

# HOW TO CHOOSE

*The Right College For You.*



Ashford  
UNIVERSITY®

THERE ARE **NEARLY 7,000**  
**ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS**  
IN THE UNITED STATES.

WHICH ONE WILL BE THE BEST  
**FIT FOR YOU?**

WHERE SHOULD YOU **BEGIN?**

*When you were a child, someone else decided where you would go to school. But when it comes to higher education as an adult learner, the choice is entirely up to you. Fortunately, you don't have to figure it out all on your own.*

*This guide will empower you to find a college that matches what you need for you and your life.*

*The following pages give you several pointed questions. Use these to specify your goals and refine your search. Then it's time to do some research and to contact schools that might work for you. By the time you reach the last page, you should have a better idea of what your goals are and where you might fulfill them.*

# ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS

*(and fill in your answers!)*

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## What are your goals?

Imagine your life, four to five years from now. What do you see yourself doing?

Maybe you'd like to live in another part of the country or another part of the world. Enrolling in a faraway university could be one step in a much larger transition.

What do you want for your family? What kinds of relationships will you have? Being a full-time college student will certainly influence your family life.

What particular skills have you always wanted to learn? Is there a cause that you feel very strongly about? If you keep yourself organized, then your extracurricular activities shouldn't have to interfere with your studies. In fact, some universities might **award you credit** for a hobby or volunteer work.

Are you eager to buy a house or a new car? Such big purchases might impede your ability to pay tuition.

Think long-term. Think big. Come up with two or three ambitious goals you could set for yourself.

**GOAL #1**

**GOAL #2**

**GOAL #3**




## What is your schedule?

Do you work full time? What do you usually do after work? How much time do you devote to your family and household chores? Do you get a full eight hours of sleep every night – or do you take catch-up naps throughout the week?

Your coursework will have a big impact on your daily routine. And different schools require different hours. In order to know whether a particular school will fit your

lifestyle, you need to see if your schedule can align with the school's requirements.

If you're not in the habit of keeping a written schedule, you'll want to start keeping one right away. There are several calendar apps for smartphones that are inexpensive or free. Google Calendar is free online, and it's an excellent tool for keeping track of your life. Or start with a good old-fashioned paper schedule. You can use this example as a model.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
•	•	•
•	•	•
•	•	•
WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
•	•	•
•	•	•
•	•	•
SATURDAY		
•		
•		
•		

## Where will you do your studying?

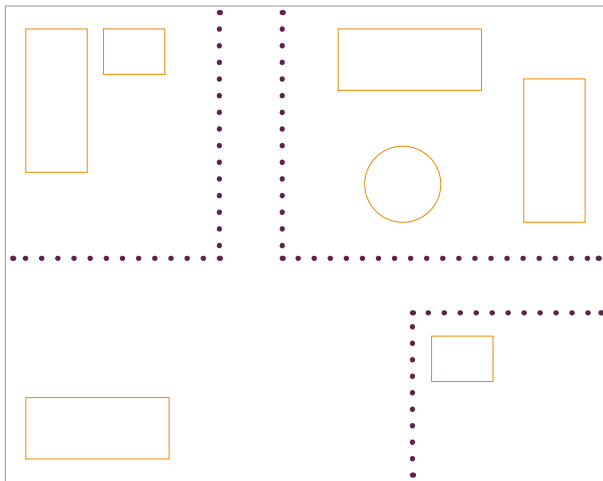
Whether you choose to attend classes on a campus or through an online format, you need your **own space to study**. Coffee shops are great if you can handle the background noise, but the cost of frequent lattes will add up. A library can provide an ideal environment, but some libraries have odd hours, so be sure to check the schedule.

Does your home have a reliable internet connection? Do you have your own computer, or will you need to share?

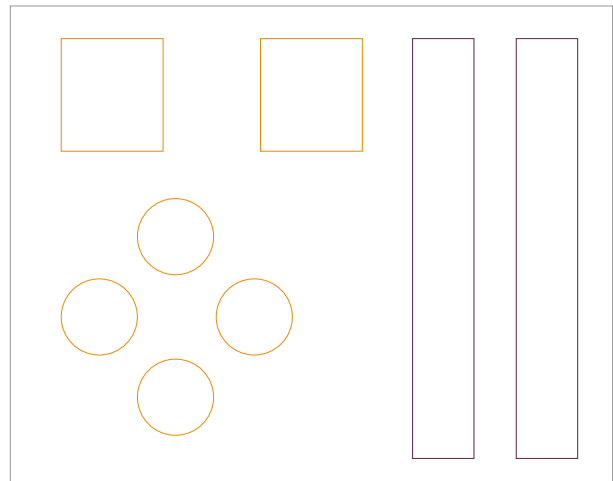
Of course, unless you live alone, you'll have to take your family or roommates into consideration. What are their schedules like? How loud does it get at home? Do you have small children who will vie for your attention?

