

## Overview

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# COUNTRY: CANADA

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Country Specific Guide

THE HEADMASTER

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## Canada

### Canadian Educational System

Canada has a strong and well-funded system of public education, which is largely managed provincially. Therefore, some aspects of the education system can vary between provinces. However, as education is overseen by the federal government, the standard of education remains consistently high.

There is both a public and private education system in Canada. The Canadian government heavily subsidizes education from kindergarten through to the post-secondary level, spending on average almost six percent of its GDP on education.

The Canadian education system is divided into three levels:

- **Primary** – Also known as elementary school, the primary level runs from Kindergarten or Grade 1 (ages six to seven) and runs through to Grade 8 (ages 13 to 14). The school year normally runs from September through to the following June.
- **Secondary** – Also known as high school, this level runs from Grade 9 (ages 14 to 15) to Grade 12 (ages 17 to 18). Ontario has a Grade 12+.
- **Post-Secondary** – Post-secondary education in Canada is provided by universities and colleges, which offer both undergraduate and graduate programs. Some universities also offer professional degrees in fields such as law, medicine, and engineering. There is a diverse range of universities and colleges in Canada, including some of the top-ranked institutions in the world.

Primary and secondary education is compulsory for children in Canada and typically starts at the age of 5 or 6, with grade levels ranging from Kindergarten to Grade 12. The majority of students attend public schools, although there are also private and separate (Catholic) schools.

### Other Types of Education in Canada

#### **1. Vocational Schools**

On top of community colleges offering vocational training, students are also given the opportunity to learn a trade or vocation at technical schools that are spread out throughout

Canada. Years ago, such programs did not require students to hold a high school diploma, but things have changed greatly in recent years.

Vocational schools allow Canadian students to learn the specific trade they are interested in and gain real-life experience under a professional and qualified supervisor.

## **2. Private Schools**

Private schools are also available in Canada, which means that they are schools that are not funded by the government, and often come with hefty price tags and they are funded by tuition fees paid by students' families or by private organizations.

Private schools in Canada are subject to the same regulations and standards as public schools, but they may offer a different curriculum or approach to education. Some private schools emphasize religious education, while others may offer a specialized curriculum in areas such as arts, sports, or technology.

## **3. Religious Schools**

Religious schools are private schools in Canada that are based on a particular religious philosophy or faith. They offer a religious curriculum in addition to the standard academic subjects taught in other schools.

Religious schools in Canada can be affiliated with a variety of different faith traditions, including Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, and others. The curriculum and approach to education at these schools may vary depending on the specific faith tradition, but they often emphasize religious values and moral character development.

Admission to religious schools is usually competitive and may require an entrance exam or interview. Tuition fees at religious schools can be higher than those at public schools, but they may also offer financial aid or scholarships to make their programs accessible to a wider range of students.

## Types of degrees you can earn in Canada

Postsecondary institutions issue degrees, diplomas, and certificates depending on the nature of the institutions and the length of the programs. At universities and university colleges, there is an emphasis on degree programs. Applied degrees are offered by some colleges. At all other institutions, the emphasis is on diploma and certificate programs. In Canada, students can earn a variety of degrees at the undergraduate and graduate levels, including:

### **1. Bachelor's Degree**

Students at the baccalaureate or bachelor's level are known as undergraduates. Successful completion of the secondary school program is the normal requirement for admission to undergraduate study. These degrees typically take three to four years of full-time study to complete. An honors baccalaureate degree usually signals a higher degree of concentration in the honors subject, as well as a higher level of academic achievement. They can be awarded in a wide range of subjects, including arts, sciences, business, and engineering.

### **2. Master's Degree**

These are graduate degrees that typically take one to two years of full-time study beyond a bachelor's degree. They often involve a combination of coursework and research and can be awarded in a wide range of subjects. It is awarded in a wide range of subject, including arts, sciences, business, engineering, and more. Students typically take courses in their chosen field

### **3. Doctoral Degree**

Doctoral degrees, also known as Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy) degrees, are the highest level of graduate degrees, usually taking three to five years of full-time study beyond a master's degree. They are designed for students who wish to pursue advanced research or professional career in their chosen fields. These degrees typically involve a significant research component, often leading to the submission and defense of a dissertation.

