

FINDING THE COLLEGE

How much do you know about private career colleges?

This article introduces you to them. It covers topics such as locating and contacting colleges, requesting catalogues, and interpreting catalogue information.

This article hopes to answer the question, "Why should I consider a private career college?"

CHOOSING A PRIVATE CAREER COLLEGE

Selecting the right college--the college that's right for you--is as important as selecting the right career. Colleges that specialize in offering career training are called private career colleges.

Why select a private career college? Here are some of the reasons so many career colleges are good at training people for good-paying rewarding careers:

1. Because private career colleges are privately owned, they are ready to respond to the ever-changing needs of business and industry by developing new courses and making changes in instruction that quickly become part of their programs.
2. Private career education today is provincially approved and regulated, but highly competitive. To compete with public education and other private schools, the curriculum must be continually upgraded, comprehensive and, most importantly, meet the needs of the industry.
3. At a private career college, the student can learn a career or profession without a large portion of his/her education being cultural or liberal arts courses.
4. Admission standards can be selective. All students normally have a common goal. Consequently, a healthy learning atmosphere is produced.
5. Instructors are chosen, for both their knowledge and practical experience. Students are therefore taught by experienced practitioners.
6. Students pay for their education and are therefore more conscientious about learning. They also realize the significant potential salary gain by completing their studies in a shorter period of time.
7. Private colleges generally regulate attendance, dress, and appearance.
8. Faculty and students are on the same side of the fence. Students are considered clients whose occupational success determines the success of the college.

9. Each student shares the reputation of this college. For this reason private college management is acutely aware of social opinion.

10. Job search assistance departments are in place. A great deal of effort is put forth in order to gain employment for each graduate. The future of any private career college depends on it. Those applying to private career colleges have more assurance that their education will bear immediate fruit.

11. There is a constant awareness of the industry. Courses are updated and changed to comply with specific job requirements.

LOCATING COLLEGES

Many types of private career colleges are located in large cities. Highly specialized colleges may be far away from your home. If you are interested in nearby colleges, the easiest thing to do is to look in the yellow pages of local phone books under the heading of School or Training. In addition, many colleges advertise in newspapers and on radio and TV. Some will mail college material to your home. Not all colleges advertise in these ways and you might want to consider colleges outside of your immediate area. If so, the directory of colleges on this web site is a good place to start. This listing of colleges will only provide you with the name, address, phone, fax (e-mail if available) and a brief description of **some** of the career training areas they offer. You would be wise therefore to phone or write for their detailed calendars or catalogues. You can also obtain information about private career colleges by writing to:

National Association of Career Colleges

P.O. Box 340

#274 Colborne Street

Brantford, ON N3T 5N3

Phone: (519) 753-8689

Fax: (519) 753-4712

E-mail: dmckinno@brant.net

Don't overlook the obvious when considering colleges. Remember to talk with your friends and people working in the career you want to enter. Many students in private career colleges heard of their college through someone they know who graduated and successfully started a new career.

CONTACTING THE COLLEGE

Once you have some names and addresses of private career colleges, you will want to contact them for detailed information.

If you call the college, you probably will talk to a receptionist first. You will need to tell the receptionist that you are interested in a training program and that you would like to receive a catalogue and financial information. (Be ready to give your mailing address and postal code.) The receptionist may handle your call or suggest that you talk to a college official. Sooner or later, a staff official will need to talk with you in person. You may decide to look over the college's catalogue and call later for an appointment.

EXPECTATIONS

Once you have college catalogues in hand, you are ready to begin your next fact-finding mission. It is at this point that you become a buyer. As a buyer, you should expect certain things from the college you choose.

Private career colleges can be expected to provide you with specialized training to get and keep a job in the career that you have selected. Of course, a college can only help you if you are willing to make the effort to finish the program.

You can expect the school to know what skills are needed and to make those skills a part of your training program. Private career colleges are noted for their ability to get the training done and not to spend a lot of your time teaching you things that are not required. They know you want to go to work and to start earning money as soon as possible.

You can expect that the college's staff members have carefully consulted with business and industry on the type of equipment and materials used. Only after knowing what is being used in the field can schools select equipment and materials for training.

You can expect these colleges to make changes in what and how they teach when changes take place or are about to take place in the businesses and industries for which they prepare students. Colleges should make sure that you receive the training needed to be successful in your career today and tomorrow.

