ASK THE SONIC COACH (Q&A)
Career Advice for Aspiring Health Researchers
November 2007

From a Student with Good Grades: I keep hearing that I should go to University X because it’s the best. It’s my first choice…but what if I don’t get in? I’m afraid that anything else will be second best and I won’t be able to get ahead after I graduate.

SONIC Coach: Certainly, there are schools that have long-established reputations for producing excellent graduates in specific fields, but it does not follow that your scientific career will suffer if you complete your undergraduate degree elsewhere. If you develop—to a high degree—the skills, knowledge and experience that make a good scientist (see my article of October 2007), you will have many options open to you when you graduate.

From a Grad-School-Bound Student: I know already that I will do graduate work after I finish my first degree. Is it better to apply to universities that Maclean’s classifies as “Medical Doctoral,” rather than to those that are “Comprehensive” or “Primarily Undergraduate”?

SONIC Coach: All Canadian universities offer graduate programs; the difference is in their relative proportion. Maclean’s uses this classification scheme so that meaningful comparisons of institutions within groups can be made. It would be a mistake to eliminate all “Primarily Undergraduate” schools without some investigation on your part. You may discover that what they offer—on the whole—would make for a better experience for you.

I suggest you use a different approach to identifying potential universities. Search a reliable database of universities programs such as the “Programs of Study Database” <http://oraweb.aucc.ca/dcu_e.html>, maintained by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, or Career Cruising’s national database of postsecondary institutions <http://www.careercruising.com> (you may have free access through your school’s guidance office or public library).

From an All-Round “A” Student: I’ve noticed that some programs have so many required courses that I’d have very few electives in my four years, while others would allow me to take a broad range of electives. In both cases, I’d still earn my B.Sc., so does it matter? What’s the best option?

SONIC Coach: Again, the choice really depends upon you. If you are a person who has an intense, focused interest in a subject area, then a program that offers
a specialized concentration (and therefore, allows fewer electives) may suit you. On the other hand, if you have diverse interests and would consider this kind of program confining, a more flexible program would be a better choice.

As long as you are working towards an honours science degree (see October’s Question and Answer column), what **matters most** is that you do your very best. And this is more likely to happen if you are genuinely interested in your courses and enjoying your program.

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