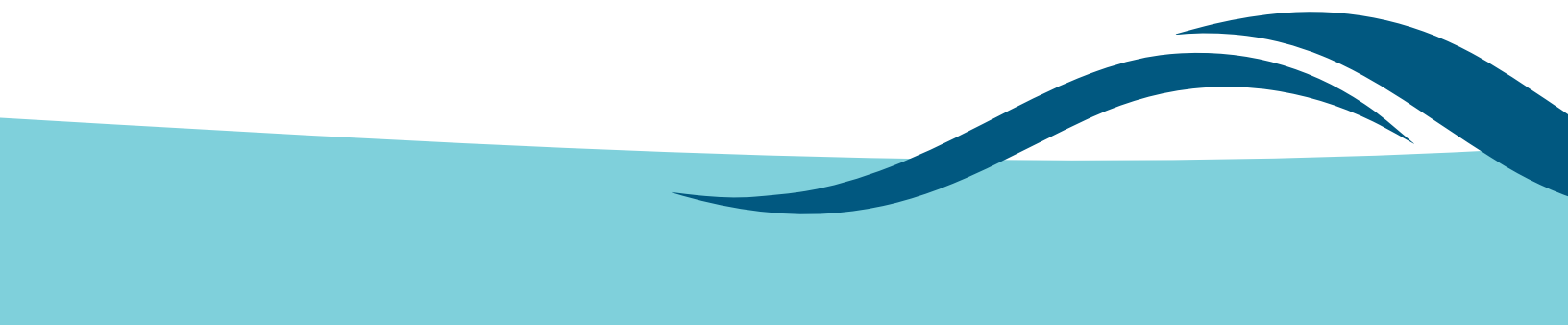
- Applicants must include a personal statement of no more than 500 words. It should outline the applicant's experience, reason for choosing UBC, and career objectives, and should describe the overall interest in the program, and what academic knowledge and experience they bring to the school.
- How have your previous experiences and academic choices influenced your decision to apply to law school? Why are you interested in attending University of Calgary Law specifically? What would you like to do with your law degree?
- The Letter of Intent which should state your academic or professional area of specialization, specify how completion of the program would support your professional practice, and identify a provisional topic for the final applied research project.<sup>60</sup>

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58 Wilfrid Laurier University. (2024). "Writing personal statements." *Wilfrid Laurier University*: <https://students.wlu.ca/academics/support-and-advising/student-success/assets/resources/writing/personal-statements.html>

59 Purdue Online Writing Lab. (n.d.). "Writing the Personal Statement." *Purdue University*: [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/job\\_search\\_writing/preparing\\_an\\_application/writing\\_the\\_personal\\_statement/index.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/job_search_writing/preparing_an_application/writing_the_personal_statement/index.html)

60 University of Alberta Career Centre. (n.d.). "Personal Statements Guidebook." *University of Alberta*: <https://www.ualberta.ca/en/career-centre/media-library/documents/publications/personal-statement-guidebook.pdf>



Although there is more than one correct way to write a personal statement and respond questions like those above, there are some tips and tricks that could be considered when preparing a personal statement.

Do...	Do not...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Edit closely to remove grammatical errors</li> <li>• Have a family member or friend review your personal statement</li> <li>• Understand what your program expects of students and outline how you meet these expectations</li> <li>• Emphasize your strengths</li> <li>• Be positive and direct</li> <li>• Present your story in an organized, orderly, specific and concise manner</li> <li>• Speak about your goals for the future and the connection a post-secondary education has to achieving those goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be repetitive</li> <li>• Re-write your resume</li> <li>• Use slang</li> <li>• Criticize a person, theory, thought or other institution</li> <li>• Refer to popular culture as a primary motivation for you decision</li> <li>• Rely on cliches</li> <li>• Speak vaguely about your experience and future goals</li> </ul>

Further, when developing your personal statement, it is also important to consider the following questions:

- What is drawing you to this program? What makes this a good next step for you?
- Why are you interested in this topic? What do you find exciting about it?
- How does your research interest align with the faculty?
- How has your past education and experiences prepared you for this program?
- What is special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you?
- What are your career goals?
- Have you had to overcome any obstacles or hardships in your life?





To support students in preparing their personal statement, applicants should consider reviewing existing guides on writing a personal statement:

Institution	Resource/Guide
Purdue University	<a href="#">Writing the Personal Statement</a>
University of Alberta	<a href="#">Personal Statements Guidebook</a>
University of British Columbia	<a href="#">Statement of Interest</a>
University of Guelph	<a href="#">Tips for Writing Your Personal Statement</a>
University of New Mexico	<a href="#">Latter/Statement of Intent</a>
University of Regina	<a href="#">How to Write a Personal Statement</a>
University of Toronto	<a href="#">Effective Admission Letters</a>
University of Waterloo	<a href="#">Writing your personal statement</a>
Wilfrid Laurier University	<a href="#">Writing personal statements</a>

### **Activity 4: Preparing a Personal Statement**

In the space provide below, prepare a personal statement that replies to the following prompt:

*Describe a challenge or obstacle you have faced and how has it shaped you? How will this experience contribute to your overall career objectives?*

In developing your personal statement, make sure to use a formal tone, professional language, and clear writing to communicate your ideas. When preparing the statement make sure to reflect on the different considerations discussed in this section.

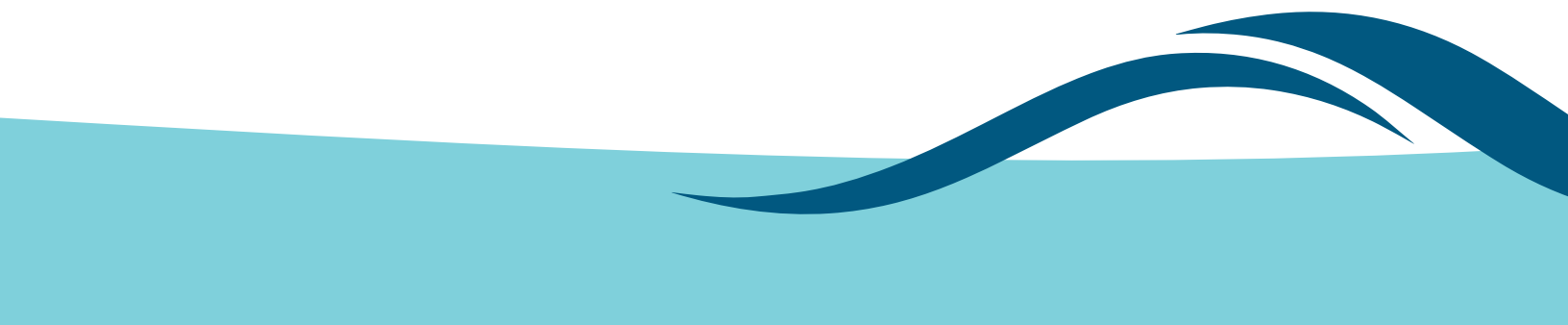
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## References and Letters of Recommendations

*To note: most undergraduate or diploma level programs will not require references or letters of recommendations. This section is relevant to those interested in applying to a graduate program.*

A requirement for most graduate programs is providing reference letters that speak to a student's skills, accomplishments, and strengths. Typically, graduate schools will ask students for academic references which are provided by professors or instructors.<sup>61</sup> Depending on the program (i.e., MBA, MSW) or if a significant amount of time has passed since completing an undergraduate degree, a graduate program may also ask for professional references. Like an academic reference, professional references come from a manager or supervisor who can speak to an applicant's skills and career suitability.<sup>62</sup> Receiving a strong letter of recommendation can help set yourself apart from other candidates, making it a critical part of the application process.

*Who should I choose as a referee?*

Ideally, a referee should be a professor or professional who can speak on behalf of your skills, abilities, and/or knowledge. For an academic referee, try and choose a professor who has taught you recently under whom you achieved good grade. It will also help to have established a good rapport with that professor and, if possible, to try and choose a professor who is closely aligned with your field of study.<sup>63</sup> When creating a short list of referees, consider asking yourself the following questions:

- How well did you do in the professor's course(s)?
- How well does the professor know you?
- Will their reputation carry weight with the selection committee?<sup>64</sup>

It is important to try and identify a referee who can provide you with a strong letter of reference. If they do not know you or your work, the reference they provide may only be able to speak to your academic record and will not provide the insight needed by the application committee.<sup>65</sup>

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61 Student Success Centre. (Oct. 24, 2023). "How to ask for grad school references." *McMaster University*: <https://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/how-to-ask-for-grad-school-references/>

62 Ibid.

63 Wilfrid Laurier University. (2021). "Tips for seeking academic reference." *Wilfrid Laurier University*: <https://students.wlu.ca/academics/graduate-and-postdoctoral-studies/assets/resources/tips-for-seeking-academic-references.html>

64 Career Centre. (2024). "Tips | Academic References." *University of Toronto - Mississauga*: <https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/careers/career-exploration/tip-sheets/tips-academic-references>

65 UBC Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. (October 2023). "Top Tip: Requesting Letters of Reference." *The University of British Columbia*: <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/about-us/newsletters/top-tip-requesting-letters-reference>



### *How do I ask for a reference?*

It is important not to assume a professor or professional will provide a letter of recommendation to a student. Instead, applicants should approach a referee well in advance of the application deadline to ask if they can provide a strong recommendation.

To do this, consider attending their office hours in person **OR** by sending an initial email detailing what you are looking for.<sup>66</sup> If you initially chose to reach out to your professor via email, avoid overloading them with too much information. Instead, provide the professor with a summary of work and course(s) you have taken with them and general information about the program you are interested in applying to.<sup>67</sup> If you can, consider asking the professor to have a follow-up meeting where you can discuss your aspirations in more depth, this can help demonstrate your enthusiasm for having them act as a referee.

Should a professor agree to write you a reference letter(s), you should provide them with the necessary details and information they will need to act as a referee. In doing so, consider providing them with the following information/documents:

- Additional information about the program you are applying to
- Current transcripts
- Resume or CV
- Copy of your personal statement
- List of professional certifications, designations, or awards
- List of extracurricular or volunteer activities
- Copies of assignments for the courses the referee instructed
- An explanation of why you want to attend graduate school

In providing your referee with this information they can form a stronger reference letter, that better reflects your intentions as a graduate studies applicant.

