

CHOOSING A VOCATIONAL SCHOOL

Over 10,000 private vocational schools teach a variety of job skills. Admission requirements for these schools vary, and the tuition ranges from approximately \$400 to over \$20,000, depending on the nature and length of the course. Vocational schools offer smaller class size. Their teachers and counselors will usually work closely with you to insure your successful completion of the training program. Most of these programs provide you with an externship in your field of study that can result in getting hired permanently, depending on your performance. Many schools also offer *free* job placement assistance, and some offer lifetime assistance. The classes and subjects that you will take are usually specific to the type of job training you are receiving. Some vocational training programs only offer a Certificate of Completion; however, many schools now offer Associate's and Bachelor's Degrees.

California community colleges also offer a variety of vocational training programs for a lesser fee, ranging from six months to three years in duration, and upon completion you will receive a Certificate of Completion. The length of the program will vary depending on how many classes you take per term; there is generally not a set time frame to complete the program. You need to take the initiative and ask for counseling and advisement to insure that you take all of the courses required to earn the Certificate of Completion. Employers often prefer candidates who complete an Associate's Degree as well as a Certificate.

Vocational schools/programs should be willing to provide you with the names of employers who have hired their graduates. Contact these employers. They are the people who may be hiring you. They know what they want in an employee. Their opinion and general impression of the school you are considering will help you decide whether this school's training program will meet your needs. Before making final arrangements to attend a school, ask specific questions about the school's job placement statistics and verify the information with employers.

Some questions to ask prospective employers include:

- Would you consider hiring graduates from this school? Why?
- Have you hired graduates in the past? How many have you hired in the past year?
- Were they hired as a result of the training they received at this school?
- Did the training make any difference in starting salary?

LEARN ABOUT MORE THAN ONE SCHOOL

(offering the same type of training, if possible)

- Visit several schools. Observe actual classes, and talk with students to get their opinions.
- Carefully read the written information provided to you. Compare it to the school's advertisements.
- Compare the private vocational schools with community colleges offering similar courses of study.
- Do not commit, and especially, do not sign any contract until you are sure of your decision.

GETTING MORE FACTS...

- Training equipment
 - Is the school using state of the art equipment and tools?
 - Are there enough tools and equipment for every student, or do students have to share?
 - If applicable, do you work on “real” people or dummies (i.e. giving shots, drawing blood, dental procedures)?
- Are there jobs available requiring the skills you want to learn? Talk to:
 - Companies that should be hiring
 - Your state Employment Development Department (EDD) or local employment agency
 - Labor unions and trade associations
- Are there complaints or recommendations about the course of study? Talk to:
 - Chamber of Commerce or Better Business Bureau
 - Present or former vocational school students
- For career counseling and additional information talk to:
 - Your high school College/Career Center Advisor
 - Someone who is working in the particular career you are considering (arrange an Informational Interview)
 - Counselors at the local *One Stop Career Center* in Concord (925-646-5555)

FINANCIAL AID

Financial aid may be available to you if you plan to attend a vocational, technical or trade school, or a certificate training program at a community college. Family income and assets, and your sophomore and junior year grade-point-average (with the exception of Physical Education and military science courses) will be reviewed to determine if you are eligible for a State of California “Cal Grant.” Obtain a **GPA Verification Form** from your College/Career Advisor during January of your senior year in high school. You must also complete a **Free Application for Federal Student Aid** (FAFSA). This form is available at www.fafsa.ed.gov on January 1st, and must be submitted electronically by March 2nd (California deadline).

There are also private scholarships available to students interested in attending vocational training programs in California and other states. Ask the school you plan to attend for leads, and also research scholarship opportunities in your College and Career Center and at www.fastweb.com, or link to other free scholarship data bases at www.finaid.org.

ACCREDITATION

Accreditation means a school has passed a thorough examination of its business practices, teaching, and curriculum. Accreditations are usually listed in the school's catalog. It's a good idea to double check the school's current status with the accrediting agency itself. If the school is not accredited, it is likely not recognized with any special testing or licensing agencies, and your training will not even count.

THE CONTRACT

Private vocational, trade or technical schools will require you to sign a contract. Don't sign anything until you ask "What happens if I don't finish the program?" Find out what part of your total payment will be refunded if for any reason you do not complete the course of study. Obtain this information by **READING THE CONTRACT**, not by just talking with the school's representative. Ask questions until you are satisfied, and work with the school's financial aid office for help.