

Eight tips for choosing the right university course

By [Carole Brown](#)



While Australia has many fine universities and a great range of courses to choose from, **choosing the right course can be a complex decision.** This is because **many considerations impact** your ability to make an informed decision such as entry scores, university reputations, study costs, class sizes and employment outcomes, not to mention working out what you are really interested in doing and what your chances of success are, AND whether now is really the right time to go to university.

Because of this complexity, many students find themselves in the wrong course in their first year – according to [Department of Education figures](#) almost one in five students (more than 25,000) leave their studies by the end of first year and up to 13,000 undergraduates end up changing courses or institutions.

Now, with the rising cost of higher education, and the prospect that students will have increasing debt to deal with once they graduate, there is **even more riding on making good first decisions** about university studies.

Here are **eight tips** to help you navigate the vast array of course options and draw up a short-list of courses that make sense to you.

1. Be guided by your interests, your skills and what you like to do

Each of the following questions is designed to help you understand your personal drivers and what you are most likely to succeed at and enjoy. They therefore can play a part in guiding your course choice.

What are you really curious about? Are there subjects that you could happily study all day? What topics and activities energise you? How do you want to make a difference in the world? What do you want to contribute? What are you good at and what do you want to get better at?

Taking some time to include a little self- reflection is a really important step that students often miss in the process of making a decision about what course to study. Make sure you factor this into your planning.

2. Investigate which university is right for you.

There are 39 Universities in Australia and they vary greatly in the experience they offer first-time students as well as those returning for postgraduate courses. As well as browsing course outlines, other factors to consider are student accommodation; other facilities like libraries, medical services and fitness facilities; support services like careers and counselling; opportunities for part-time work; clubs and societies; and transportation.

The reputation and ranking of a university may also be an important factor but remember that within even the top-ranked universities, there can be considerable variation in reputation between faculties and subject areas. As a start, you can discover more about what each university offers through [The Good Universities Guide](#) and [Universities Australia](#).

3. Get across course information

There are some really good tools that can help you identify what courses are out there including [My Future](#) and the [Good Universities Course Finder](#). As well, higher education guides provided by the state admissions agencies such as the [Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre](#) provide up-to-date information as do the universities themselves.

Once you identify courses that look interesting, you can delve more deeply into other information such as course length; range of majors and subjects; quality of teaching staff; class sizes; opportunities for internships or work experience; course costs and employment outcomes for graduates.

4. Have a few options up your sleeve

Draw up a short list of possible courses and also consider if double degrees or part-time study might suit you best. If you can't get into the course you want, then consider other pathways into it like bridging courses or enrolling in a related degree and transferring in later. There are **many pathways** into university these days including mature age and special entry schemes that may help you to get into the course you want.

5. Find out about employment outcomes

In their marketing material, universities usually mention the sorts of careers their graduates find. Specific information about graduate employment outcomes can be found through the [Australian Graduate Survey](#). As well, employers and professional bodies have job information for their fields and [Graduate Careers Australia](#) and [Job Outlook](#) have lots information about career options. Of course, a degree is not the only factor that will determine your employability and chances of getting a job after graduation. Gaining a range of work experience and getting involved in extra-curricular activities are also important.

6. Tally up the finances

The costs of higher education are rising, and is becoming a more significant factor in students' decisions about which courses to enrol in. Universities will provide you with information about course fees. Make sure you get this up front to help inform your decision-making. Also, don't forget to factor in books and other materials needed to do the course.

7. Location, location

If the location of the university or the course you want to do is important to you, then this obviously narrows down the course field considerably. If you are re-locating to take up a course, look into what accommodation options the universities offer as well as the local rental market.

8. Make it your decision

I have known many young people confused and uncertain about what to do after school, who end up enrolling in a university course on the suggestion or urging of their parents, friends or teachers. Sometimes this works out well, but other times it turns out the wrong decision because it actually wasn't yours. Take a little time to do the research and reflect on **what you really want**. That way the outcome is likely to be a better one.

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Carole Brown, [Individual Career Solutions](#), 2014