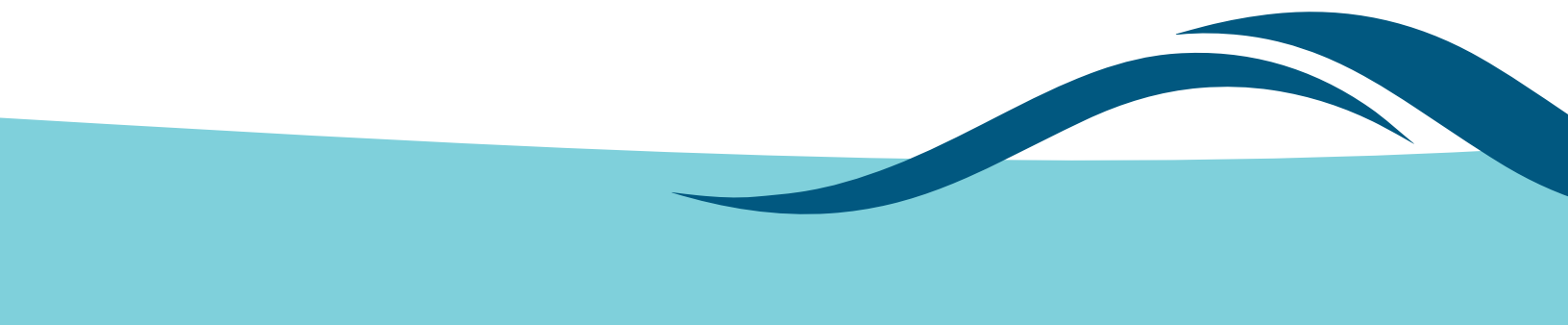
### *How long should I give my referee?*

Professors and professionals are busy people and may be a referee for several students at a time, on top of their regular workload. It is important to give them enough time to write a strong recommendation letter on your behalf. It is suggested that applicants provide their referee between four (4) and six (6) weeks before the deadline to develop a reference letter. **However**, the more time that is provided to a referee the better.

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66 Wilfrid Laurier University. (2021). "Tips for seeking academic reference." *Wilfrid Laurier University*: <https://students.wlu.ca/academics/graduate-and-postdoctoral-studies/assets/resources/tips-for-seeking-academic-references.html>

67 Ibid.



## Thanking Your Referee

After your referee provides you with a strong recommendation, it is important to send them a thank you. As a professional courtesy, students should provide their referee with updates on the application process and if they were accepted to their graduate program. In most cases, professors and professionals like to see students succeed; by sharing your success you keep your network open to future opportunities with that individual.

## Resources

To support students in preparing their personal statement, NWAC has pulled together several guides made by post-secondary schools on asking for reference letters.

Institution	Resource/Guide
McGill University – Career Planning Services	<a href="#">Reference and Recommendation Letters</a>
McMaster University – Student Success Centre	<a href="#">How to ask for grad school references</a>
Queens University	<a href="#">How to Ask for a Reference Letter</a>
The University of British Columbia – College of Graduate Studies	<a href="#">4 Tips for Requesting Letters of Recommendation</a>
The University of British Columbia – Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies	<a href="#">Top Tip: Requesting Letters of Reference</a>
The University of Toronto – Career Centre	<a href="#">Tips   Academic References</a>
University of Alberta – Career Centre	<a href="#">References Guidebook</a>
University of Guelph	<a href="#">Student tips: asking a prof to be a reference or advisor</a>
University of Waterloo	<a href="#">Getting an academic letter of reference for post-graduate studies</a>
Wilfrid Laurier University	<a href="#">Tips for seeking academic references</a>



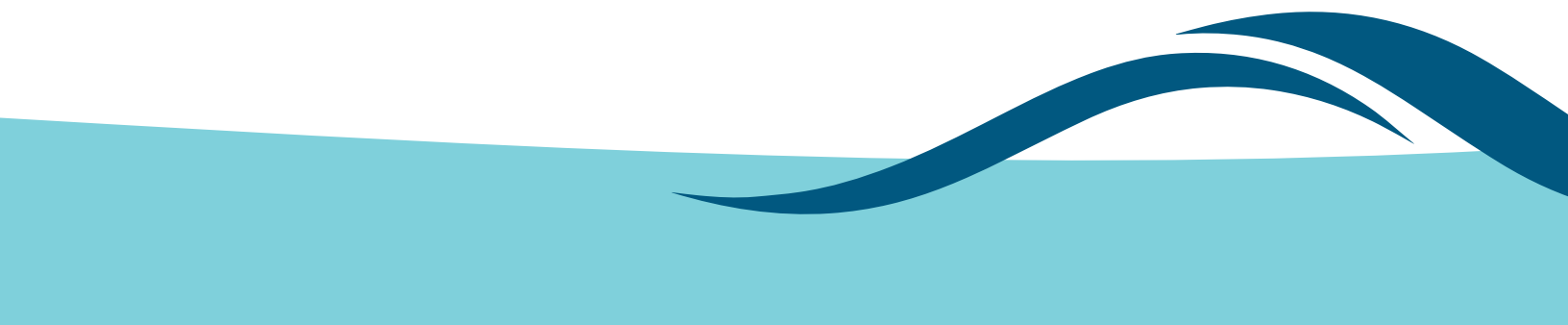
## Standardized Tests

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**Most** graduates of Canadian high school typically do not need to participate in extra standardized testing when applying for University. In some instances, post-secondary schools may require students to complete an English or French language aptitude test to ensure they are capable of learning in the language of instruction. These are usually required for students whose first language is neither English or French and have not completed their full-time studies in a Canadian high school. However, most students who have successfully completed their high-school studies in Canada will not need to complete a language test.

For most post-secondary students in Canada, standardized testing will only apply after completing a degree/diploma program. In this case, there are four (4) different tests that applicants may need to take when applying to a professional school (i.e. law school, medical school, dental school, etc.). It is important for prospective students to research the program requirements to determine if they need to complete standardized testing for admission; this information will be available through the school's admissions website.

Test Name	Purpose
<a href="#"><u>Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT)</u></a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Created by business schools to assist in the admissions process for Master of Business Administration programs.</li><li>• The exam is comprised of three sections:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>↳ Quantitative Reasoning</li><li>↳ Verbal Reasoning</li><li>↳ Data Insights</li></ul></li><li>• The test is 2 hours and 45 minutes long and consists of 64 questions.</li></ul>
<a href="#"><u>Law School Admissions Test (LSAT)</u></a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The LSAT is a standardized test used for law school admissions and is designed to assess the skills most needed for law school success.</li><li>• The test consists to two logical reasoning sections and one reading comprehension section.</li><li>• The LSAT is composed of four 35-minute sections, with a 10-minute intermission between the second and third sections. Each section has 24-28 questions.</li></ul>



Test Name	Purpose
<p><u>Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT)</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The MCAT assesses a student’s knowledge of natural and social science concepts, critical thinking, and scientific problem-solving skills required to study medicine.</li> <li>• The test consists of four sections, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>↳ Biological and Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems</li> <li>↳ Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behaviours</li> <li>↳ Chemical and Physical Foundations of Biological Systems</li> <li>↳ Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The MCAT provides students with 6-hours and 15-minutes to write the exam. Test takers are also allowed to take 10 to 30-minute breaks between each exam session.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Dental Aptitude Test (DAT)</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The DAT program is provided by the Canadian Dental Association to assist dental schools in selecting first-year students.</li> <li>• The DAT has two main parts, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>↳ The computer-based “written” test, composed of multiple-choice question. Topics under the written component include a survey of natural sciences, perceptual ability, and reading comprehension.</li> <li>↳ Manual Dexterity Test, which involves carving a piece of soap according to exact specification.<sup>68</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>• The English DAT is composed of 210 multiple choice questions, with 3 hours for completion.</li> <li>• The French DAT is composed of 160 multiple choice questions, with 2 hours for completion. The French DAT does not include a section on reading comprehension.<sup>69</sup></li> </ul>

68 Canadian Dental Association. (2024). *Candidate Guide - Official Guide to the Dental Aptitude Test (Canada)*. Canadian Dental Association: [https://www.cda-adc.ca/files/becoming/dat/documents/DAT\\_Candidate\\_Guide.pdf](https://www.cda-adc.ca/files/becoming/dat/documents/DAT_Candidate_Guide.pdf)

69 Ibid.



## **How to prepare for standardized tests?**

Each standardized test is different and requires a distinct set of skills and knowledge to succeed. For example, the MCAT tests students on the skills and knowledge developed during an undergraduate degree, whereas the LSAT looks at a test taker's logical reasoning skill. Because of these differences, test takers will need to prepare for their tests in slightly different ways. That said, NWAC has developed several tips for assisting students in preparing for a standardized test.

### **1. Begin Studying Early**

For any test, it is essential to give yourself enough time to study and understand the material that will be tested. Depending on the test, it may be worthwhile to begin studying 6 months to a year before the examination date. By starting your studies well in advance, this will give you time to assess and reassess your skills and knowledge so that you may focus more on areas of weakness when studying. Moreover, students who are electing to study during their final undergraduate year may need more time as they balance the demands of their program and standardized test.

### **2. Develop a Study Plan**

An important part of preparing for a major examination is developing a study plan that emphasizes your strengths as a student. Students should reflect on how they have best prepared for exams in the past. For example, think about if you learn best from listening, reading, writing or a combination of each method.<sup>70</sup> As most standardized tests offer self-study and preparation courses, understanding how you prefer to study will assist in choosing the right path for you.

It is also important to consider developing a study schedule that outlines various study goals and milestones. A study schedule should be flexible and have times built in for rest, exercise, and eating.

