

## What are Postsecondary Educational Programs?

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Today, there are many educational choices available for students with disabilities after they graduate from high school. It is important to choose the program, style of learning, and environment that fits your son or daughter's personality, learning style, and needs.

Early planning for postsecondary education should occur in middle or junior high school. Planning includes decisions about what classes to take related to future career goals and the type of postsecondary education program required to reach those goals. Exploring the student's interests and providing opportunities to interact with adults in the field of an area of interest are all a part of planning for transition.

For youth with disabilities, another important part of planning for postsecondary education, is establishing contact with the office for students with disabilities at the program your youth decides to attend. This office is listed on each program's website, but you may have to use the college or university's search function to find it.

### What are the similarities and differences between a liberal arts college and a university?

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#### Similarities

Both liberal arts **colleges** and **universities** offer bachelor's degrees in arts and humanities, science and engineering, education, or business. Both college and university programs take roughly four years to complete. There are three types of classes that liberal arts college or university students must take: general education, classes toward a major, and electives. The required number of general education classes must successfully be completed before graduation by all students. In the junior or senior year, students in colleges or universities must decide on a major course of study such as history, biology, or education, and take more advanced classes in that specific area in order to meet the requirements for receiving a Bachelor's degree (B.A.). Liberal arts college and university undergraduate programs prepare students for positions in such fields as nursing, teaching, information technology, social work, etc., and offer graduate programs in architecture, dentistry, engineering, law, medicine, veterinary science, and other many others.

#### Typical admission requirements:

- **High school transcript and coursework:** A high school transcript is a document that lists all the courses your youth has taken, the grade received in each class, and the cumulative grade point average (GPA). Each college or university has its own specific requirements for high school courses that need to be completed for admission. For example, some universities require classes that reflect a federally developed set of "rigorous standards" for high school students. This would be demonstrated in the specific standards for high school graduation in your state. Standardized tests are given each year and are developed based on "rigorous standards." High school transcripts, which include test scores, must be submitted with all college or university applications.

- **Grade Point Average:** Liberal arts colleges and universities identify a desired high school GPA for potential students. The GPA is found on the high school transcript.
- **College entrance exam:** The American College Test (ACT) and the SAT (formerly Scholastic Aptitude Test) are the two most commonly required entrance exams. Each college and university specifies a range of scores that are considered acceptable for admission.
- **Student essay:** Most liberal arts colleges and universities require a personal essay, or answers to a set of questions, describing what the student thinks about a specific statement developed by the institution. Prospective students are challenged to think “out of the box” in order to answer effectively.
- **Community involvement:** Some liberal arts colleges or universities require evidence of a student’s community involvement, community service, or volunteer projects.
- **Letters of recommendation:** These letters can be from teachers, administrators, coaches, and others who had an important influence on the student’s life.

## Differences

**Universities** typically have program options which are broad in scope. For example, a university can be composed of colleges or departments that include law, medicine, engineering, and liberal arts. **Liberal arts colleges** tend to have smaller, more narrowly focused programs in areas of the liberal arts in some of the same fields but tend to be focused on the liberal arts.

**Universities** tend to have large enrollments and may feel less personal. Students may find it challenging to access individual attention or support services. Liberal arts **colleges** usually have smaller enrollments and provide more individual student attention and support.

**Some universities** have a one year (or more) on-campus residency requirement. **Liberal arts colleges** tend to have longer residency requirements. Residency means living on-campus.

**Degrees can lead to occupations in:** math, science, the arts, social sciences, psychology, information technology, nursing, education, business administration, and engineering, among others.

**Parents should consider** *their youth’s ability to function on their own, ask for support, and live independently in a liberal arts college or university environment before making a decision about enrolling in these institutions.*

## **What are the similarities and differences between a two-year college (community college) and a vocational or technical school?**

**Two-year colleges** (sometimes called community colleges) are typically publicly-funded, while **vocational or technical institutes** may be publicly or privately-funded. They both offer a variety of degrees or certificates that are easily applied to future employment.

## Similarities

### **Admission requirements for a two-year community college and vocational or technical schools:**

- **High school transcript:** An official high school transcript is a document that lists all the courses your youth has taken, the grade received for each, and the cumulative grade point average (GPA).
- **High school diploma or equivalent:** A high school diploma or its equivalent is required for most two-year colleges, vocational, or technical schools.
- **College entrance exam or educational assessment test:** Tests such as the American College Test (ACT) and SAT are the two most commonly required. If the student has not taken the ACT or SAT, the applicant

will need to take an educational assessment test – usually the Computer-Adaptive Placement Assessment and Support System (COMPASS).