In Canada, doctoral degrees are offered in a wide range of fields, including the arts, sciences, humanities, and professional disciplines such as medicine, law, and engineering. The focus of the program is on developing advanced knowledge and research skills in a specific area of study.

#### **4. Diplomas**

Diplomas are certificates awarded upon completion of a specialized program of study, typically in a college or technical institute. They are designed for students who wish to gain practical, hands-on training in a specific field and are typically shorter in duration than bachelor's degrees, taking 1 to 2 years to complete.

The curriculum is focused on developing practical skills and knowledge in the chosen field, and students receive hands-on training through laboratory work, internships, and co-op placements.

Diplomas are a popular option for students who are looking for a more practical, hands-on education that prepares them for a specific career path. They offer the opportunity to gain specialized knowledge and skills and are often more affordable and accessible than other forms of post-secondary education.

#### **5. Certificates**

Certificates are even shorter-term programs of study that may take a few months to a year to complete and provide students with practical training and hands-on experience in a specific field.

Certificates are offered in a wide range of fields, including healthcare, technology, business, and arts. They are often more focused and specific than diplomas and can be completed in a shorter amount of time, ranging from a few weeks to several months.

They are a popular option for students who are looking to enhance their career prospects or acquire new skills quickly and affordably. They are also an attractive option for individuals who are already working and looking to upskill or change careers.

## Find the best college for you

### How to find universities in Canada

Identifying colleges and universities that are a good fit for your academic and social needs is crucial to your college application process.

#### **Research Online**

One of the simplest ways to find information about universities is to do research online. A simple online search using keywords such as "universities in Canada" or "top universities in Canada" will provide you with a comprehensive list of universities in the country. Give yourself plenty of time for this phase of the process, as there is a lot of information! Also, do not trust everything you read online, and take time to dig deeper into facts.

#### **Government Websites**

The Government of Canada's official website, Canada.ca, provides a list of universities in the country and information about their programs and services.

#### **College Websites**

One of the most reliable sources of information is the college's website. Almost everything you want to know – from the choice of majors and programs to dormitories to application details – everything can be found on the website. Not just this information, websites are generally illustrative of a school, its students, and its mission.

#### **University Rankings**

There are several well-known university rankings, such as the QS World University Rankings and the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, which provide an objective comparison of universities in Canada and around the world.

#### **Educational Consultants or College Advisors**

Speaking to a higher education expert, one who is properly trained and certified by an external organization, is a great way to understand which colleges match your academic interests, personal preferences, and professional goals. Educational consultants can provide



you with personalized advice and guidance on universities in Canada, including information on admission requirements, program offerings, and student life.

### **Student Forums**

Student forums and discussion boards are great places to connect with current and former students and get firsthand information on universities in Canada. Reading student reviews and testimonials can provide valuable insights into the experiences of current and former students and can help you make an informed decision.

### **Attend a College Fair**

If there are college or university fairs in your city, town, or school featuring higher education institutions, try to attend so you can meet these representatives of universities in person.

### **Web-Based Portal Programs**

Many high schools offer online portals that allow students to research, track, and plan their college admissions. These are usually free of charge to students and families. Ask your school if they have any particular online portals that can help you with your research.

## Understanding a College's Academic Reputation

### **Rankings**

Many organizations, such as Times Higher Education, QS World University Rankings, and U.S. News & World Report, release annual rankings of colleges and universities in Hong Kong and globally. These rankings take into account factors such as research output, reputation, and student satisfaction.

### **Accreditation**

Hong Kong has several accreditation bodies, such as the University Grants Committee (UGC) and the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) that are responsible for ensuring that colleges and universities meet certain standards of quality and academic reputation.

### **Reputation Surveys**

Surveys are conducted by different organizations and websites such as "The Good Universities Guide" and "Top Universities" asking employers, academics, and students to rate the reputation of different colleges and universities.