Ultimately, you'll **need your own space**, even if it's only one small room. Suggestion: get together with everyone who lives under your roof, and agree on one room that you designate your study area. Make sure everyone understands when you'll be working there, what you're doing, and why this distinction is so important.

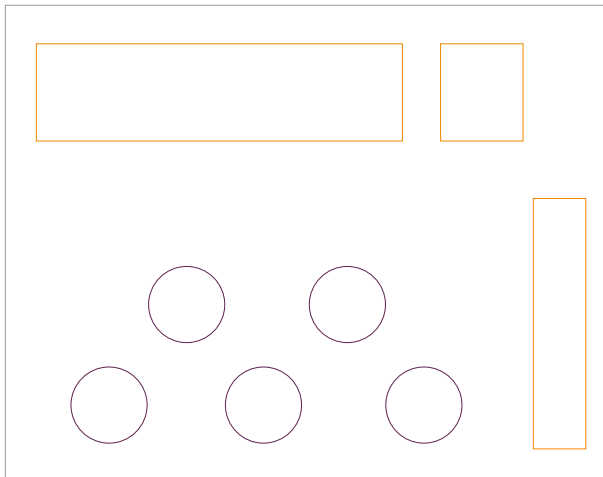
### HOME



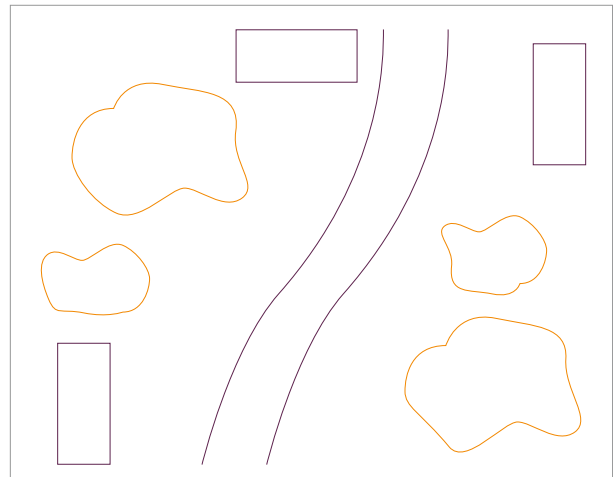
### LIBRARY



### COFFEE SHOP



### PARK



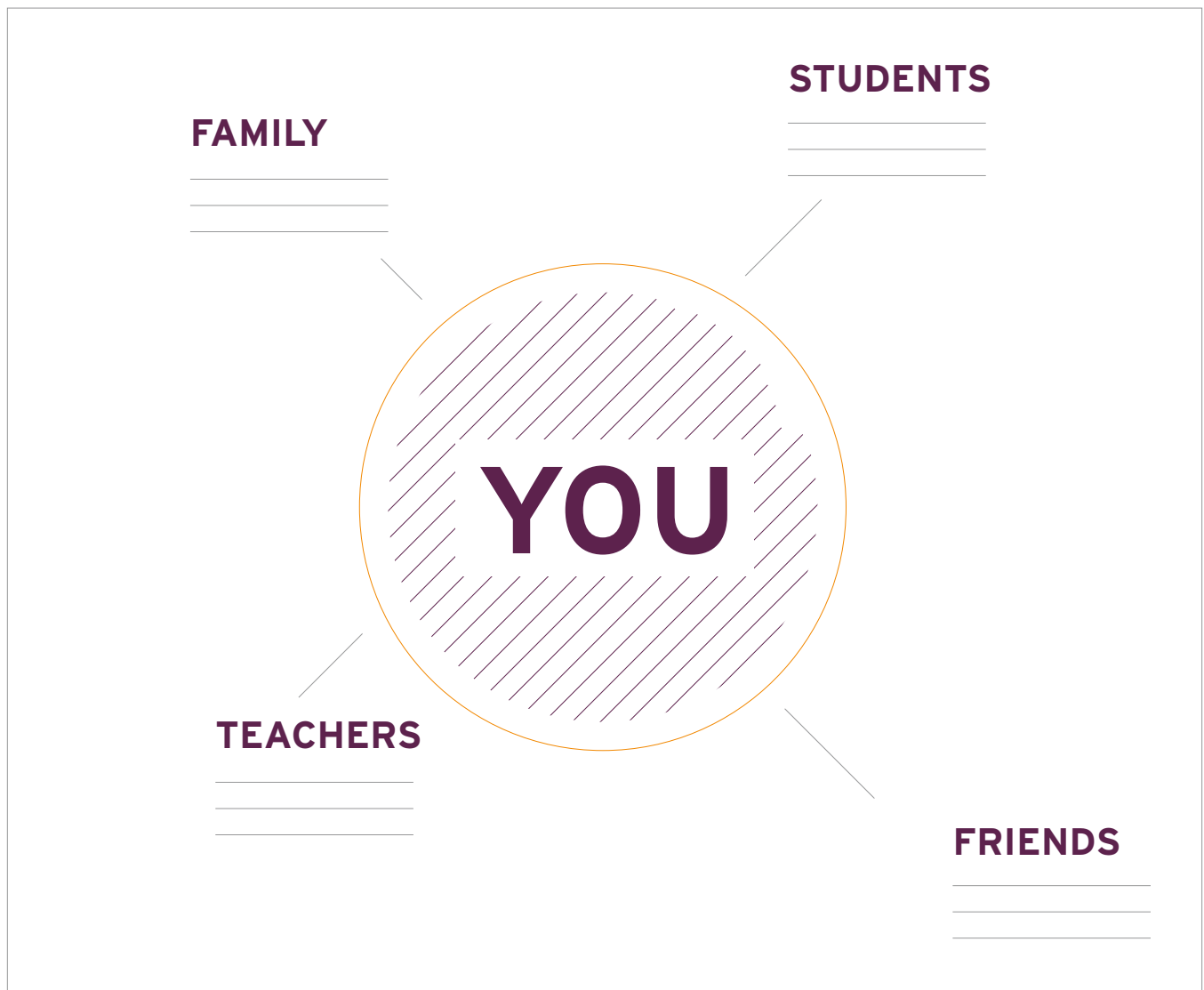
## How will you stay motivated?