- **Student essay and a physical (health) exam:** A student essay can be a requirement but this is not typical. A health physical and list of immunizations is often part of the admissions process

**Two-year community colleges** offer Associate of Arts (A.A.) or Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) degrees and typically offer programs with credits that transfer to a four-year college or university degree program. **All three two-year schools (two-year community colleges, vocational and technical schools** offer certificates needed to work in specific fields such as Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), nursing assistant, business, general contractor, or radiology technician. Vocational, technical, and two-year community colleges rarely have on-campus residency requirements.

## Differences

**Community colleges** offer courses for credit in many fields that can be used as stepping stones to enrolling in a four-year college or university program. **Vocational and technical schools** offer some courses that might transfer to a college or university for credit, but it is important to check with staff before enrolling. The wide variety of certificates offered in these programs helps individuals enter the job market directly without further coursework. Vocational and technical schools frequently adapt their coursework to meet the needs of the changing job market.

**Community colleges** often have traditional areas of study such as business management, mathematics, or language study, and may have a designated program designed to make it easy for students to transfer to a four-year college or university.

**Program completion or degrees in vocational and technical schools lead to occupations such as:** *nursing assistant, EMT, beginning accounting, HVAC, construction, plumbing, cosmetology, electrician, computer management, dental hygiene, and other technical fields.* Parents should consider the school's graduation and post-school employment rate when making decisions to enroll their son or daughter.

## What are the differences between public and private postsecondary education programs?

A **public** university or liberal arts college is partially financially supported by state funds, and its administrators report to a Board of Regents (usually elected) or Board of Trustees (may be elected or appointed by the governor) and the state legislature for budget and policy decisions. Public universities are also supported by tuition, research, grants, and endowment funds.

**Private** universities or liberal arts colleges may be non-profit or for-profit institutions. A private college or university president reports to a Board of Trustees that sets the budget and policies of the university. Tuition, investment, and endowment (donations) are the primary financial supports of a private university. However, most private schools accept financial aid and grant funds from the federal government and must follow the same rules regarding students with disabilities as public colleges or programs. Many online schools and some colleges are for-profit institutions.

**Parents should consider costs as well as class size when making the decision of whether a public or private program fits their youth's needs.** Tuition is usually much higher at a private liberal arts college or university, whether it is for-profit or not. Your student may be eligible for financial aid that would make private and public colleges more affordable. Public universities are partially supported with state funds and are typically less expensive. All postsecondary students must fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid ([FAFSA](#)). Be sure to ask for assistance completing the application if it seems unclear.

## Questions for Parents and Youth about Postsecondary Planning

### 1. Is my son or daughter considering a four-year college or university? Is this setting attractive to your young adult?

#### When beginning the exploration process, be prepared to consider the following:

- Admission requirements: SAT or ACT scores, grades, high school courses taken, extracurricular and community activities requirements
- Advocacy: Office for Students with Disabilities or Section 504 Officer — accommodations needed, eligibility requirements, professor notification, early registration, assistive technology, online learning software, interpreters, auxiliary aids and services, classroom/building accessibility, testing accommodations, and others
- Documentation of disability
- Summary of Performance (SOP)
- Career goals
- College or career placement center availability
- Housing issues: on-campus residency requirements, types of housing available, timelines for reservations, accessibility
- Extracurricular or community activities: opportunities to participate in, attend, or volunteer for sports, arts, clubs, social and music events
- Transportation: near to bus, rapid transit, parking, special transportation needs
- Graduation and post-graduation employment rates

### 2. Is my son or daughter considering a two-year, vocational, or technical college? Is this setting attractive to your young adult?

#### When beginning the exploration process, be prepared to address the following:

- Advocacy: Office for Students with Disabilities or Section 504 Officer — accommodations needed, eligibility requirements, professor notification, early registration, assistive technology, online learning software, interpreters, auxiliary aids and services, classroom/building accessibility, testing accommodations, and others
- Career goals
- Summary of Performance (SOP)
- Admissions requirements: changes from open enrollment in the past to taking entrance exams, remedial classes required, grades, high school transcripts, GED, demonstration of specific skill sets
- Documentation of disability
- Housing: flexible
- Extracurricular or community activities: availability of sports, arts, clubs, social events, music events to attend, volunteer opportunities, career centers to visit
- Career placement centers
- Rates of employment after completing the program