

## **What are the different options that I have after graduation?**

When graduating from high school a student faces many life determining changes. Should I go to college or not? Which college? What major? Should I get an Associate's degree or a Bachelor's degree? What about certifications? What is the best for what I want to do? Answers to these questions require a good understanding of what the options are and a good understanding of who you are as a person. The answers to these questions require honest and hard answers.

Let's start with the first part, what are the different options that I have?

The soon to graduate high school student has several questions to ask. First, do I go to college? Believe it or not, this question is less an issue of money and more an issue of desire. For students who do not wish to go to college, a wide variety of other educational opportunities exist – technical colleges, apprentice positions for trades, and other OJT (on the job training) programs. However, there is a high degree of competition for these positions and in their early periods their pay is typically lower than those with college degrees.

For those students that have chosen to go on to college there are more questions to ask. Hopefully, the student has decided early on that they want to go to college and have put forward the time and energy to make the grades and do the necessary preparation. However, even if the student has just recently decided they want to go to college many opportunities exist. The questions that must be answered initially are which college and what degree. Once those have been decided the next question to ask is what major?

Many factors go into choosing what college and what degree. Factors that help to determine what college to go to include where did my parents go? Where are my friends going? What does it cost? Does it offer the degree and major that I am wanting? Where is it located? The most important factors, according to several studies, are where it is located and what does it cost? Where it is located is primarily a personal choice. Excellent colleges are located all over the country and throughout Texas.

What does it cost can be important depending on the student's financial status. Regardless of their status however, with a willingness to work hard and make the appropriate decisions any student can afford to get a college education. Grants, loans and scholarships are numerous.

The other decision is what degree to get. For the soon to graduate high school student there are two options, the Associate degree or the Bachelors degree. The associate degree is

typically a two year degree and primarily offered by community colleges. These degrees are more focused toward technician types of positions. These are excellent positions and provide better opportunities than those without any degree. However, they do not provide the necessary broad educational experience that many employers look for when considering employees for promotions or managerial type positions.

The Bachelor degree is a four year degree. This is the primary type of degree offered by universities and colleges. These degrees typically combine two years of general education including math, English, history, etc., with two years of specialized advanced coursework. These degrees are what most employers look for when hiring employees. Their earnings potential can be significantly higher than those with no degree or an Associate degree.

It is interesting to note that at this time the unemployment rate for those with a college degree, Associate or above, is only 5% as compared to the unemployment rate for those without a college degree is over 10%. Another thing, while 50% of high school graduates go to college, only 50% of them actually finish their degree. That means that only 25% of high school graduates eventually end up with a college degree.

So which is the best route for you? That depends on what you are looking for. If finances are your primary criteria and you know what you want to do then I suggest you go to a junior college for the first two years and take all the required general education courses. Make sure you do your best to get good grades. Then apply to the university of your choice for the last two years and pick the college that is the best in your area of interest.

There are several advantages to this strategy. It's cheaper – community colleges are usually cheaper than universities because of their funding sources. It's easier – usually, but not always, the courses offered by the community colleges are not as rigorous as those offered by the universities. However, because of this some universities will not accept courses taken at community colleges in transfer.

It is imperative that if you choose this strategy that you check to make sure that the courses you take at the community college will transfer to the universities you are interested in attending. It is best to check with the university to see what they will accept and not what the community college says they will accept. There is nothing worse than taking a bunch of classes only to find out that they will not be accepted and you will have to take them over at the university.

Another advantage is that if your grades or test scores were not the best, this gives you the opportunity to build them up. Entry requirements for community colleges are typically less rigorous than most universities.

While this is a great strategy it also has some disadvantages. You give up the college experience – part of the fun of college is the 'college experience'. Football games, homecoming, fraternities and sororities, etc. are all part of the college experience. Most community colleges do not offer these activities and switching schools after two years makes it hard to catch up once you are a junior in a university.

Another disadvantage is that because the rigor of community college classes are not the same as at a university, when transferring to the university students may find it difficult to adapt to the higher level of requirements.

If finances are not the primary criteria then I suggest going to a four year college from the beginning. Besides the advantage of participating in the college experience you also have many more opportunities for development through such things as student organizations, internships, and building relationships with friends and faculty that also results in networking opportunities for job placement.

So after you have decided your college and degree the next step is your major. While you must decide on your college and degree early on the choice of your major does not have to take place early on, unless you choose to get a two year Associates degree.

If you choose to get an associate's degree you must pick your college, degree and area of specialty or major straight from the beginning. As long as you know what you want to do there is no problem. The only problem comes in when you are not sure of what you want to do. You do not want to take a whole course of study just find out you hate the job.

If you don't know what you want to do, then the safest thing is to take your time and take courses that you know will transfer to a university or that you know can be applied to other majors that you are most interested in. The more time you take to think ahead the happier you will be when you graduate. Keep in mind that once you graduate, you will be working in your job at least 8 hours a day, 5 days a week, for 50 weeks a year. You don't want to be in a job you don't enjoy doing.

That is another advantage of the Bachelor's degree. The first two years of classes allow you the time and opportunity to try different courses of study to find out what you really enjoy. That way when you do declare a major, you will be more interested and make better grades and improve your opportunities for success.

For those few students who already know what they want to do and where they want to go before they even graduate the choice is easy. For the rest of us we need to take some time and think through what will help us to get to where we want to go in the best way to get there.

### **What about Certifications?**

Certifications are another big concern for students interested in a technology degree. The purpose of certifications is to provide a potential employer with some documentation to a person's knowledge in a specific area based on an objective non-biased evaluation.

There are two general types of certifications: product/company specific and general. General certificates such as A+, Network +, and Security + are geared for a more general knowledge of the certified subject area. They focus on general subject area knowledge and often do not go into as much detail as the product/company specific certifications. These are recognized by employers as a great indicator of base level knowledge.

Product/company specific certifications are just that. Certifications that are targeted to support in detail a specific company's product offerings. Oracle, Microsoft and Cisco are the most popular and well known and respected. These certifications are a double edged sword. First they are excellent guidelines for educational programs. Many schools, mostly 2-year technical schools, base their curriculum in specific fields based on these types of certifications.

However, basing the complete education on these certifications restricts your employment opportunities. Yes you are well educated in the support of these particular products, but if the prospective employer does not use those products then your employment prospects for that employer are reduced.

Additionally, recent research on the valuation of certification by employers is not what one would expect based on what the certification sellers would have you believe. A recent study of university IT employers found that while 69% of employers provide some sort of financial support for employees to get and maintain certifications, only about 7% actually require them. Additionally, the study found that most employers rated experience over certifications.

### **Degrees at Texas State**

Texas State's 32,572 students choose from 97 bachelor's, 89 master's and nine doctoral degree programs. Its students come from around the globe, and our student body is diverse. Thirty-five percent of Texas State students are ethnic minorities. Hispanic Outlook ranks Texas State 13th in the nation for the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to Hispanic students. It provides the ultimate 'college experience' for those students who want it all as well as excellent quality academic programs for those transferring or looking to exceed academically.

I hope this paper has helped to give a little better understanding of the different options that a high school graduate has and how to decide where their future lies. The guidelines I have provided are only guidelines and only the individual student can decide what is best for them based on who they are and who they want to become. If you have any questions, comments, suggestions, or would like further information please feel free to contact me.

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