Does it Matter Which University I Attend?

Choosing a university is not simply a matter of looking at the newest issue of MacLean’s Guide to Canadian Universities and applying to the highest-ranked schools. The process is much more personal than this. You are deciding where you will live, learn, work and enjoy leisure activities for the next four years, so you need to choose a place that is the best “fit” for YOU. Academic reputation is one important criterion, certainly. But if other aspects of your life are not nurtured, you may feel that something “just doesn’t feel right,” and you may end up questioning your decision to pursue your interest in science.

So what factors are important? Academic considerations are, of course. But you also need to assess the university and community environments; social supports and student life; and examine the financial aspects; to name a few. The priority you give to each depends upon your own circumstances, preferences and aspirations.

Academics

Identify the universities that offer the program(s) that interest you. As you read the descriptions of the courses, which universities’ programs emerge as most intriguing? Of these institutions, which do have you a realistic chance of getting in to (admission standards & prerequisite courses)?

Social Factors

It is critical to have a support and social network while at university (as in every phase of your life). How far from home will you be living? Have you any existing supports in place at the universities you’re considering (e.g., older siblings attending; family or friends of family living in community; classmates also applying)? Recreational activities, athletic teams and faith-based organizations are excellent ways to meet new people. Could you see yourself becoming involved?

Financial Matters

Of course, it is critical to assess the financial implications. The cost of tuition, books and supplies; housing, food and other living expenses; travel (e.g., commuting or visiting home), and the like, will vary with the program, the university, the size and location of the community. And be sure to investigate all avenues of funding—e.g., scholarships and financial assistance, work-study
programs, internships, co-op placements—and what job search training might be available through student services.

So does it matter which university you attend? No, not in the sense of making the university’s reputation your only basis for selection. What matters most is that the university you choose offers the best opportunities for you to develop fully as a human being, under your current personal and financial circumstances.

**Our topic next month will be on:** How am I going to PAY for my undergraduate degree?

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