### **3. Understand How the Test Works**

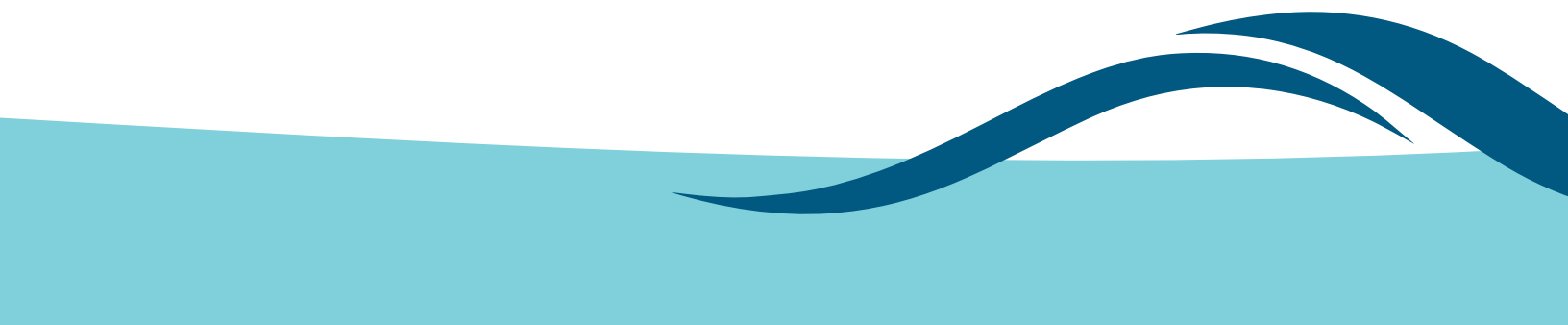
As each standardized test has its own set of quirks, it is important to understand how the test works. For example, knowing the different sections of the examination, the allotted time, or how many questions are typically asked will be vital to your preparation. Before starting to study content, make sure to review the outline for each test online to ensure you are set up for success.

### **4. Take Practice Tests**

Practice tests are a valuable tool used by many students when preparing to write a standardized test. Often, previous years tests are made available online to help test takers prepare for an exam. When completing a practice test for the first time, give yourself ample time to complete the examination from start to finish, should you need extra time to complete the test do not be afraid to take it. Your first time taking a practice

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<sup>70</sup> PennState Division of Undergraduate Studies - Pre-Law Advising. (n.d.) "How should I prepare for the LSAT?" PennState: <https://dus.psu.edu/pre-law/how-should-i-prepare-lsat>



test should provide students with a baseline of where their skills and knowledge are and will help identify any gaps that should be addressed when studying. **Remember** your first practice test will be the first time that you are seeing information presented in this manner, **it is okay to fail or not live up to your original expectations.**

In subsequent practice tests try to more closely adhere to the time constraints that you will have during the examination. By doing this, you will familiarize yourself with testing conditions and will feel more comfortable when taking the exam. In the final weeks leading up to the standardized test try and replicate the exam experience, this could include writing in a quiet space with only the materials provided during the exam. Once again, attempting to mimic testing conditions will help reduce stress when it comes time to write the test.

### 5. Eat Well, Exercise, and Rest

An important, but often overlooked, part of preparing for any examination is giving yourself enough time to relax. By making sure that you are maintaining your wellbeing, you are giving yourself an opportunity to absorb what is being learned while also ensuring your body has the fuel to continue studying. Here are a few ways to stay on top of your wellbeing while studying:

- Engage with the outdoors and grounding yourself through nature therapy
- Incorporate traditional methods, meditation, or quiet moments throughout your day for peace of mind
- Engage in regular physical activity
- Eat a well-balanced and nutritious diet, and when possible, incorporate ancestral food into your diet
- Get sufficient rest each night to rejuvenate and prepare your body for the next day
- Interact with your community network for emotional support and a sense of kinship
- Leave yourself time to be with your family and friends to unwind and reconnect
- Depending on your cultural beliefs and practices, consider herbal treatment, purification rituals, sweat lodges, and guidance from Elders or Traditional Healers
- Access mental health experts and helplines, when necessary, as this can be an incredible source for emotional support





## Decision-Making

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After submitting your application and any necessary supplementary documents, post-secondary schools will review your application. During this time, the admissions committee will compare your application against others by looking at your academic and non-academic credentials. After examining your application, post-secondary schools will make a final decision on whether to admit students and will notify students of their standing with the school. In doing so, students will receive one of four decisions:

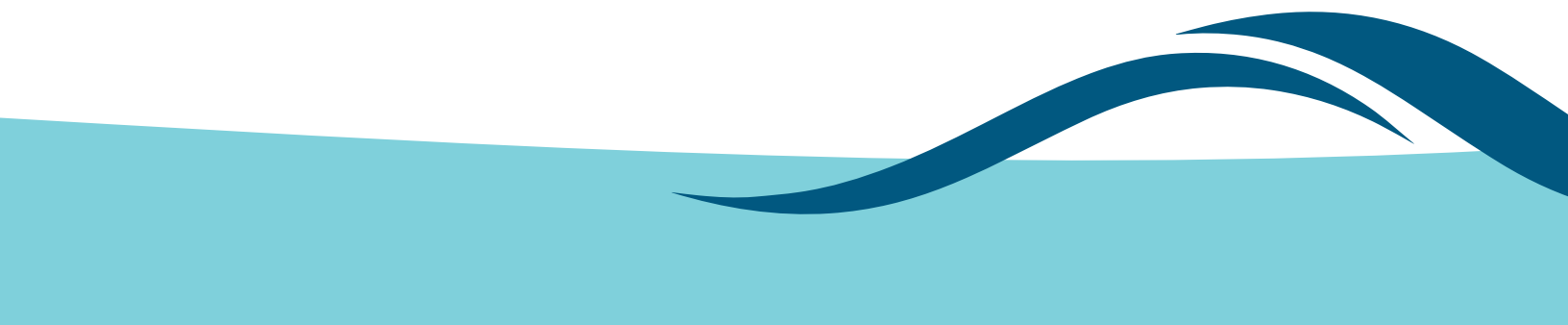
Response	Meaning
Unconditional Offer of Admission	Students have been accepted into their chosen program and can accept their offer. The school has not attached any conditions to your acceptance. <sup>71</sup>
Conditional Offer of Admission	The student has been accepted into their chosen program; however, they are expected to achieve a certain grade point average throughout the remainder of their high school studies. For example, students may be expected to maintain a 70% average in the for the remainder of the school year. <sup>72</sup>
Waitlisted	The school is unable to admit you as a student at this time; however, the school will reconsider your application should any spaces in the program you applied to become available. <sup>73</sup>
Declined	Unfortunately, your application has not been accepted. This can happen for several reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Your overall average was not competitive.</li><li>• You did not present a senior level course in a prerequisite subjects required for the program.</li><li>• You have an insufficient number of available courses at the time of consideration.</li><li>• Supplementary information was not submitted.<sup>74</sup></li></ul>

71 University of Toronto. (2024). "Apply to U of T - Your Admission Decision." *University of Toronto*: <https://future.utoronto.ca/apply/after-you-have-applied/your-admission-decision/>

72 University of Toronto. (2024). "Apply to U of T - Your Admission Decision." *University of Toronto*: <https://future.utoronto.ca/apply/after-you-have-applied/your-admission-decision/>

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.



When receiving responses from schools it is important to stay positive! Just because you may be waitlisted/rejected from one school does not mean the same for another school.

### **Choosing Between Offers**

The time has come, and post-secondary schools have sent you offers of admission to their program(s). But how do you choose between offers?

By this point, you have already investigated and applied to the post-secondary schools and programs that best align with your interests, skill, and knowledge. Additionally, you have categorized the schools you have applied to into safety, target, and dream schools. This preparation has provided you with an incredible amount of knowledge about the program, school, financial requirements, extracurricular activities, campus life, and student support available. Based on this, you can make an informed decision about which offer is best for you. At this point, consider asking yourself the following questions:

1. Did I receive multiple offers from different schools?
2. Was I accepted into my dream school? Target school? Or a safety school?
3. Was I accepted into the program I initially applied for?
4. Does my offer include any conditions?
5. Was I waitlisted?
6. Am I able to meet the financial requirements to pay for school?  
Am I eligible for financial aid?
7. Does my offer include an entrance scholarship?
8. Does my offer provide information on next steps?

To assist in answering these questions, we suggest reviewing the pros and cons list you prepared for each school when deciding where to apply. This will help alleviate any further indecisiveness about choosing what is best for you.

**Remember**, there are opportunities to move between programs and schools later in your educational journey. Should you accept an offer and later feel the school was not the right fit, talk to your academic advisor to discuss your options.

### **Accepting an Offer**

In your offer of admission, schools will provide information to applicants on how to review and accept their offer. In doing so, accepted students will have to log on to either the institution's applicant portal or the provincial application system. At this point, students will need to navigate to their offers where they can accept or decline their offer. Once you have accepted an offer, the post-secondary institution will provide written confirmation of your acceptance via email. We suggest saving this confirmation for your personal records.

After accepting your offer, the university/college may require a deposit to confirm your admission. This can be done through the university/college student portal. At this time, students may also be asked to apply for residence for the coming year.

### **Deferring an Offer of Admission**

In rare circumstances, students may request to defer their admission into a program due to personal circumstance. By deferring an offer of admission, students are delaying



their start for a minimum of one term or a maximum of one year.<sup>75</sup> To request a deferral, students must first accept their offer of admission and then submit a deferral request to the admissions office. Each institution may have different requirements for deferring, so it is important to consult with the Registrar's office or an academic advisor for guidance. Students will be notified if their request was granted and will receive a notice the following year to reconfirm their admission to the school.

## Student Housing

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For students, the first year of post-secondary school represents their first opportunity to live outside of their home. Many students take this opportunity to live away from home and complete their studies. Students have three living options when attending university:

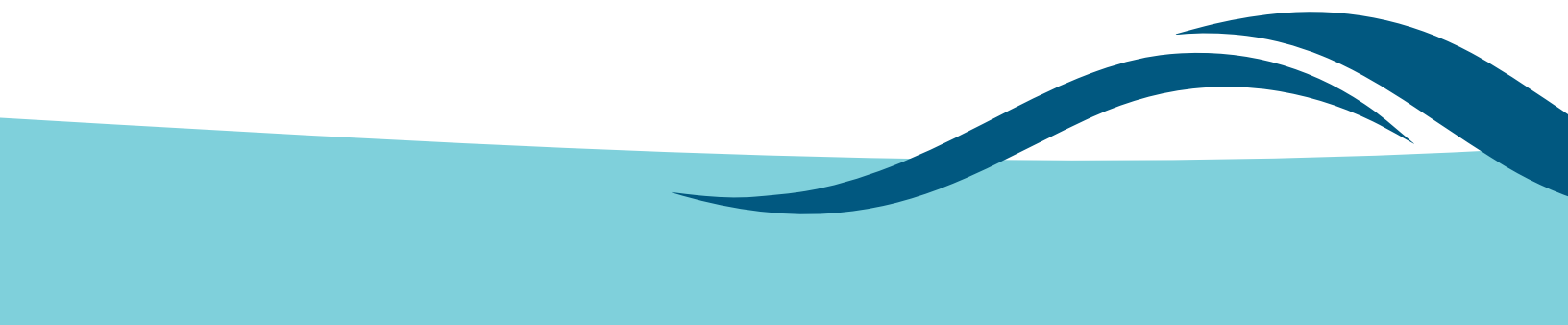
1. Living at home
2. Living on Campus (residence)
3. Living off Campus

Although each has their benefits, the majority of first year students choose to live on campus, also known as residence, in living spaces provided by the university/college. In residences students have access to private or semi-private rooms, shared bathrooms, laundry facilities, furniture, and internet. Schools often offer an array of different residence options from more traditional dorm styles to apartment style residences.

