

Evaluating Postsecondary Options

The **BIG** Idea

- What should I consider when evaluating postsecondary education options?

AGENDA

Approx. 45 minutes

- I. Warm Up (5 minutes)
- II. What to Look For (10 minutes)
- III. School Research (25 minutes)
- IV. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

MATERIALS

STUDENT HANDBOOK PAGES:

- Student Handbook page 134, What Do You Want to Know?
- Student Handbook page 135, Resources for School Research
- Student Handbook page 136, Top Tips for Judging Schools
- Student Handbook pages 137-138, School Research

Overhead projector

Chart paper and markers

OBJECTIVES

During this lesson, the student(s) will:

- Examine what questions to ask when applying to a one- or two-year program and where to find the answers.

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students discuss the importance and process of evaluating one- and two-year programs, such as community, technical, and career colleges. They begin by writing three questions they would have about one of these programs. Then they discuss the importance of accreditation, and questions to ask when evaluating a school or program. Next, they choose a career from a list and use CFWV.com and the Web to research two schools that offer training in that career. Finally, they discuss the challenges they faced and further options for finding the information they need.

PREPARATION

- Make arrangements for the class to use the computer lab, and make sure CFWV.com (or similar website) is accessible from students' computers.
- List the day's **BIG IDEA** and activities on the board.
- Write the day's vocabulary words and definitions on the board.
- The following handout needs to be made into overhead transparencies or copied onto chart paper:
 - **Student Handbook page 137-138, School Research**
- For **Activity III**, Item 5, review the website of a community college or tech/trade school in your area.
- The following websites will provide helpful background information when preparing for this lesson:

INFORMATION ABOUT ACCREDITATION

What is Accreditation?

<http://www.fastweb.com/fastweb/resources/articles/index/104246>

- Explains the sometimes-confusing accreditation process.

Accreditation—Make Sure It's the Real Deal

<http://www.fastweb.com/fastweb/resources/articles/index/110294>

- Includes questions to ask to make sure your degree will be worth your time and money.

U.S. Department of Education Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs

<http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/>

- Search for a specific school or program, those accredited by a specific organization, or those in your city or state; includes community colleges and technical and trade programs.

American Association of Community Colleges

(See “About Community Colleges” or “Community College Finder”)

<http://www.aacc.nche.edu>

- Accreditation doesn’t seem to be included on this site, so make sure and check this independently (for example, on the U.S. Department of Ed website, above.)

Accrediting Council of Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS)

(Go to “Accreditation,” then “ACIS Directory of Institutions to download PDF of accredited schools, which includes career colleges) <http://www.acics.org>

- Download a list of accredited institutions, by state.

APPRENTICESHIPS

U.S. Department of Labor: Apprenticeships: State Offices of Apprenticeship

<http://www.doleta.gov/OA/stateoffices.cfm>

- Includes addresses and phone numbers, by state.

CAREER VOYAGES: REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIPS

<http://www.careervoyages.gov/apprenticeship-main.cfm>

- Find apprenticeships in high-growth industries, then find apprenticeship opportunities in your state.

WEST VIRGINIA

Community and Technical College System of West Virginia

www.wvctcs.org/programs.asp

- Lists programs offered at each school.

VOCABULARY

Internship/Apprenticeship: a position in which a recent graduate receives on-the-job training and classroom instruction, sometimes with pay.

Licensed: having legal permission to operate.

Accreditation: official approval of a program after a school has met specific requirements.

Financial Aid: scholarships, grants, loans, and work-study programs that help students pay for tuition and other postsecondary expenses.

IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS

In the **Warm Up**, you may prefer to introduce the topic, then present **Student Handbook page 134, What Do You Want to Know?**

In **Activity III, School Research**, you may wish to replace the school example in Item 5 with one specific to your area.

ACTIVITY STEPS

I. Warm Up (5 minutes)

1. [As students enter the classroom, refer them to **Student Handbook page 134, What Do You Want To Know?** Give students about three minutes to write down their questions.]
2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Welcome, everybody. Last week, we explored some postsecondary options other than four-year colleges, including community college, tech schools, and trade schools. Today, we're going to examine how to evaluate these options.
3. [Have students share some of the questions they listed on **Student Handbook page 134, What Do You Want To Know?** Then ask them to brainstorm some ways they could find answers to these questions.]

II. What to Look For (10 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** If you choose to attend a community college or tech or trade school, it is extremely important to research the school carefully. The two main questions you'll want to answer about any program you're considering are:
 - Do they offer an appropriate level of training?
 - What are my chances of succeeding there?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: So, how do you know if a school is going to offer the right training and help their students succeed? Luckily, there are ways to check to make sure they meet certain educational standards. You can make sure that the school is licensed or accredited. When a school or program receives accreditation, it has been evaluated by an independent body and its mission and courses have met certain standards. Some schools or programs may be licensed by the state.

