

College Readiness Curriculum

Lesson 4

The College Search

Lesson Overview:

Students will continue the College Readiness Curriculum by completing the following steps: 1) exploring post-secondary school options and requirements, along with students' personal preferences 2) creating a list of schools to investigate further

This curriculum is part of STEM U
Sponsored by



College Readiness

Lesson 4: The College Search

Lesson Overview:

During this lesson, you will guide students to explore and compare post-secondary school options, consider their own needs and preferences in a post-secondary school, and finally, generate a personal list of schools to investigate.

***NOTE:** If your students are in their senior/final year of secondary school and have already begun applying to the schools of their choice, you may wish to skip to Lesson 5: Choosing a School. If your students are in their junior/penultimate year of school or below, you may wish to omit Lesson 5. If your students are at varying grade levels and stages of the college application process, you might want to separate them into groups and present either/both Lesson 4 and Lesson 5, depending on what is appropriate for each group. If presenting both Lessons 4 and 5 to the same students, please note that slides 6–9 of this lesson are repeated in Lesson 5.*

Core Concepts:

- There are several different kinds of post-secondary schools and programs.
- To choose the right post-secondary option, you must identify your requirements, preferences, and priorities.

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Learn about the different post-secondary school options that exist.
- Identify their personal preferences and requirements for post-secondary schools.
- Investigate and create a comparative list of schools that interest them.

Materials Needed:

- [College Search Slideshow](#)
- Worksheet 1: Post-Secondary School Preferences Worksheet
- Worksheet 2: Post-Secondary School Chart

Supplemental Videos:

- [The College Search](#)

Step 1: Activate Background Knowledge

Invite students to discuss what they already know about the process of searching for a post-secondary school or program. You might use the following questions and prompts to guide discussion:

- Has anyone begun a college search? What have you discovered? Please share your experiences and thoughts.
- Does anyone have older siblings or friends who are in college/post-secondary school? What kinds of schools/programs do they attend? Please share what you know about their search and how they conducted it.

Step 2: Introduce the College Search Slideshow

Explain to students that post-secondary school options can vary tremendously, depending on factors such as where you live, what you want to study, and the specific job or career you plan to pursue. Tell students that the slideshow will introduce the various options and degrees that are out there, as well as help students learn the vocabulary used to describe post-secondary schools and degrees. Ask students to take out notebooks and pens, so that they can take notes during the slideshow.

NOTE: You may wish to add, delete, or edit slides as appropriate to your country and region, and those where your students are likely to apply to schools.

Step 3: Begin the Slideshow

Present the first part of the slideshow (Post-Secondary School Options) pausing occasionally to answer questions and solicit comments from students. (See suggestions within the slideshow.)

[slide 1]

Post-Secondary School Options: Colleges vs. Universities

Some countries simply refer to post-secondary school as “college” or as “university”. In other countries, both terms are used to describe slightly different options.

Universities tend to be large schools that offer a wide variety of academic programs and may include various professional schools (sometimes referred to as colleges within the university); for example, the School of Engineering, the School of Medicine, and the School of Business. Universities usually award both undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Colleges tend to be smaller than universities or may be a smaller section of a university. Colleges may offer only four-year bachelor’s (undergraduate) degrees, or may offer some master’s degrees, too. In some cases, colleges award only even shorter-term degrees and certificate programs. For

example, colleges in China offer three-year vocational degrees. And in the United States, the term “community college” refers to institutions that offer two-year associates degrees.

Pause to Ask: *Which types of schools are you familiar with? Do you know anyone who is attending one of the above types of schools?*

[Slide 2]

Post-Secondary School Options: Degrees vs Certificates

In most countries there are three or four levels of degrees, or diplomas, offered. The time required to earn each degree may vary a bit from school to school and region to region. In addition to degrees, some post-secondary schools – such as trade schools or colleges/universities with technical training programs – offer certificates of completion that may be required to enter into a specific career. Certificate programs tend to be shorter than degree programs. Some certificate programs exist to provide professional/technical training in addition to a diploma. Other certificate programs stand alone and usually prepare students for a very specific job.