<b>Traditional/Dorm Style</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Combination of single and double rooms where residents share common washrooms and spaces.</li><li>• Students are expected to join the college/university meal plan.</li></ul>
<b>Apartment Style</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Combination of single bedrooms in two-to-four-bedroom apartments outfitted with kitchenettes, dining, and living spaces.</li><li>• Geared more towards independent living as students will cook and clean in their own space.</li></ul>

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75 Wilfrid Laurier University. (2024). "Deferring an Offer of Admission." *Wilfrid Laurier University*: <https://www.wlu.ca/academics/faculties/graduate-and-postdoctoral-studies/admissions/assets/resources/deferring-an-offer-of-admission.html>



Living in residence is a common post-secondary education experience in the first year of attending post-secondary school and comes with several benefits for students. These benefits include:

- **Convenience:** Being in residence provides you with easy access to services, resources, and other facilities around campus. Further, monthly fees, such as hydro and internet, are included in the cost of residence.
- **Community and Friendship:** Students can develop a community and new friendships from the students who live in their dorm. Residences will often host social events to bring students together.
- **Flexibility:** Students have an opportunity to live in an environment that meets their basic needs while they adapt to a college/university environment.
- **Resources:** In addition to campus services, like writing centers, students living in residence will have access to programs and services not offered to those living off campus. For example, residence dons help develop a sense of community and support to students living on their floor.

As previously discussed, residence and living away from home come with additional expenses. Before applying for residence, consider your financial situation to ensure that you can afford to live on campus.

Off campus housing and living at home are great, and often cheaper, alternatives to living on campus. Moreover, some universities/colleges offer residence to upper-year students or opportunities for upper-year students to work and live in residence as dons. As a senior student, it is worthwhile considering continuing to live in residence if it responds to your needs.

### **Applying for Residence**

After accepting an offer, students will receive information on how to apply to residence for the upcoming school year. Students will submit a residence application using the college/university student or housing website. Applications will ask students about their living preferences and, in some cases, may ask students if they have a roommate in mind. After submitting your residence application, keep an eye out for your residence offer. Once you have received and accepted a residence offer, you will have to pay a fee to hold your place in residence.

Over the coming weeks or months, students who have accepted their offer of residence will have to choose a student meal plan and begin preparing to move into residence. Consider the following checklist when preparing to move into residence.



## Residence Checklist

### *Room Essentials*

- ✓ Bedding (mattress cover, sheets, and comforter)
- ✓ Pillow
- ✓ Clothes hangers
- ✓ Power bar
- ✓ Extension cord
- ✓ Cutlery
- ✓ Dishes (Plates, bowls, glasses)
- ✓ Mugs/Cups
- ✓ Reusable water bottle
- ✓ Tupperware Containers
- ✓ Laundry basket
- ✓ Laundry detergent
- ✓ Fabric softener
- ✓ Ethernet cable
- ✓ Cellphone charger

### *Bathroom Essentials*

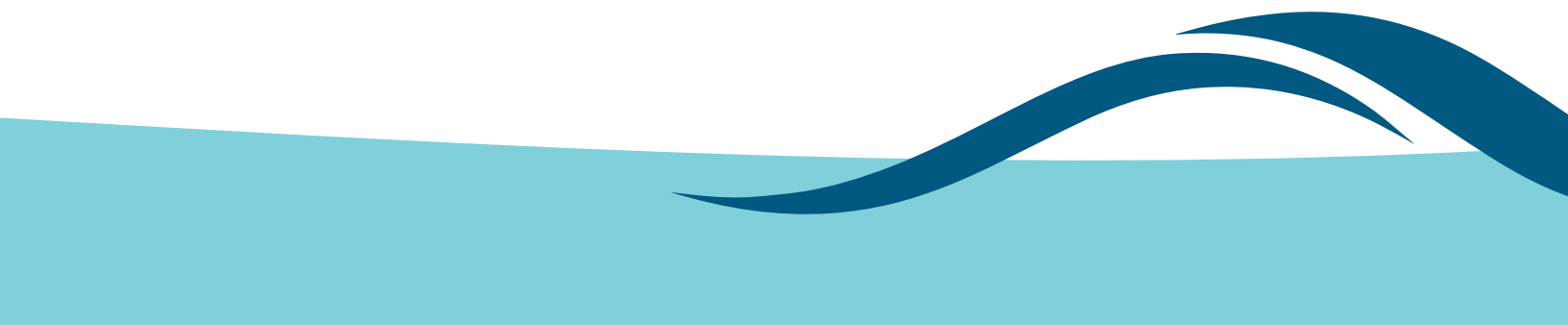
- ✓ Soap
- ✓ Shampoo and conditioner
- ✓ Razors and blades
- ✓ Shaving gel
- ✓ Toothbrush
- ✓ Toothpaste
- ✓ Dental Floss
- ✓ Comb/hairbrush
- ✓ Deodorant
- ✓ Nail clippers
- ✓ Towel and face cloths
- ✓ Medications
- ✓ Kleenex
- ✓ Hair dryer
- ✓ Styling Iron
- ✓ Flip flops
- ✓ Makeup
- ✓ First aid kit
- ✓ Shower Caddy

### *Study Essentials*

- ✓ Pencils and/or pens
- ✓ Eraser
- ✓ Notebooks
- ✓ Laptop
- ✓ Backpack
- ✓ Printer and Printer Paper
- ✓ Que cards
- ✓ Sticky notes
- ✓ Stapler and Staples
- ✓ Paper clip
- ✓ Agenda/Calendar
- ✓ Highlighters
- ✓ Binder
- ✓ Whiteboard and Markers

### *Outerwear*

- ✓ Fall jacket
- ✓ Winter coat
- ✓ Mittens/Gloves
- ✓ Scarves
- ✓ Toques



Residence Checklist	
<p><i>Clothes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Socks</li> <li>✓ Underwear</li> <li>✓ Pants</li> <li>✓ Shirts and t-shirts</li> <li>✓ Sweaters</li> <li>✓ Workout attire</li> <li>✓ Dress clothes</li> <li>✓ Pyjamas</li> </ul>	<p><i>Footwear</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Running Shoes</li> <li>✓ Casual Shoes</li> <li>✓ Dress Shoes</li> <li>✓ Winter Boots</li> <li>✓ Rain Boots</li> </ul>
<p><i>Miscellaneous</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Swimsuit</li> <li>✓ Umbrella</li> <li>✓ Photographs</li> <li>✓ Poster</li> <li>✓ Small speaker</li> <li>✓ Room fan (Small)</li> <li>✓ Mattress Topper</li> <li>✓ Cleaning wipes</li> <li>✓ Paper towel</li> <li>✓ Scissors</li> <li>✓ Alarm Clock</li> <li>✓ Headphones</li> <li>✓ Personal recreation equipment</li> <li>✓ Garbage bag</li> <li>✓ Storage bin</li> <li>✓ Camera</li> <li>✓ Kettle</li> <li>✓ Snacks</li> <li>✓ Reusable grocery bag</li> <li>✓ Government-issued photo ID and Provincial Health Card</li> </ul>	



## Living Off Campus

Many college/university students live off campus instead of in student housing. Typically, there are lessors and private student housing rental options that student can choose from. Although off campus housing is usually cheaper, students may have to bring/purchase their own furniture, as well as pay for utilities and other expenses. Most post-secondary institutions have good relationships with housing partners in the community and can assist students in looking for housing. It is important to begin looking for off-campus housing before the school year begins.

To assist in assessing your options, NWAC developed a checklist to support in navigating off-campus housing. For more background information on your rights as a tenant, please consult our [Tenant Housing Toolkit](#). The toolkit includes definitions and information on your rights as a tenant and the responsibilities of your landlord.

### Activity 5: Student Housing Search – Checklist

	Yes	No
<b>Location</b>		
Is the rental property located close to campus?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the rental property close to a grocery store and other shops?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the rental property located close to public transit?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the rental unit close to culturally relevant programs and services?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there Indigenous community support systems nearby?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Layout</b>		
Does the layout support your needs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there an adequate number of bathrooms to support your needs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the property offer enough storage/closet space?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
Is there laundry located on site?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there parking available at the rental property?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the rental unit come furnished?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does this rental unit meet my accommodation priorities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Condition</b>		
Is the property in a good state of repair?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the appliances in the rental unit in working order?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the rental unit have a working furnace?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the rental unit have a working air conditioner?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the unit have working smoke and carbon-monoxide detectors?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the unit show any signs of mold? Insects? Other pests?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Cost</b>		
Does the cost of the rental unit fit within your monthly budget?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are utilities included in the rental?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the lessor require a deposit?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is subletting allowed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>





# Phase 2:

## Attending Undergraduate School

### Settling In

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#### Orientation and First Week

Adjusting during the first year of College/University can be challenging for students, especially those studying in a new city. Often, first year students will have to grapple with building new relationships, managing their independence, and facing challenges in student life.<sup>76</sup>

In the first week of school, most universities and colleges host a “Welcome Week” also known as “Frosh Week” or “Orientation Week”. During the first week of school, universities/colleges will have activities arranged for students where they can better acquaint themselves with <sup>77</sup>. This is also a fantastic opportunity to meet other students, join clubs and familiarize yourself with the campus. Post-secondary schools often support an array of clubs, academic societies, and interest-based groups where students can explore their interests and make new friends.<sup>78</sup> During this week students can visit Indigenous student services and other student services and clubs of interest!

#### Academic Expectations

Managing your academic responsibilities is crucial for academic success and to avoid being overworked. This section can help students understand course load and how to manage time with other aspects of the student life. Managing your academic expectations can make a significant difference in your ability to balance academic, work and personal life commitments.