Sure, you're excited now. But what about when times get tough? Up to four years can feel like a long time. You'll have to keep re-kindling that excitement.

You can start by keeping a clear picture of your goals close at hand. That way, whenever you get tired or frustrated, you can remind yourself why you wanted higher education in the first place. Many students

make vision boards and put up photos on **Facebook** or **Pinterest** and around their workspace to keep them focused on their destination.

It's best to have a **personal support system** – a network of family, friends, and fellow students to back you up when you get stuck. Of course, you have to communicate with them. Make sure they understand you're going to school and what that means for your time. Share with them why this goal is so important to you. And ask them to keep you encouraged along the way.



## What's the one subject you most want to study?

Finally, let's circle back to the very first question about your goals. You may want to do some deep soul-searching. Put aside what you think you "should" do or where the jobs are.

When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up? What do you really want to do with your life?

Not everyone needs to go to business school. And you may not need a degree to do what you love.

However, if a college degree would empower you to pursue your passion, then keep in mind that not all schools offer the same programs. For example, if your dream is to perform on stage, then you should know which schools offer courses in the performing arts.

Write down the names of some people who are already successful and well known in the field you want to enter. Where did they go to school? Are any of them teaching now? Consider following in their footsteps. You could even enroll at the school where your hero teaches, or ask that person to be your mentor.

## How will you stay organized?

Enrolling in a university will bring a stream of documents, paperwork, notes, brochures, and books into your home. In other words, if you want to go to college, start by cleaning off your desk.

You will need a system for removing clutter and filing things away. But you'll also want to keep some important items close at hand, in case you need them later.

And as mentioned before, you will need to keep track of your schedule, including due dates. That means you'll want to have easy access to a calendar that you can rely on.



**HEALTH**



**BUSINESS**



**LIBERAL ARTS**



**EDUCATION**

# WHERE TO START YOUR SEARCH

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*Now that you've clarified your goals, you can begin searching for colleges that match your interests.*

*Keep in mind that you're not searching for the biggest and best college in the world. You're searching for the best college **for you**. Focus on finding a college that best fits your goals and lifestyle.*

## College Board

A good place to begin your search may be **BigFuture** by The College Board. Though this site is mainly geared toward students coming out of high school, as opposed to adult learners, there may be some information you can gather. You can filter your search by up to 10 different criteria. You can even assign your filters different weights to privilege those criteria that are most important to you.

Depending on how many filters you choose, you could come up with hundreds of results. So you should keep adding filters and narrowing down your results. The website allows you to create your own list to review later. Once you've narrowed down your list to fewer than a dozen options, then you can start to look up more specific information on each school.

This site only gives a superficial overview of each school. In order to make an informed choice, you'll need to drill down for more details.