[Slide 3]

Post-Secondary School Options: Degrees

While there is some variation around the world, many countries have aligned their post-secondary degree options – especially bachelor’s, master’s, and many doctorate degrees.

Typical degrees include:

Two or three year degree – also known as an associate’s degree in the US, a Level 5 or Intermediate degree in the UK. Two or three year degrees tend to be more technical or job-specific. Some students choose to pursue two year degrees as a less expensive way of completing the first two years of post-secondary school. Then they transfer their course credit to a bachelors program.

Bachelor’s degree – most colleges and universities offer bachelor’s degrees that students can enter directly after secondary school. This degree is also known as *licenciatura* in Spanish-speaking parts of the world. Most bachelor’s degrees consist of three to five years of education and may be very specialized, or may be more general.

Master’s degree – in many countries, a master’s degree follows a bachelor’s degree, offering one to three additional years of specialization.

Doctorate degrees – Doctorate degrees may follow a bachelor’s degree or may follow a master’s degree and generally require 2 to 4 years of study, although some degrees that require research or additional medical specialization may take longer to earn.

Combined degrees – some regions and some post-secondary schools may offer degree programs that combine two or more of the above degrees. These combined degrees may offer faster completion opportunities and/or may be more economical.

Pause to ask: *What level of degree may be necessary for your desired career path? What do know about the degrees adults in your life have earned?*

[Slide 4]

Post-Secondary School Options: Public vs. Private

Depending upon where you live, you may have an option to choose between a private or public college/university. Some of the differences between the two might include:

- **Cost:** public schools tend to be less expensive and may even be free or only charge small fees.
- **Financial aid:** some private schools retain a large amount of funding to provide financial aid. Some private schools may end up costing less than public schools for those offered financial assistance.
- **Quality:** In some regions of the world, private schools tend to be viewed as higher in quality. On the other hand, in other regions, private schools may have less government regulation and may provide a lower quality education.
- **Offerings:** Public and private institutions in the same city or region may offer different areas of study or different degree/course options.
- **Size:** Most public institutions tend to be larger, while some private colleges may be very small.

Step 4: Recap and Identify

Before you present the second half of the slideshow, pause to recap, or ask a volunteer to summarize, the information about different types of schools. Then describe some local post-secondary schools and ask students to identify which type of school each is, based on the information from the slideshow.

Step 5: Continue the Slideshow.

Present the next part of the slideshow (Considering Your Preferences), pausing occasionally to answer and ask questions, and solicit students' comments. (See suggestions within the slideshow.)

[Slide 5]

Considering Your Preferences

Whether you are just beginning a post-secondary school search or trying to narrow an initial list of schools, you will want weigh your choices against your preferences and priorities. These preferences may make the decision for you, or they may at least narrow your options.

Take a moment to think about what your perfect post-secondary school might be like. It might be a real school that you know, or it may just be an idea. Write down a few words that describe that perfect school or program. Keep those words and your idea of a perfect college in your mind, as you move forward in this lesson.

Pause to ask: *Would anyone like to share their personal description of the perfect college? What makes the college perfect for you?*

[Slide 6]

Factors to Consider

As you begin to consider potential schools here are a few factors you might want or need to consider:

Location: Do you want to be in a specific city, region, or country? Do you want to be near or far from home? Do you prefer an urban or rural setting? What is the proximity to other cities or sites you may want to visit? How important is location to you?

Academic Interests: What do you want to study? Do you want to focus on an area of study or more actively prepare for a specific job or career? Do your future goals (a career or graduate school) require a very specific undergraduate field of study (biomedical engineering or astrophysics, for example), or will a broad field (biology or physics, for example) prepare you equally well? How committed are you to a particular field of study? Do you want the option to try out different areas of study? Do you want a degree that has a narrow focus, or would you prefer a program or school that allows or encourages a “well-rounded” education and the ability to attend classes outside of your primary field of study? For each school you may want to consider the individual professors. Are the professors in your field well-known or well-respected? What are their accomplishments? What have they published? How do other students rate them in reviews?