##### *Understanding your course load*

The school determines the number of credits that make up a full-time course load. Some schools or programs have unique ways of measuring each course, for example, one course can either be a 0.5, 1, 3, 6 or 9 credits based on the institution and/or program.<sup>79</sup> Depending on how your courses are structured, they can run for a semester (about three months or for a full academic year – consult your institution’s academic calendar for dates). Typically,

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76 Kaye, C. (n.d.). “Getting settled at a Canadian University.” *University Study*: <https://universitystudy.ca/getting-settled-at-a-canadian-university/>

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

79 Danika. (2018). “Getting Your Course Load Right.” *Medium*: <https://medium.com/youalberta/getting-your-course-load-right-3d1bd7050e29>

most post-secondary schools require full-time students to take 4-5 courses per semester to complete their program within the standard time frame.<sup>80</sup> However, it is best to speak to a faculty advisor.<sup>81</sup> who can work with students to identify what the best possible course load and options are based on the students' personal needs and availability of classes.<sup>82</sup>

### *Managing Your Time*

When developing your schedule as a student, it is important to consider your different priorities and commitments. This means thinking about part-time/full-time jobs, caregiving responsibilities, extracurricular activities, and personal time. By considering these factors, students can set themselves up for future academic success. Students considering taking a reduced course load should keep in mind that it can cost more and will take longer to complete their program. Students can also take additional courses during the spring/summer semesters to accelerate their program progression.<sup>83</sup>

After registering for courses, students can change/adjust their course load and schedule during the semester. In some instances, students may become overwhelmed during the semester and adjusting their timetable and course load can help alleviate stress associated with school. However, there are three deadlines that students should keep in mind:

1. Adding/Withdrawing period at the start of term, where students will not be penalized and may receive a refund on their tuition.
2. Later drop/withdraw period after the first week of class where students will be financially liable for part of the course's tuition.

Final drop/withdraw period where students may be financially liable for paying for the course and could have their grade reflected on their transcript.

If a student feels overwhelmed or have underestimated their schedule, they can change their schedule after the semester starts. However, there are usually three deadlines to keep in mind:

1. This deadline is usually earlier in the semester, and students can either drop or add a class if it meets the deadline.<sup>84</sup> If a course is dropped before this deadline, the tuition for that course may be refunded.
2. The second deadline may have financial implications, meaning there may be a partial or no refund applied if a course is dropped.<sup>85</sup>
3. The third deadline is the last opportunity to drop a course that is not going well or may no longer fit your schedule.<sup>86</sup>

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80 Ibid.

81 Erin. (n.d.). "Changing your mind on what to study." *University of Waterloo*: <https://uwaterloo.ca/future-students/missing-manual/applying/changing-your-mind-what-study>

82 Danika. (2018). "Getting Your Course Load Right." *Medium*: <https://medium.com/youalberta/getting-your-course-load-right-3d1bd7050e29>

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid.



Dropping a course before the deadline may not impact the student's transcript, but it is best to check with your faculty policies.<sup>87</sup> Regardless of what a student decides, it all comes down to how a schedule and time is managed to have a successful academic career.

## Financial Support

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### Managing Student Finances

At school it is important to manage your financial situation and understand the different options available to students looking for financial support. As you settle into post-secondary school life, there are several solutions that can aid you in paying for tuition, school supplies, and other living expenses. Often, post-secondary institutions have financial services to help students learn to budget and apply for financial support.

In addition to options for Financial Aid and Scholarships and Bursaries (as already detailed on Page 22), there are also opportunities to consider while you are completing your program to support your financial needs. This section will detail additional considerations such as part-time employment, summer jobs, and emergency funds and loans.

### Part Time Employment

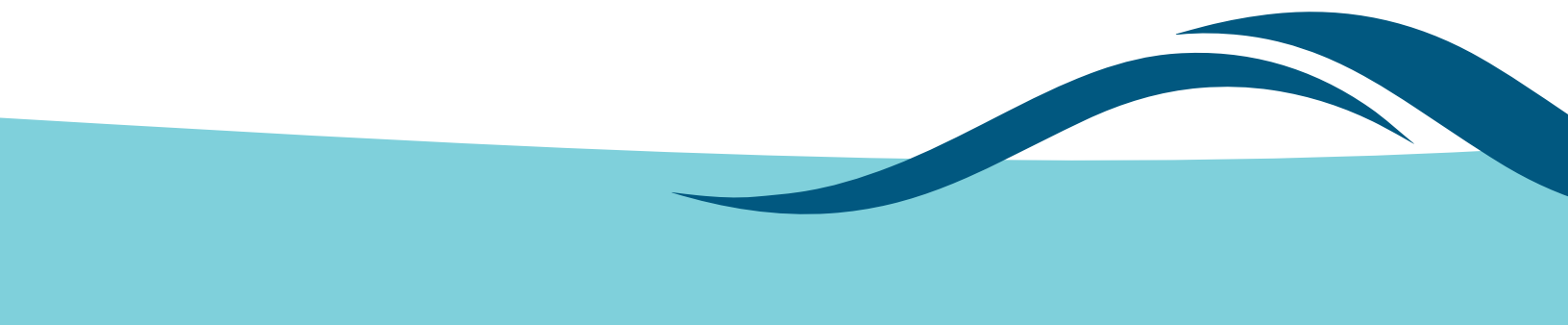
At school, many students decide to take on a part-time job to support themselves financially. Part-time employment can be a fantastic opportunity for students to earn extra cash and gain valuable skills at the same time. Post-secondary institutions will often have job portals or career services that can help connect students to on- and off-campus employers. However, students can also reach out to local employers on their own.

When applying, be mindful of how many hours per week you can manage to work as a student. Most students with part-time employment typically work between 10 and 20 hours per week, leaving them plenty of time to focus on their studies. Moreover, setting your availability when applying to part-time jobs will help prevent burnout and achieve a better work life balance. Often, part-time jobs on campus will be more mindful of student's schedule and will be more mindful to changes in your schedule.

*Students who have loans may have limitations on how much they can work part-time and/or earn. Before taking on a part-time job, make sure to review the terms and conditions of your loan to make sure it will not interfere with your funding.*

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87 Ibid.



## Work Study Programs

Work Study programs offer part-time, paid on-campus employment opportunities to eligible post-secondary students. These programs offer students an opportunity to earn money while learning, developing real world knowledge and transferable skills, and exploring career opportunities.<sup>88</sup> Examples of Work Study jobs include:

- Advancement Clerk
- Finance Assistant
- Marketing Assistant
- Communications Assistant
- Research Assistant<sup>89</sup>

Students looking to participate in a Work Study program should reach out to their student support services advisor for more information. However, some post-secondary schools may not offer Work Study opportunities.

## Summer Jobs

The summer offers an amazing opportunity for university and college students to take a break from school. However, the summer can also be an exciting time to build on your experience and develop your savings for the next school year. In doing so, students should consider looking for summer job opportunities during the school year to improve their chances of finding a job that suits their needs.

Post-secondary students have access to plenty of summer opportunities where students can explore different career paths. For example, the Government of Canada hosts the [Federal Student Work Experience Program](#) where students can explore different opportunities within the public services. Moreover, the Government of Canada supports several opportunities for [Indigenous students and graduates](#). These jobs provide incredible opportunities for Indigenous students looking for a future in the public sector.

Students should also consider researching private sector summer jobs, as businesses will often take on a handful of students during the summer. This is also a fantastic opportunity to develop transferable knowledge that supplements your education. When looking for summer jobs consider using platforms like LinkedIn, Monster, and/or Indeed.

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88 University of Toronto. (n.d.). "Work Study Program." *University of Toronto*: <https://www.registrar.utoronto.ca/finances-and-funding/work-study-program/>

89 Ibid.



## Emergency Funds and Loans

When attending post-secondary school, students may face extenuating circumstances or hardships that impact their finances. In response, many schools have established emergency funds, such as emergency scholarships, to support students going through financial difficulties. In doing so, students are expected to apply for an emergency scholarship to demonstrate they are in a state of financial need. Often, students can access emergency funding through their Student Union, admissions office, and/or faculty advisor. However, emergency funding is only meant to temporarily alleviate financial hardships or bridge gaps in funding. This means that students should prepare a financial plan for their continued finances.

## Student Services and Support

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### Academic Advising

Each post-secondary institution will have student services and support resources available to students. Student services are for everyone, whether a student is facing challenges, or they are doing well.<sup>90</sup> Resource provided through student services include academic advising, financial advising, writing support, and other various support.

Every institution will have an academic advisor within your faculty that can assist you in navigating your academic career from choosing courses, adding and/or dropping courses, ensuring you are on track to graduate, etc. Depending on the support a student needs, academic advisors can guide students to the best office to support their success. There are different types of counselling, some of which include:

1. Academic advisors – used to create your course schedule, adjusting your short- or long-term goals, understanding your degree requirements, etc.
2. Personal counseling – can be used to get support with mental and physical health. Advisor can also direct you to the appropriate department for your concerns.
3. Financial advisors – Financial advisors can help navigate school tuition fees, budgeting, overcoming financial emergencies, understanding the financial implications of adding or dropping a course/program.
4. Indigenous student services – Indigenous student services have different types of culturally-relevant support for students. However, the level of support and services provided to Indigenous students may vary between institutions. Indigenous students' services typically have Elder support, peer support, and a place for Indigenous students to lounge, or study.

**How to access academic advising:** Students can visit their faculty or registrar's office whether that be online, in-person or a call. Usually visiting an academic advisor requires an appointment and that can also be done online or in-person.

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90 Wilfrid Laurier University. (n.d.) "Undergraduate Academic Advising." *Wilfrid Laurier University*: <https://students.wlu.ca/academics/support-and-advising/academic-advising/index.html>



Usually visiting an academic advisor requires students to make an appointment, which can be done in-person or online. Moreover, students who are unsure of where to access academic advising can speak to members of their faculty in-person, online, or by telephone to access more information.