To find out if a school or one of its programs is accredited, you can just go online. The U.S. Department of Education provides a database of all accredited schools and programs. [Refer students to **Student Handbook page 135, Resources for School Research.**]

2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** This research is also important if you're looking at an apprenticeship. If you're considering this path, make sure that the apprenticeship program is registered and recognized by either your state or the federal government.
3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Okay, so you've checked a program or school, and you know

it's accredited. What are some of the ways you could find out more about a program you're interested in? *(Look at websites and/or school brochures, talk to school reps, your school counselor, people in the field, and alumni)*

What are some of the questions you could ask to make sure your time and money will be well-spent? *(What will you learn? How long is the program? What are the costs? Is financial aid available? Will they help you get a job after graduation?)*

Let's take a look at some basic information you'll want to research for a school you're considering. [As a class, go over **Student Handbook page 136, Top Tips for Judging Tech Schools**. Discuss the meaning of any vocabulary that might be new to students, like internship, licensed, accreditation, and financial aid. (See **VOCABULARY**.)]

III. School Research (25 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Now it's your turn to work with a partner to see what you can find out about one- and two-year programs. I'm going to assign you and a partner a career. Then you're going to use CFWV.com and the Web to research basic information about two schools that offer training for that career.
2. [Have students find a partner, and ask them to turn to **Student Handbook pages 137-138, School Research**. Display this page using an overhead or LCD projector. Explain that they'll use CFWV.com to identify two schools that provide training in their assigned career. Then they're going to visit each school's website to find the information listed on their student handbook page.]
3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Before you begin, I want to let you know that researching information on one- and two-year programs can be extremely challenging. I will not be able to give you step-by-step directions and you may find it frustrating to comb through the websites. When you search for information on four-year colleges and universities, you'll find a wealth of online information about the schools' programs, majors, requirements, etc. But this information is not as readily available for one- and two-year programs. It may take a lot of patience—and searching—to find the information, and there may be some information you can't find at all. If you run into a roadblock and can't find a piece of information you're looking for, don't worry. Just put a question mark in the space.
4. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Let's look at an example together. I'm going to look for schools that provide training to be an electrician.

5. [Model how to use CFWV.com to find a school in your state that offers training for that career. Using an overhead or LCD projector, record the research you find for each column in the chart on **Student Handbook pages 137-138, School Research**. Instruct students to record this information on their handbook page as they follow along.
- Use your username name and password to sign on to CFWV.com.
 - Click the **Career Planning** tab and then click the **Explore Careers** section.
 - Enter “Electrician” in the **Search for** box.
 - Click **Electrician** for details about that career.
 - Click **What to Learn** and scroll down to the section titled “Education Level”. Is apprenticeship a path for this career? Yes it is, so check **Yes**.
 - Now scroll up to “Beyond High School.” [Point out that there may be different names for similar programs. Therefore, students should investigate each one when they’re searching for programs.]
 - Click **Electrician**, then click **Schools Offering This Program** on the left side of the page. Select **Certificate Programs** and then click **Go** for a list of schools in the state that offer that program. [Explain that students should be recording only two-year and Career & Tech programs (not four-year programs).]
 - Use the first school as an example. Write “Cabell County Career Technology Center” in the chart, then point out that it is identified as a two-year program, so you would write “Community College” in the chart.
 - Click on the school name to view its profile, and then click the school’s website, which is posted in the blue box in the upper right corner of the screen.
 - Ask students where to find information on the electrician program. They’ll probably figure out that they should click **Adult Day and Evening Programs**, but then hit a stopping point, since there’s no obvious link to a program for electricians. Ask students which link seems most logical. Click **Electronic Technology Program** read all of the information in the chart. It is a two year program.
 - Note that students may need to contact the school for additional information about the program.
 - As time permits, you may want to look for other information, reinforcing that information is difficult to find, and often not available at all.
6. [Give students about 10 minutes to complete their research. Remind students not to spend too much time searching for one piece of information. If they get stuck, they should write a question mark in the box.]

IV. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

1. [Come back together as a class and have students share what they learned. What information was difficult (or impossible) to find? Would you apply to this program without knowing these facts? Did you feel that either of the schools you researched would be worth your time and money? Why or why not?]
2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** So, what do you do if you can't find the information you need? [Take answers from volunteers.] Contact the school directly! Most sites include email address, phone number, and/or a contact page. Typically, they want to hear from prospective students, and will even mail materials to your home.
3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** While it may take some extra legwork to research these schools and programs, maybe there's a way we could help each other, and maybe even future classes. What are some things we could do as a class to help each other find this information? [Take suggestions from volunteers. Some suggestions include: Start a library of information for one- and two-year programs. Keep a three-ring binder for one- and two-year programs, including notes from research, emails, and informational phone calls.]
4. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Great job today, everyone! Next week, we'll turn to a different postsecondary option and begin our research on four-year colleges.

What Do You Want to Know?