Career Goals: What career do you want to prepare for? Is there only one kind of program, field of study, course, or major that will prepare you well for your desired career? Or are there several options that would put you on the right track? Does a school have famous alumni in your area of interest that either speak well of the program or who might serve as a connection later on? How successful are the graduates from the university or program? How long does it take graduates to obtain a job after graduation? How many go on to Master’s or PhD programs?

Pause to ask:

- *Which of these factors is most important to you? Why?*
- *Is there any information from this slide that you have questions about?* (For example, students may be uncertain how to research the reputations of professors from a particular school or department, or where to find out how many graduates of a particular school or program typically find a job within a short period of time.)

[Slide 7]

More Factors to Consider

Cost: How much will each option cost? Consider tuition, room and board, books, supplies, etc. Will you be tempted to spend more on recreational activities depending upon the location? Is that cost realistic for your budget? Is financial aid available? Is cost a concern at all? You may want to confer with your family if they will be responsible for all or part of the cost.

Prestige: How important is it that your post-secondary school or program be regarded highly? Will the prestige of your college play a role in your career success or not? For some thought-provoking reading on the value of attending a prestigious university, check out [Your Elite School is Not Worth the Cost, Studies Say](#) or [Do Elite Colleges Lead to Higher Salaries? Only for Some Professions](#).

Selectivity: How selective is the school? Given your own academic record, exam results, or experience, how likely are you to be accepted? You may want a broad range of selectivity on your final application list. Be realistic, but don't underestimate yourself, either.

Size: Small schools tend to offer smaller class sizes, closer relationships with instructors, and an environment some students find more manageable than a huge campus. Small schools may have fewer resources, but you may have more access to the resources that do exist, such as lab equipment or professors' time. Larger schools often provide a wide variety of academic offerings as well as extracurricular options. On the other hand, at a large school, some specialized resources may be available only to graduate students or to a select few undergraduate students.

Pause to ask:

- *Which of these factors is most important to you? Why?*
- *Is there any information from this slide that you have questions about?* (For example, students might not understand what it means for a school to be prestigious or selective. They may not know where to look to find statistics about how what percent of applicants are admitted, etc.)

[Slide 8]

Even More Factors to Consider

Extracurricular interests: Are there clubs, sports, activities, volunteer opportunities or job/internship opportunities in or near the school that appeal to you? Consider other recreational activities you enjoy, too. You probably won't spend every second in class or studying, so make sure that you are happy with your options for filling the rest of your time, too!

Special Interests: Some schools are set up to serve students from specific backgrounds, or with specific requirements or interests. Are you looking for a single-sex environment? Maybe you seek a school—such as a historically black college or university—designed with the needs and interests of a particular community in mind. Do you want your school to have a strong religious affiliation? Perhaps you want the discipline and training a military school offers, or maybe you'd fit in well at a school with a strong focus on one particular subject area, such as technology, health sciences, or fine arts.

What other specialties might appeal to you or best meet your needs?

Academic Culture: Many schools have their own “culture” – a set of shared values or an ethic that permeates the way that people behave and interact with each other. Would you excel in a school that is extremely competitive and focused on individual success? Or would you prefer a school that is more relaxed and supportive? Would you like a school that feels more formal? Or would you like a school in which you feel comfortable calling your professors by their first names?

Campus Culture and Social Issues: It is worth looking at current social issues and the stances that a university has recently taken on issues that are important to you. How have students, faculty and leadership responded to different social issues as they have come up on campus? Are women and others protected against harassment and even assault? Do students feel that they can openly speak their mind? What political stances have students, faculty, and or leadership taken? Do you agree or disagree?

[Slide 9]

And Still More Factors to Consider

Safety: Much like social issues, safety issues can play a huge role in your college experience. Will you feel comfortable walking across campus after dark? What about if you leave campus? What level of safety and security do you need to feel comfortable? You may also want to talk with your parents or guardians about their comfort level and safety concerns, as well.

Campus Resources: Consider the resources you might need or appreciate. Support that you might ask about or review could include: career center, medical center, counseling (academic and/or emotional), health/balance resources, writing center, etc.

