

CHOOSING TERTIARY STUDY AT A UNIVERSITY OR TAFE



There are many factors to consider when you are weighing up courses and the institutions that offer them, but the key considerations include the following:

- **Why is the subject matter important for me?** The first step to success is deciding what you are interested in and reading the course handbook thoroughly to ensure that the course leads to the career you want.
- **How much choice will they allow me?** Some courses (engineering, for example) require all students to complete the same ‘core’ subjects to meet industry and government accreditation requirements. Other courses in fields that are not regulated (particularly generalist courses like arts) allow you to choose a lot of electives and graduate with a specialisation or major. Check course handbooks to see how much choice is offered.
- **How will I be learning?** Some courses involve a lot of writing, while others are very practical, requiring lab work (engineering or science) or extensive practice to perfect artistic techniques (performing arts or design). Another group of courses, especially Vocational Education & Training (VET) courses, focus on developing practical skills to a required level of competency.
- **What study style will suit me?** You should be able to understand how you will be spending the majority of your time and whether the work is more practical or theoretical by contacting the course coordinator or referring to the course handbook.
- **Are there international study opportunities available for me?** Some courses integrate a compulsory international study experience or industry placement as part of the course content. Other courses allow students to undertake optional study tours, summer semesters or exchange opportunities. Be sure to check out the opportunities available within your course and whether credit is granted.
- **Will there be an industry focus?** An increasing number of courses focus on providing students with practical, industry-based skills and knowledge. While VET courses have always had a strong industry component, many higher education courses are also incorporating stronger ties with industry to ensure students gain ‘real world’ skills.
- **How will I be able to study?** Courses may be offered full time, part time, by distance education (including on-line learning and/or a mixture of on-line and attendance) or on an accelerated trimester schedule. Not all courses offer all options, and some institutions may offer more flexibility than others.

- **What are the entry requirements?** Most courses are offered at many institutions and entry difficulty varies considerably. Entry may require a certain level of education, a required Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) score, subject prerequisites or industry experience. Some courses rely more heavily upon the submission of a portfolio, an interview or an audition. Check the course guide or ask your careers teacher.
- **Will 'special' applications or applicants be accepted?** Alternative entry criteria may be considered by the admissions office at a university or TAFE Institute. This may include an aptitude test (the STAT test being the most common) in place of an ATAR score, special entry requirements or programs for students from certain groups in society (Indigenous students or students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, for example).
- **What will it cost me?** Be sure to investigate the availability of government-subsidised offerings, such as HECS-HELP for Commonwealth Supported Places. If full fees are required, check whether you are able to defer these costs through FEE-HELP or VET FEE-HELP (for eligible students studying higher level VET qualifications). Factor in accommodation, living expenses, books and materials.
- **Where can I do it?** Most courses are offered in a range of locations, but some are available in selected cities and centres only. Your choice of courses will vary considerably if you are willing to relocate for study. A smaller regional institution may better suit your budget and preference for a more intimate environment.
- **Where will it lead me?** Some courses lock you into an occupation (dental therapy and surveying are both good examples). This type of vocational study is the main focus of most VET courses. Others, especially arts and science, are much broader in scope. Courses in business or law are somewhere in between, offering skills that would be relevant to a range of jobs or occupations.
- **Is there accommodation and other services?** Consideration should be given to the availability and cost of accommodation and whether other services are provided, including student assistance with study, student counselling, special needs, transport, car parking, and health, legal and financial matters.

Disclaimer Any careers advice offered in this article should be taken as general advice. You should also seek advice and clarification from your careers teacher.