You can expect the private career college to take a personal interest in you. The college will work with you and be your partner, helping you to reach your career goal. After all, without successful students, private career colleges could not be successful themselves.

You can expect the private career college to provide individual job search assistance. Unlike community colleges and universities, private career colleges make job search a central part of the program. It's as important to them as it is to you that you find a job after graduation.

You can expect the college's staff to be business like in responding to all of your questions. Don't be afraid to ask! These professionals are proud of what they do, and they will be glad to talk to you.

WHAT'S IN A CATALOGUE?

There are many different looks to a career college catalogue. Some catalogues may contain many pictures; others are very colourful. The catalogue offers the college an opportunity to put its best foot forward. But you need to look at ***what the catalogue says*** rather than how it looks. Here are some items that should be in a college catalogue and some tips for interpreting the information you will read.

LICENSING AND ACCREDITATION

Most provinces require that a college be licensed by the province in order to operate as a private post-secondary educational institution. At the very least, the college should say that it is approved by a provincial government regulatory authority.

In addition, the Provincial Ministries governing private colleges recognize certain accrediting agencies that have established standards for institutions and/or programs to improve the quality of education in private career colleges.

Why is voluntary accreditation important to you? If a catalogue says that the college is accredited, then you know that the college has had the following criteria verified by an independent accrediting body.

- A Truthfully advertises its services
- B Clearly sets forth the terms for enrollment
- C Admits only qualified students
- D Charges reasonable tuition fees
- E Offers up-to-date courses
- F Maintains equipment for the training programs
- G Employs instructors with program-related job experience
- H Keeps classes to a reasonable size
- I Provides guidance and job search services

Remember, accreditation is your index of a college's commitment to its students and to offering them a high-quality education. And like public colleges and universities, accredited and non-accredited private career colleges and institutes listed on this web site can usually offer government financial aid programs (to those who qualify) that can help you pay for your training.

Note: There are many registered private career colleges listed on this web site which offer programs of high standards that have chosen not to participate in the voluntary accreditation process. All colleges listed in this guide are approved for membership by the National Association of Career Colleges or one of its provincial affiliates.

HISTORY OF THE COLLEGES

A college doesn't have to be in business for twenty years to be good. But if it has been operating for a few years, then you have an indication that it is steady, established, and reliable.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

Program descriptions can vary, depending on the training area. Generally, the more information given, the better. After reading this section you should know what's involved in the training and how long it should take to complete the program.

FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

The catalogue will describe the college's facilities and equipment. It is a good idea to review this information before you visit the college. When you visit the college, you should check out the facilities and equipment advertised in the catalogue.

ADMISSIONS POLICY

Most catalogues say that your interest in the training program is the most important factor in being accepted into a program. This is true. But the catalogue should review the college's admissions requirements. Do you need a high school diploma? Many colleges will give you a basic skills test just to make sure that you are able to handle the training.

ENROLLMENT DATES

Many colleges say they have an open door policy. This doesn't mean that you can start any time you want. However, most colleges will offer several starting dates during the year to help you get started as soon as possible. These dates will often appear in the college catalogue.

TUITION AND REFUND POLICIES

These policies are very important to understand before you decide to enroll. It is not unusual for the tuition costs to be listed on a sheet separate from the catalogue. (Tuition information changes more quickly than the general information.) In addition, there should be a stated refund policy for students who find it necessary to leave college. The amount of the refund depends on how long a student has been in training.

The refund policy will be different from college to college, but it should be clearly stated.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Federal and Provincial financial assistance in the form of loans and grants are often available to assist students attending private career colleges. Many colleges also have scholarships, or bursaries or other financial assistance plans to help you.

JOB SEARCH ASSISTANCE

Any good college includes job search assistance as part of its program, and the catalogue should include this information. Career planning services should be part of the tuition costs. The college ought to have an active job search office, because that's the bottom line for both of you. However, keep in mind that no one can guarantee you a job, and no college should guarantee you a job.

ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES

A good catalogue will mention the rules regarding attendance and conduct, grading, the dress code (if applicable), and the available counselling and tutoring services. If the catalogue covers all the categories of information listed here and the training program seems like the one you want, then you are ready for the next step in planning for your future--calling the college and making an appointment to talk to a college official.

SUMMING IT UP

Selecting the right college
-- the college that's right for you --
is as important as selecting the right career.