**How to prepare for an academic advising appointment:** It is important to understand your needs as a student to determine the best type of advising for you.<sup>91</sup> However, if you are unsure, it is okay to start with your academic advisor who may be able to direct you to an appropriate department if needed. An academic advisor is a valuable resource that should be used throughout your academic career.<sup>92</sup> Academic advisors can provide students with support and guidance to make informed decisions on your majors, career goals and planning, course selections, switching areas of study and other related concerns.<sup>93</sup>

#### *Step 1 – Contact your advisor*

Be sure to familiarize yourself with your faculty advisor, their availability and how to book appointments. Once you are ready, contact your advisor to introduce yourself, what you are looking for, and booking an appointment.<sup>94</sup>

#### *Step 2 – Be Prepared*

Before going to your appointment make sure you familiarize yourself with the schools policies and procedures around your question. Doing further research may help you in asking questions to your advisor, and best leverage your meeting with them. Together with your advisor you can gain a better understanding of your concerns or goals.<sup>95</sup>

#### *Step 3 – Be Honest*

It is important to be honest with yourself and your advisor. Whether that be the possible challenges you are facing with a course, integrating into the school, or the hurdles that you are facing as a student. Being honest with your advisor allows them to help you overcome your challenges and direct you towards success.<sup>96</sup>

#### *Step 4 – Customize Your Academic Degree*

An academic advisor can help you explore all the different academic options that your post-secondary has to offer. Students sometimes change their mind about the program they started with or are conflicted between two programs, and an advisor can help you consider your different academic options.<sup>97</sup>

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91 IvyWise Academic Advising. (2025). "Meeting with Academic Advisors: How to Prepare for Academic Advising Appointments." IvyWise: <https://www.ivywise.com/blog/meeting-with-academic-advisors-how-to-prepare-for-academic-advising-appointments/>

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid.

96 Ibid.

97 IvyWise Academic Advising. (2025). "Meeting with Academic Advisors: How to Prepare for Academic Advising Appointments." IvyWise: <https://www.ivywise.com/blog/meeting-with-academic-advisors-how-to-prepare-for-academic-advising-appointments/>



### Step 5 – Never be Afraid to Ask Questions

Always ask your advisor any questions as they are the most well-connected person you know on campus, and they have a lot of experience helping students.<sup>98</sup>

Here are some example questions that can guide your appointment with an academic advisor:

1. What extracurricular activities should I pursue to prepare me for my career? Does our school have student clubs that I can join?
2. How are my grades? Am I on track to graduate on my time?
3. I am interested in learning more about X, is there a course or program I can take or switch to?<sup>99</sup>

## Counselling and Wellness

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Students at most post-secondary institutions will have access to mental and physical health services, and other wellness programs. These services are often integrated into your provincial/territorial healthcare system or your tuition fees. Therefore, in most cases students do not need to pay additional fees to access any of these services offered on-campus.

### Mental Health and Counselling

Students may experience a range of challenges which can impede their personal and academic success. It is important to know that students are not alone throughout this process and at any time during the student's academic career they can reach out to a counsellor to discuss concerns with a professional in a safe, private, and friendly environment. Alternatively, Indigenous students can reach out to Elders on campus or an Indigenous counselor if this program is available at your institution.

There are different forms of counselling such as individual or group counselling. Group counselling is counsellor-facilitated opportunity to interact and connect with other students in a supportive environment.<sup>100</sup> However, individual counselling may provide the privacy students need to discuss their concerns and problems with someone in a safe and private environment. Regardless of the form of counselling, campus counsellors usually operate the same way as a private practice counsellor, where all information shared with the counsellor is strictly confidential.<sup>101</sup> Counsellors cannot share any information about your counselling session or that the student even attended counselling, unless permitted by the student.<sup>102</sup> Counsellors may be mandated to share information if a person's life is in danger, including your own, if there is harm done to a minor, or if information is

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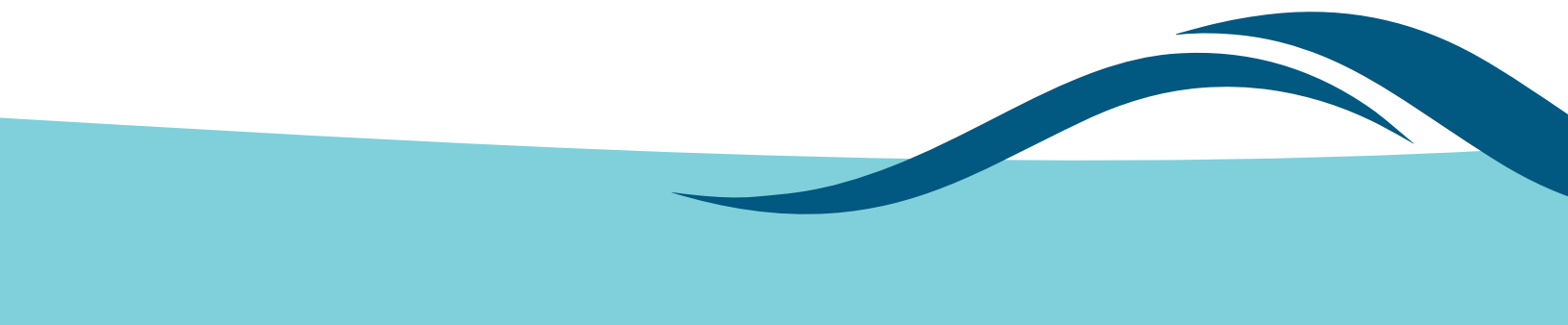
98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 George Brown College. (n.d.). "Learn More About Counselling and Confidentiality." *George Brown College*: <https://www.georgebrown.ca/current-students/services/counselling/learn-more-about-counselling-and-confidentiality>

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid.



subpoenaed by a court of law.<sup>103</sup> Policies may vary from institutions across Canada, and it is important to familiarize yourself and adhere to those policies and regulations.

## QUICK FACTS

- All registered students can access on campus counselling services
- Counselling sessions are usually once a week and 60 minutes long
- Usually, no referrals are needed from you General Practitioner
- Students can discuss any of their personal or academic concerns
- You can request to change counsellors at any time if one is not a match
- Students can request extension or accommodation with academic deadlines if their mental health is impeding on their academic success.
- If you see your counselor in a public setting, you don't have to acknowledge them if you'd prefer to keep your situation private.

### Physical Health

Your physical health is just as important as your mental health. The quality of your physical health will determine everything, from managing your stress, ability to be present for your family and friends, and working towards your academic success. While you have options to seek physical health support outside of your institutions there are also options for on-campus medical support.

#### *Campus Health Centres*

Most post-secondary schools will have dedicated health centers on campus, where students can receive a variety of physical health services. These services may include:

- General medical care: medical check-up for illness, injury, or routine checks
- Vaccination: Immunization for diseases like flu or travel-related vaccines
- Sexual and Reproductive health services: contraception, STI testing, gynecological care

For medical care that cannot be provided by the campus physician, referrals may be provided to local doctors or specialist.

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103 Ibid.





## Student Health Plans

Post-secondary institutions in Canada typically offer some form of health insurance coverage for students, which may provide either full or partial health coverage. If you already have an existing health insurance plan, you can submit proof of your coverage to avoid incurring additional charges.<sup>104</sup> This includes plans you may have through a parent, spouse, a band council, or Health Canada.<sup>105</sup> If you decide to opt out of the student health insurance, be sure to inform your school's financial department to avoid incurring any extra fees.<sup>106</sup> Conversely, if you choose to maintain student health insurance coverage, these plans typically cover:

- Visits to doctors or specialists
- Prescription medications
- Physiotherapy
- Dental and Vision care<sup>107</sup>

However, students may be uncertain about the best decision for their health and lifestyle. In that case, they can always make an appointment with a financial advisor on campus to gain a better understanding of the health coverage options that suit their needs.

*Note for new students: It may take some time to get your account setup and working to access any health plans.*<sup>108</sup>

In addition to healthcare coverage, students have access to various health resources. To learn more about the services and programs offered at your institution, you can typically find this information under the health or counseling services website. If you cannot locate it on the website, reaching out to your advisor or discussing it with peers is always a good starting point. Other health services can include:

- Vision Coverage
- Crisis Response Helpline and Suicide Prevention
- Parenthood Support
- Food Security Support
- Centre for Sexual Violence Support
- Women's Mental Health Group
- Sexual Health
- Dietitian Services

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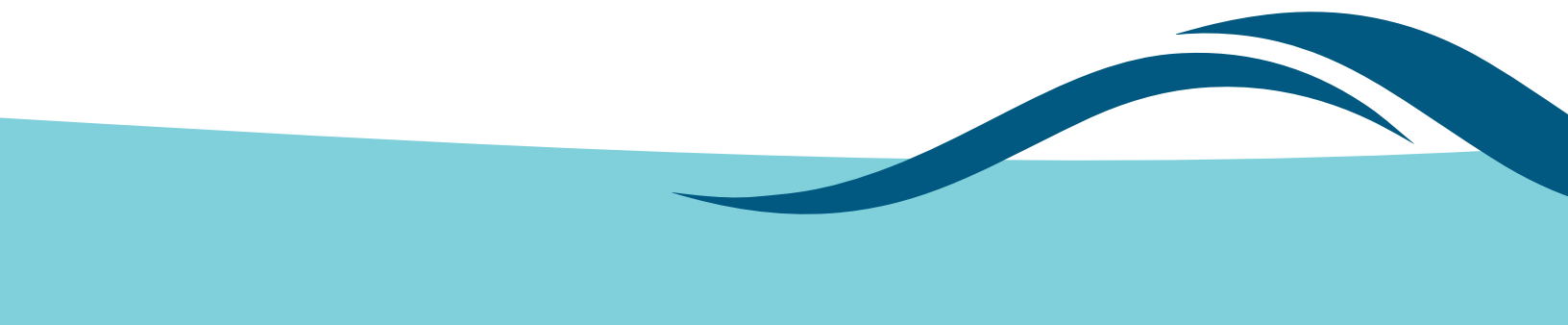
104 University of Toronto Students' Union. (2020). "Health and Dental Plan." *University of Toronto Students' Union*: <https://www.utsu.ca/health-and-dental/>

105 Ibid.

106 Ibid

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid.