Your Own Preferences: You are likely to spend the next three to five years pursuing an undergraduate degree. What other aspects of your life or studies will be important to you during that time? Talk with your family, friends, guidance counselor and/or other mentors and advisors to help you pinpoint your personal priorities.

Gut feeling: Sometimes you just get a feeling that one option is better than another. Are you the kind of person who tends to follow your hunches? Or do you prefer to make your choices using concrete evidence and logic?

Step 6: Recap and Rank

- Invite volunteers to recap the information from the “Factors to Consider” slides. Ask each volunteer to identify and briefly summarize one or two factors. Answer any questions student may have about the factors.
- Ask partners to Think-Pair-Share about which factor is most important to each partner. Direct each partner to ranking her or his top three factors. Then invite several pairs to share their top factors with the class, briefly explaining why they chose their factors.

Step 7: Complete the Post-Secondary School Preferences Worksheet

Explain that before students explore the post-secondary options that might be available to them, they should continue to explore which types of schools might best fit their interests, personalities, family expectations, career aspirations, and financial situations. Knowing which kind(s) of schools to look looking for will help students narrow their options and focus their searches.

Distribute the Post-Secondary School Preferences Worksheet. Make time for students to complete the worksheet in class or ask them to complete it as homework. Suggest that they build on the Think-Pair-Share and other discussions that took place during the presentation of the slideshow.

When students have submitted their worksheets, set aside a few minutes per students to discuss and give feedback on the completed worksheets. Respond to any questions students have, as well as using the following points to guide discussion:

- Consider what you know about this student and the options likely to be available to him or her? Do the student’s preferences seem reasonable?
- Are there other factors the student should be considering?

Step 8: Students Begin a Post-Secondary School Chart

Distribute the Post-Secondary School Chart and share the Resources listed at the end of this lesson. In class or as homework, invite students to begin an online search for schools that match most or all of the preferences they listed on their worksheets and that generally fit their descriptions of an “ideal” school.

As students begin to list schools on their charts, meet with each student periodically to review her or his chart and provide feedback. Respond to students’ questions and concerns and use the following points to guide discussion.

- Do the student’s assessments of each school seem complete? What else should s/he consider?
- What other post-secondary schools or programs would you recommend this student look into?
- Does one school seem to stand out above the rest? Why?
- Can you put the student in contact with mentors who attended schools that interests him/her?
- You might also suggest that students review their charts members of their College Readiness Teams.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As they begin to identify specific schools that might interest them, students may benefit from consulting the following resources.

In-Person Resources

- **Current Students** – Do you know someone who is already a student at the school? Ask them about their experience and impressions. Admissions offices often have programs to put you in contact with a current student who is willing to talk to you and answer your questions.
- **Alumni** – Do you know someone who attended the university in the past? Ask them about their experience and impressions. Don't forget to attend the Alumni Week sessions during this module!
- **Admissions Office Staff** – If you cannot find the information you are looking for on the internet, call the school Admissions Office.
- **Guidance Counselor** – Guidance counselors at your secondary school may have helped other students who were interested in the same school. They may also have a relationship with some admissions offices.
- **School visits** – If it is practical, planning a visit to your top choice schools can help you to learn more about the people (students and professors) and the culture of the school community. School visits can be planned for before applying, or before selecting a school. If possible, ask to meet with current students and professors in your program of interest.

Online Resources

General:

- **Internet search** –Use a search engine to search for a specific school. School websites and other comparative websites can provide general overview information as well as specific details, so you may find yourself going back to the same website several times during your search and decision-making process.

Specific:

- [TopUniversities \(global\)](#)
- [The African Economist – Africa's Top 100 Universities](#)
- [Universities Australia](#)
- [University Grants Commission \(India\)](#)

- [Malaysia University Portal](#)
- [Universidades de Mexico](#)
- [Los Mejores Universidades de México – El Economista](#)
- [Unistats \(UK\)](#)
- [UCAS \(UK\)](#)
- [Your Europe Education & Youth \(European Union\)](#)
- [College Scorecard \(US\)](#)
- [Campus Explorer \(US\)](#)
- [US News and World Report Rankings \(focus is on US, but also includes global information\)](#)