You are interested in pursuing one of the postsecondary options below, but you have important questions to answer before you make up your mind. Remember, you are the consumer—it's your time and money you're about to commit, so you want to make a careful decision. Now, imagine you are sitting across from an admissions officer at a community college or trade school, a potential employer for an apprenticeship, or a military recruiter. What do you want to know before making your decision? First, circle the option you might pursue. Then write down three questions you might have.

Postsecondary Options:

Community College Tech/Trade School Apprenticeship Military

Question 1:

Question 2:

Question 3:

RESOURCES FOR SCHOOL RESEARCH

A good school can be hard to find! Here are some resources to help in your search.

Information about Accreditation

What is Accreditation?

<http://www.fastweb.com/fastweb/resources/articles/index/104246>

- Explains the sometimes-confusing accreditation process.

Accreditation—Make Sure It's the Real Deal

<http://resources.monster.com/education/college-accreditation.asp>

- Includes questions to ask to make sure your degree will be worth your time and money.

U.S. Department of Education Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs

<http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/>

- Search for a specific school or program, those accredited by a specific organization, or those in your city or state; includes community colleges and technical and trade programs.

American Association of Community Colleges

(See “About Community Colleges” or “Community College Finder”)

<http://www.aacc.nche.edu>

- Search for community colleges by state. We don't see anything about accreditation on this site, so make sure to check this independently using the U.S. Department of Ed website listed above.

Accrediting Council of Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS)

(Go to “Accreditation,” then “ACIS Directory of Institutions to download PDF of accredited schools, which includes career colleges) <http://www.acics.org>

- Download a list of accredited institutions, by state

Apprenticeships

U.S. Department of Labor: Apprenticeships: State Offices of Apprenticeship

<http://www.doleta.gov/OA/stateoffices.cfm>

- Includes addresses and phone numbers, by state.

Career Voyages: Registered Apprenticeships

<http://www.careervoyages.gov/apprenticeship-main.cfm>

- Find apprenticeships in high-growth industries, then find apprenticeship opportunities in your state.

West Virginia

Community and Technical College System of West Virginia

www.wvctcs.org/programs.asp

- Lists programs offered at each school.

Top Tips for Judging Schools

1. Compare programs.

Locate and compare different programs. What courses do you take? Do you graduate with a certificate, a license, or a degree? How long is the program and how much does it cost? How much hands-on experience will you get (including internships and apprenticeships)?

2. Find out about other costs.

Will you be required to purchase your own supplies and materials? What is the cost of your tools, equipment, supplies, and books?

3. Ask about instructors, classrooms, and equipment.

Tour the campus before enrolling. Check to see if the equipment is up-to-date. Meet some of the instructors and find out about their qualifications.

4. Learn about the success rate.

Ask what percentage of their students graduate and find jobs. What kind of jobs do they get? Ask to be put in touch with some recent graduates to get their perspective on the training they received.

5. Find out if there's financial aid.

Does the school offer financial aid? Can government financial aid be used?

6. See if the school's licensed and accredited.

Find out if the school is licensed (usually done by a state agency). Also look for accreditation, which is usually done through a private agency or association.

7. Do a background check.

See if the school has had any complaints against it. Check with the Better Business Bureau and your state's Attorney General's office. Verify that the school has a good reputation when you speak with potential employers or those already in the field.

Adapted from www.fastweb.com, "Do Your Homework Before You Enroll," by Stephen Borkowski

School Research

Check the box in front of the career you're investigating.

<input type="checkbox"/> Administrative Assistant	<input type="checkbox"/> Computer Programmer	<input type="checkbox"/> Paramedic
<input type="checkbox"/> Automobile Mechanic	<input type="checkbox"/> Dental Hygienist	<input type="checkbox"/> Interior designer
<input type="checkbox"/> Chef	<input type="checkbox"/> Paralegal	<input type="checkbox"/> Truck Driver

Then use **CFWV.com** to identify and learn about two schools that offer training in that program:

- 1) Go to CFWV.com (www.cfwv.com) and search for the career you selected by clicking the **Career Planning** tab and then the **Explore Careers** section. Type the career name into the **Search for** box and click **Go!**
- 2) Click **What to Learn** and read the third section, titled "Education Level". Is apprenticeship a path for this career?
 Yes No
- 3) Click the most appropriate category under "Beyond High School," then click on a program. Click the **Schools Offering This Program** tab. Select **Certificate Program** or **Associate Degree** (you may need to try both). Then click **Go**. Write down two schools that offer the program. (If no schools appear on the list, you may need to go back to the "What to Learn" page of the career profile and select another program listed under "Beyond High School".) Include only two-year and Career & Tech programs on the chart on **Student Handbook page 138**.
- 4) Visit the websites for each school and record the information you can find. If you cannot find the information, write a question mark on the chart (**Student Handbook page 138**).
- 5) When you're done, return to the CFWV.com site for that career and click **Other Resources**. On the back of this page, write the names of at least two resources you could contact for more information.

Name of Career: _____

School Name	Community College or Tech School	Program and Degree Offered	Sample Courses	Tuition/ Financial Aid	Accreditation (yes/no)	Contact (phone / email)