## Use Your Favorite Search Engine

In looking at the answers you gave to the questions in the first section of this ebook, is there a common theme or subject? For example, if one of your answers is 'write a novel,' you might be interested in pursuing a degree in English or writing. Maybe one of your goals is to start a business. You should consider a business degree or perhaps one in entrepreneurship.

You can search specifically for a degree program, such as bachelor's degree in entrepreneurship, and make a list of colleges offering that degree. You can also do advanced searches to include other facets of the degree program that you require, such as 'online,' 'flexible,' or 'military benefits.'

You can also search to attend a school in a particular region of the country. Or if you're thinking about an **online university**, where location is not an issue, search the phrase 'online education' and see what options you have. You should be able to gather basic facts from a school's website such as the degrees they offer and the cost of tuition.



# CONTACT SCHOOLS DIRECTLY

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*You have a few possibilities and some useful information on each one. Now it's time to call the college or university directly, and speak to an admissions counselor. Give yourself some time to have a full conversation. Here are some good questions to ask:*

## **Am I eligible for any benefits?**

If you have any connection to the US military, you'll want to make sure you get the benefits you deserve. Many schools also offer certain grants and scholarships to students depending on their work or employer. So don't be afraid to ask up front!

## **What if I change my mind after I enroll? Will I be charged tuition if I leave the university during my first few courses?**

Some colleges will allow you a trial period for your first few courses. Make sure you won't be responsible for tuition if you change your mind before a certain date.

## **How many credits can I transfer toward my degree?**

If you've been to any college before, make sure you get credit for the work you've already done. Even if you've never attended a college before, you should still ask this question. Many colleges give you a pathway to earn credit for work training and life experience.

*“Even if you're planning on taking courses online, make sure you can preview the online classroom.”*

## **How will I pay for it?**

Many schools will have finance advisors to help you sort out the money side of things as well as various options for you to fund your education. From tuition reimbursement from your current employer to federal financial aid, there are several ways to afford to go back to school. Be sure to ask what your options are for paying for school.

## **How do I schedule a tour?**

If you're planning on attending classes at a physical campus, you'll probably want to see the facilities before you sign up. Request a guide to show you around.

Even if you're planning on taking courses online, make sure you can preview the online classroom. Is it user-friendly? Or does it look like a video game from 1984? You're going to be spending a lot of time in this environment, so make sure you're comfortable using it to study and complete your coursework.

## Is this school accredited?

When a college or university is accredited, it means that school has been found to meet certain basic requirements for academic quality. Before enrolling, you should always check the school's accreditation.

*“Find out if the school offers any courses that let you study from ebooks or if you will need to pay for expensive textbooks.”*

## How will I connect with my fellow students?

This question is especially important for online students. Can you join student organizations or honor societies? Are there group projects, or will you do all your assignments by yourself? How the school representative answers these questions should give you a feel for the culture of that college. You don't want to go it alone, so make sure you'll have support and a strong sense of community.

## What technology does this college provide?

Find out if the school offers any courses that let you study from ebooks or if you will need to pay for expensive textbooks. Many colleges now offer a free smartphone app for their students to download. Ask if this school does. Find out how your professors will provide feedback – digitally or on paper? You may prefer a cleaner, high-tech solution.

## What other student services does the school offer?

Again, this question is important if you plan to attend school online. Ask if there are additional student services, such as career services, a library, or a writing center. Is there an active alumni community? When former students are still connected with their school, it's a good sign that the school created a welcome atmosphere.

## How do I apply? Is the application on paper or online?

College applications tend to be long and complicated. So make sure you know what's involved, how much time it will take, and what you'll need to complete the application. Some schools may offer an admissions counselor to walk you through each step.

*“When a college or university is accredited, it means that school has been found to meet certain basic requirements for academic quality.”*

## SO NOW WHAT?

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What you do next will depend on the answers you receive to the questions above. If you've asked the questions but the college representative doesn't give you clear answers, then you may need to keep looking.

But if you like what you hear, then you've found a school that fits your lifestyle and goals.

Once you've found a college or university that's a match for you, go ahead and apply.

## A FINAL THOUGHT

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Planning your education can be exciting. As long as you prepare and take the time to find the right school for you, then you'll be in good shape to reap the rewards of a college degree.

Thanks for trusting Ashford University to provide some guidance through such a big decision. No matter where you go, stay inspired and never lose sight of your goal.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT GETTING STARTED IN A DEGREE PROGRAM, OR TO CREATE AN ACTION PLAN, **PLEASE CONTACT AN ADVISOR AT ASHFORD UNIVERSITY: 866.711.1700.**

