

CHAPTER 7

FINDING THE RIGHT COLLEGE

Colleges and universities offer a wide range of opportunities. It took me a lot of time and work to find the right place for me. But, it was worth it! Let me share Maria's story and how she found the right college.

She set out to get her degree at 38, with three children and a full-time job. She kept asking herself "Am I crazy? Can I really do this?"

She told us that this was the scariest thing she had done in her adult life. And, the best decision she ever made.

She said, "a college degree always seemed more of a dream than a reality to me. I was scared to death of falling on my face."

She looked at many schools. And, they couldn't have been nicer. She said they gave her, "the first step" to her future.

Yet, when she listened to President Carol Leary's speech, describing the university and its impact on women, she tears came to her eyes. That's when she knew she had found the right place for her.

So, what questions should you ask when searching for the right place for you?

First, it is important to know what a degree is. Employers tell us they love associate and bachelor's degrees. They teach us to communicate, think, lead, and perform as a professional in a field.

That takes a lot of learning. Usually 20 courses to earn the associate and 40 for the bachelor's. Yet, many associate courses transfer into the bachelors. And, some colleges and universities give credit for previous training and life learning. Or, allow you to study on your own and test out of courses.

It all adds up quickly.

Important! Some degrees like teaching or occupational therapy have licensing requirements and external examinations to become a licensed teacher or therapist.

Therefore, it is critical that you ask the following questions of your college admissions counselor:

What programs do you offer?

What are the requirements for the degrees and majors that interest me?

How long will it take me to complete them?

How can I finish faster?

And, what must I do to achieve the degree or license that I want?

Next, ask yourself what kind of learning environment works best for you. Do you need small classes, or personal attention, or would you thrive in a large lecture hall or online where you can learn on your own schedule?

Let's consider type, size, status, accreditation and scheduling. Got your pencils out? This sounds tough, but its really about quality and choosing what you need to succeed.

Decide which type of institution fits your goals. Community colleges are the least expensive but offer mostly associate degrees. Four-year colleges and universities may offer associate's, bachelor's, master's, and even doctorate degrees.

Decide which size institution works for you. State universities enroll thousands of students seeking bachelor's degrees and have many different majors, but classes can be large. A private college keeps classes small but may have fewer degree options.

You can also choose to attend a women's college, like The American Women's College Online at Bay Path University. Our adult women tell us, that in its all-women's environment, they feel free to discuss anything, take leadership roles, show their strengths, and declare their true passions!

Warning!

Most state and private universities are not-for-profit institutions. Their primary purpose is educating students. For-profit colleges and universities are businesses that must generate profit for investors and owners.

So, you ask, how can I determine quality?

Check Accreditation!

This is tricky, because in the United States, regional accreditation ensures that high standards. Choosing an unaccredited or even a nationally accredited university might mean that an employer or graduate school could refuse to recognize your hard-earned degree.

Finally, for adults, when and how a university offers courses can be critical! Many colleges and universities offer day, evening, weekend and online options.

Some colleges, like Bay Path, offer accelerated classes where adult students take courses in six weeks. It's intense, but women finish their degree faster.

So, what are the critical questions to ask when evaluating a college or university:

Does it offer the major and degree I want...the way I want it: online, evening, or weekends?

Is it a nonprofit and is it regionally accredited?

Does it offer ways to speed up my time to completion?