## Indigenous Student Services

Almost all post-secondary institutions have an Indigenous Student Services center dedicated to providing culturally supportive programs and services for Indigenous students.<sup>109</sup> These specialized offerings strike a balance between academic excellence and traditional teachings, fostering a deep connection to culture.<sup>110</sup> Indigenous Student Services play a crucial role in establishing a supportive community throughout your educational journey, playing a critical role in connecting Indigenous students with Indigenous communities and culturally relevant resources.<sup>111</sup>

Indigenous Student Support Services often provide comprehensive approaches to assistance, allowing Indigenous students to receive help for all their concerns in one spot.<sup>112</sup> Typically, the Indigenous Student Services center has an office accessible to all Indigenous students, offering support in the following areas:

- Academic advising
- Bursary and scholarship information
- Financial planning
- Study spaces
- Tutoring and academic support
- Community and peer connections
- Counseling
- Traditional healing and advocacy
- Space for lunches and breaks
- Elder support<sup>113</sup>

In some instances, colleges/universities may offer additional programs and services to Indigenous students to support their success. Some examples of how post-secondary school programs and services support Indigenous students include:

1. Employment opportunities that are only available to or prioritize Indigenous students, such as internships, work-study programs, summer programs.
2. Cultural and traditional support services where Indigenous students can participate

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109 Toronto Metropolitan University. (n.d.). "Gdoo-maawnjidimi Mompil Indigenous Student Services." *Toronto Metropolitan University*: <https://www.torontomu.ca/indigenous-student-services/>

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid.

112 Toronto Metropolitan University. (n.d.). "Gdoo-maawnjidimi Mompil Indigenous Student Services." *Toronto Metropolitan University*: <https://www.torontomu.ca/indigenous-student-services/>

113 Ibid.



in sweat lodges, talking circles, and ceremonial practices, as well as spaces to meet with Elders, healers and other students.

3. Indigenous-focused academic courses or programs that may focus on topics like language, history, governance, and culture.
4. Indigenous student advisors who can provide personalized support related to academic success, transitioning to post-secondary life, and navigating institutional systems.
5. Support for student parents and caregivers such as childcare, parenting workshops, and support services.
6. Indigenous research opportunities that engage in research that reflects Indigenous knowledge, perspective, and methodologies, often in collaboration with Indigenous communities.

## Disability Services

Students with a disability are protected by a combination of federal and provincial/territorial laws, although the specifics can vary across jurisdictions. The protections primarily arise from the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom*, and provincial/territorial human rights codes and post-secondary institutions must uphold these rights and protections to accommodate students with disabilities.<sup>114</sup>

Post-secondary institutions have a range of delivery methods that are structured to meet the federal and provincial/territorial laws to accommodate students with a disability.<sup>115</sup> Most, if not all institutions have specialized facilities, policies, equipment, and services for students with disabilities, but these models may vary widely based on institutions.<sup>116</sup>

*Steps students with disability can take:*

For many students with a disability planning and understanding what accommodations are available may be integral to their educational success. The following are some tips on how students can advocate for themselves and plan for the appropriate accommodation if needed:

- Reach out to the Accessibility Centre when applying to obtain information on available services and inquire about how they can access services. Accessibility advisors can assist students in accessing assessments and funding to support students with disabilities.<sup>117</sup>
- Register with your accessibility centre early to allow for a smooth transition and access to accommodations on the first day of school.<sup>118</sup>

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114 Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2024). "The opportunity to succeed: Achieving barrier-free education for students with disabilities." *Ontario Human Rights Commission*: <https://www3.ohrc.on.ca/en/opportunity-succeed-achieving-barrier-free-education-students-disabilities/post-secondary-education>

115 Ibid.

116 Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2024). "The opportunity to succeed: Achieving barrier-free education for students with disabilities." *Ontario Human Rights Commission*: <https://www3.ohrc.on.ca/en/opportunity-succeed-achieving-barrier-free-education-students-disabilities/post-secondary-education>

117 National Education Association of Disabled Students. (2012). "Enhancing Accessibility in Post-Secondary Education Institutions - A Guide for Disability Service Providers." *National Educational Association of Disabled Students*: [https://www.neads.ca/en/norc/eag/eag\\_en.pdf](https://www.neads.ca/en/norc/eag/eag_en.pdf)

118 Ibid.



- Meet with your accessibility advisors often to discuss your accommodation needs. We suggest doing this once you receive your course schedule.<sup>119</sup>
- Develop an Accommodations Plan that outlines the specific services, equipment and/or accommodations needed to successfully complete in-class attendance, testing, and out-of-class accommodations with your accessibility advisor.<sup>120</sup>
  - ↳ Speak with your accessibility advisor to make sure your professors/instructors are informed about your accommodations in the first week of class. Students can also meet with their professors/instructors to discuss their accommodation plan. Should you encounter difficulties with an instructor, consider seeking the advice of your accessibility advisor for further assistance.<sup>121</sup>
- Alternatively, the student's advisor can deliver copies of the accommodation letter directly to the instructor and students can self-identify with the instructor during class.<sup>122</sup>
- Most importantly, students should stay up to date with deadlines and submit their documentation on time. In the case that students do miss the deadline, always reach out to the Accessibility Centre advisors to see if there are any other available options.<sup>123</sup>

Some of the accommodations available to students are:

- Notetakers may be arranged for students that have difficulties taking clear and concise notes.<sup>124</sup>
- Visual Language Interpreting for students who are deaf and/or hard of hearing. Interpreters will provide instruction from the course instructor in Sign Language for eligible students.<sup>125</sup> Deaf or hard of hearing students may also have access to captioning services. However, these services may be difficult to find at some post-secondary schools.<sup>126</sup>
- Classroom features, such as priority seating, access to electrical outlets, or near speaker systems, may be provided to students to ensure they can attend class.<sup>127</sup>

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119 Ibid.

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid.

122 Ibid.

123 National Education Association of Disabled Students. (2012). "Enhancing Accessibility in Post-Secondary Education Institutions - A Guide for Disability Service Providers." *National Educational Association of Disabled Students*: [https://www.neads.ca/en/norc/eag/eag\\_en.pdf](https://www.neads.ca/en/norc/eag/eag_en.pdf)

124 Ibid.

125 Ibid.

126 Ibid.

127 Ibid.



- Procedural adjustments, such as a reduced course load or amendments to course syllabus, that could be made by instructors to ensure students can successfully complete a course.<sup>128</sup>
- Learning skills services that teach students valuable skills, such as time management and organizational skills, to help students' complete assignments and stay on top of coursework.<sup>129</sup>
- Testing accommodations, such as extra time or writing in a separate writing space, to assist student in writing a test/exam.<sup>130</sup>
- Tutoring services for students with disabilities.<sup>131</sup>
- Special Arrangements – The student's particular situation may require accessibility accommodations methods that are not already in place, if this is the case, then students should speak with the advisor, and they will assist with making the appropriate arrangements.<sup>132</sup>

## Changing Programs or Taking a Break

Choosing a course or program can be difficult and can have significant implications on your future career. However, it is completely normal for students to change their mind and course of study while at school. If you are considering changing your course of study speak with an academic or Indigenous advisor.<sup>133</sup> By meeting with an advisor, you can appropriately weigh your academic options and choose the best available option.<sup>134</sup>

### What students should know before they request to change their programs:

- Understand the degree requirements and the qualifications
- The program may affect the tuition fees
- Reach out to the faculty advising office of the program you want to change
- Students may only be eligible to change their program once per academic year
- Certain programs may have different deadlines for transfers or changes

128 Ibid.

129 Ibid.

130 Ibid.

131 Ibid.

132 National Education Association of Disabled Students. (2012). "Enhancing Accessibility in Post-Secondary Education Institutions - A Guide for Disability Service Providers." *National Educational Association of Disabled Students*: [https://www.neads.ca/en/norc/eag/eag\\_en.pdf](https://www.neads.ca/en/norc/eag/eag_en.pdf)

133 Erin. (n.d.). "Changing your mind on what to study." *University of Waterloo*: <https://uwaterloo.ca/future-students/missing-manual/applying/changing-your-mind-what-study>

134 By meeting with an advisor, you can appropriately weigh your academic options and choose the best available option Ibid.

## Before Program Start Date

Students may change their mind after they have applied and accepted their offer of admission. However, students may be able to change their program before its start date. In some instances, students may be able to revise their application and make appropriate changes before the start of the program. We suggest that students reach out to their registrars office to understand their options and deadlines for changing into a different program.<sup>135</sup>

If the deadline for changing programs has passed, interested students should reach out to their academic advisor to learn about their options.<sup>136</sup>

## Once Your Program Starts

Students can still change their mind once they have started their program. There are some options available for students who wish to change their programs. It is important to note while students are not locked into a program, changing programs may take time and money.

**Switching your major:** Students wishing to change their major/program should note that in some cases, students may not be able to transfer all their credits toward the new major and may need to start from year one.<sup>137</sup> The rules may vary depending on the new program the student wants to start, and it is best to speak to the academic advisor who may direct the student more appropriately.<sup>138</sup>

**Specializations, Double Majors, and Minor:** In most programs, students can take elective courses, which serve as an excellent way to explore other areas of interest. Students can also enroll in elective related to programs they are considering switching to.<sup>139</sup> If a student has already invested time and money into their program but wishes to make a change, they can consider adding a specialization, double major, or a minor.<sup>140</sup>

## Changing Schools

In some instances, students may no longer feel that their school aligns with their study interests, career goals, or financial/personal circumstances. This may lead to students pursuing a transfer to a different university/college that better suits their needs. While exploring a transfer/change in schools, students may be eligible to take courses at two different institutions to determine if their new preferred institutions meet their needs. However, students should remember that credits may not be transferable which could delay their graduation. If you are interested in changing schools, meet with an academic advisor to explore options and receive assistance in navigating the transition.<sup>141</sup>

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135 York University. (n.d.). "Program Change." *York University*: <https://myacademicrecord.students.yorku.ca/program-change>

136 Ibid.

137 Ibid.

138 Ibid.

139 Ibid.

140 Ibid.

141 Erin. (n.d.). "Changing your mind on what to study." *University of Waterloo*: <https://uwaterloo.ca/future-students/missing-manual/applying/changing-your-mind-what-study>



## Taking a Leave of Absence

There may come a time when students need to step back from their studies, and if that is the case there are important factors to consider if you decide to take a leave of absence for medical, academic, or personal reasons.<sup>142</sup> Some things to consider when taking a leave of absence:

- 1. When to withdraw** – While students may experience unexpected circumstances it is best to withdraw before registering in classes or before course drop deadlines.<sup>143</sup> If students are actively enrolled in classes and have missed the drop deadline, students should then speak to their academic advisor. If a course is not dropped before the deadline the course may remain on the transcript with the grade earned while abandoned courses receive a final grade of F, in most cases.<sup>144</sup>
- 2. Academic Consideration** – Before taking a leave from your program students should review their academic and degree requirement to ensure they are on track to graduate according to the students desired date.<sup>145</sup> Taking a leave of absence may push back the graduation date. Also, some courses may only be offered during specific times throughout the year and may also be a prerequisite to future courses essential for the program - this is important to note.<sup>146</sup> While each institution may have different requirements it is best to speak with your academic advisor to explore your options.<sup>147</sup>
- 3. Financial Considerations** – Students should consider financial implications, for programs such as provincial financial programs, federal financial programs, or scholarships, grants etc.<sup>148</sup> It is best to speak to a financial advisor and/or an Indigenous advisor to see if any outstanding fees will impact your leave of absence or to avoid any other service or tuition charges.<sup>149</sup>
- 4. Other Implications** – A leave of absence can affect various aspects, such as access to school resources, health benefits, extracurricular activities, leading student clubs etc. If you are considering enrolling in courses at a different school while on leave. In that case, important to consult with your primary institution first, as some schools may not permit this, which could complicate your return. Furthermore, this decision may also impact future academic opportunities such as application for medical school, law school, grad school etc. In that case, students should consult with those schools to understand how a leave of absence might impact their eligibility for admission.<sup>150</sup>

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142 University of Toronto-Scarborough Office of the Registrar. (n.d.). "Leave of Absence." *University of Toronto*: <https://www.utoronto.ca/registrar/leave-absence>

143 Ibid

144 Queen's University. (n.d.). "Leaving and Returning to Studies." *Queen's University*: <https://www.queensu.ca/artsci/undergraduate/student-services/leaving-and-returning-to-studies>

145 University of Toronto-Scarborough Office of the Registrar. (n.d.). "Leave of Absence." *University of Toronto*: <https://www.utoronto.ca/registrar/leave-absence>

146 Ibid.

147 Queen's University. (n.d.). "Leaving and Returning to Studies." *Queen's University*: <https://www.queensu.ca/artsci/undergraduate/student-services/leaving-and-returning-to-studies>

148 University of Toronto-Scarborough Office of the Registrar. (n.d.). "Leave of Absence." *University of Toronto*: <https://www.utoronto.ca/registrar/leave-absence>

149 Ibid.

150 Queen's University. (n.d.). "Leaving and Returning to Studies." *Queen's University*: <https://www.queensu.ca/artsci/undergraduate/student-services/leaving-and-returning-to-studies>



### **Returning from a Leave of Absence**

When you're ready to resume your studies, you might need to verify that you haven't enrolled at another institution, that you have at least one course reflected on your transcript, have no outstanding financial balance and that you meet other eligibility requirements set by your school. Students can always consult with their academic advisor on the eligibility requirement to return to your studies. If you did enroll in another institution while on leave, you may be required to reapply to your original school.

If students were required to withdraw and placed on academic probation, then they should consult their academic advisor to review some strategies for raising your GPA and eligibility on registering back into courses.





# Phase 3: Graduation

## Graduation and Completing Your Program

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Graduation from university or college is an exciting and important milestone, but it requires careful planning to ensure meeting all requirements. By following below checklist, you can prepare for your graduation and focus on transitioning from school to workplace.

### Checklist for Graduation:<sup>151</sup>

1. Check your student portal or academic dashboard to ensure you have completed the total credits required for your program. Each program and department depending on your institution may required different number of credits, so verify these details in advance by checking with your education advisor from your department.
2. To avoid missing any requirements, contact graduation advisor to get double check your account.
3. Ensure that all outstanding balance in your student account is cleared before applying for graduation.
4. Register to receive your degree: Student about to graduate must register to receive their degree whether or not they are attending Convocation ceremony. Most of universities and colleges offering online registration through student portal. Check your school's website about degree registration period by faculty or department. Once you have applied for graduation, you can track your graduation status in your student account/center.
5. Check all the deadlines regarding request or cancel gradation, request name changes, deadline to pay all outstanding debts, updating your personal information if there are any changes such as your email, phone number, permanent.

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151 University of Ottawa (2025)- <https://www.uottawa.ca/current-students/obtain-your-degree/students-about-to-graduate>

## Preparation for Convocation

Before registering for convocation, make sure to review the graduation procedures outlined above to confirm that you meet all the necessary requirements. Most universities and colleges offer a dedicated graduation ceremony for Indigenous students. Detailed information about the convocation timeline and procedures can be found on the Indigenous Student Center page of your institution's website.<sup>152</sup>

There are several steps you need to complete to successfully participate in convocation. At most universities and colleges, convocation ceremonies are held twice a year, in the spring and fall.<sup>153</sup> Indigenous students registered with their institution's Indigenous Student Center will receive email notifications regarding the timeline and registration process for convocation.<sup>154</sup>

Indigenous students have the option to participate in both the Indigenous Convocation Ceremony and the regular convocation ceremony. In most cases, attending the Indigenous Graduation Ceremony is free of charge, and there are no restrictions on the number of guests you can invite to the event.<sup>155</sup>

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152 University of Ottawa (2025). Indigenous Graduate Honoring Ceremony. Link: <https://www.uottawa.ca/about-us/indigenous/indigenous-graduate-honouring-ceremony#:~:text=The%20ceremony%20is%20held%20earlier,the%20end%20of%20final%20exams.>

153 Ibid.

154 Ibid.

155 Ibid.



# Concluding Remarks

This toolkit is a direct response to the ongoing challenges faced by Indigenous youth in accessing post-secondary education opportunities. The contents of this guide were inspired by feedback provided by Indigenous youth from across Canada and responds to the unique barriers they face to pursuing further education.



# Glossary

**Academic Advisor** - A professional who guides prospective and current students through the admission process, course registration and selection, program planning, graduation requirements, scholarship and more.

**Academic Probation** – When a student’s academic performance is below the minimum standards set by the program and the student as a consequence is put on academic probation.

**Acceptance Letter** – A formal letter sent by the institution the student applied to informing them that they have been accepted into their applied program.

**Accessibility Services** – Support services that help students navigate accessibility services by providing accommodations, such as note-takers, extra time for exams, learning environment and ensuing equal access to education.

**Application Deadline** – The last day by which a student must submit their application or form for admission to a program.

**Conditional Offer** – An offer of admission that is dependent on meeting specific requirements, such as the final high school or adult school grade.

**Counselling Services** – A department that provides mental health support, including counselling for personal or academic concerns, accommodation for exams, tests or class attendance, and other personal issues.

**Course Load** – The number of courses a student takes during a semester or academic year. Usually this could be between 3-5 courses per semester or year.

**Course Registration** – the process of selecting and signing up for specific courses for the academic term.

**Financial Advisor** – a professional who guides students plan and manage their finances which includes student loans, grants, bursaries, financial aid, and offer other financial advice.

**GPA (Grade Point Average)** – It’s the number that represents the student’s academic performance. GPAs are calculated by dividing the total number of grade points earned by the total number of courses taken.

**Grants/Bursaries** – A type of financial aid that is not needed to be repaid and provided based on the student’s financial need or criteria.



**Indigenous Student Services** – Supports services specifically for Indigenous students, usually encompasses cultural programs, mentorship, peer support, Elder support, academic and financial advising.

**Orientation Week** – Also known as “Welcome Week” is a period of event that welcomes new students to an institution the week before the academic year begins. This is an opportunity for students to meet other students, participate in activities, and learn more about the school.

**Prerequisite** – A course or requirement that must be completed before a student can enroll in a course or program.

**Program of Study** – The academic path or discipline the student chooses to pursue, such as Sociology, Business, Indigenous Studies, Environmental studies.

**Program Requirements** - The courses, grades and prerequisites needed to be eligible for admission to a particular program or course.

**Registrar’s Office** – The office responsible for administrative work that manages student records, registration for courses, academic transcripts, and overall student academic information.

**Student Clubs** – A student-led organization focused on a special interest. Examples include debate clubs, cultural clubs, sports clubs.

**Student Health Plan** - A type of health insurance specifically designed for students which is integrated into the student fees. It provides coverage for various medical expenses.

**Student Loan** – The amount of money borrowed from the government or private lenders to pay for the tuition and other educational expenses. Student loans must be repaid, with possible interest rates, after the completion of a program.

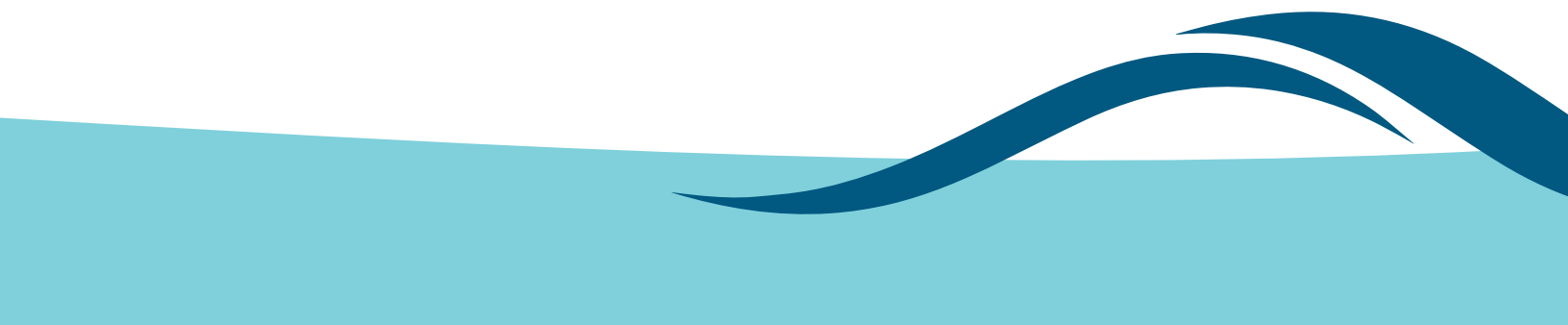
**Student Services** – A department that offers various support services including academic advising, career counselling, and mental health resources.

**Student Union** – An organization that represents student interests and provides services like events, clubs and advocacy groups to join or receive support.

**Transcript** – An official record of a student’s academic performance that indicates the courses taken, the year it was completed and the grade earned.

**Tuition Fees** – The amount of money charged by an institution for the courses that students enroll in. The fee can vary depending on programs, institutions, and other factors.

**Writing Centre** – A resource center that provides students with various writing support including help with essays, research paper, resume writing and other writing assignments.









Native Women's  
Association of Canada



L'Association des femmes  
autochtones du Canada