### **Research output**

A college or university's research output, such as the number of publications and research grants, is also a good indicator of its academic reputation.

### **Graduate Employment**

The graduate employment rate and the average salary of graduates of a college or university can also be an indicator of the academic reputation of the college or university.

### **Alumni Network**

A college or university's alumni network can also be a good indicator of its academic reputation. Many colleges and universities have active alumni associations and networks, which can provide valuable information about the college or university's academic reputation.

### **Factors to consider when choosing a university in Canada**

When choosing which schools to apply to, look at tests required (academic standardized and English proficiency tests), costs, scholarships, international student services, campus facilities, and internships and job placement rates. Based on your research, you can narrow your application list down to target only the colleges and universities that meet your needs.

If you are an undergraduate, you might look closer at campus amenities, while graduate students—who are living on campus or not—might consider the area's off-campus quality of life, too.

- **Curriculum, courses, and majors:** Which college's academic program appeals to your interests and study style most? Consider whether you want more flexibility in your major or whether you seek an intensive, directed course from the start.

- **Campus environment and climate:** City, suburban, rural, consolidated campus versus distributed campus – the value of warm weather cannot be overestimated for some students!
- **Student Diversity:** Is the college co-educational or single-sex? Are there students from all over the country/world with different backgrounds and experiences?
- **Size of school:** Undergraduates/graduates, student-to-faculty ratio, average class size, and professors versus teaching assistants taking entry-level classes.
- **Opportunities for further studies and employment:** Research, professional schools, internships, and graduate placements.
- **Alumni network:** Domestic, international, strength, and accessibility.
- **Facilities, extracurricular activities, and sports:** Access to laboratories, computing centers, music, theater, athletic facilities, and competitive sports teams.
- **Cost versus prestige:** Financial aid or a brand college? Decide what is more important - lightening your financial burden and being a merit scholar with special status or privileges on campus, or going to a well-known college familiar to your friends and family.

### Questions for Undergraduate Students

As an undergraduate, you will likely spend a lot of your time on campus, so the campus experience is a crucial part of your decision. To narrow down the colleges on your application list, answer these questions:

- What do I want to study?
- Do I want to attend a large university or a small college?
- Should I go to a public college or a private college?
- Would I be happier at a college campus that is in the countryside, a small town, or a city?
- Which types of campus activities and student organizations do I want to join?

Colleges list their class size and average student-to-faculty ratio (i.e., how many students are on campus for every faculty member) on their websites so you can easily get a sense of the class sizes at the colleges that interest you. College websites will also list the programs available, as well as activities and student organizations.

## Applying to Colleges

### Applying to colleges in Canada

At this point, you may have a short list of colleges to which you want to apply—ideally, around five to ten universities in Canada.

To streamline your application process, make sure you have everything you need to complete your applications ahead of time. Beyond filling out the application form, each university or college will have its own required application checklist. You will also need a valid passport, payment for your application fees, and, for some colleges, proof of financing.

### **Application Form**

Most colleges and universities in Canada require applicants to complete an online application form.

### **Academic Certificates and Transcripts**

You will need to provide certified copies of your educational certificates and transcripts from your secondary and post-secondary studies. For undergraduate applicants, that means submitting transcripts from every institution you have previously attended: your complete secondary school academic transcripts, external exams, and (for transfer students) any prior colleges or universities.

### **English Proficiency Test Scores**

As an international student applicant, you will need to take at least one test to determine your English proficiency. You may also need to take other standardized tests to demonstrate academic proficiency. Ask in advance—a growing number of undergraduate colleges and graduate departments are now test-optional when it comes to the SAT/ACT or GRE/GMAT.

- Duolingo
- IELTS
- iTEP
- PTE Academic
- TOEFL

Undergraduate Academic Standardized Tests

- ACT
- SAT

### **Personal Statement or Statement of Purpose**

Colleges and universities in Canada may require you to submit a personal statement or statement of purpose outlining your reasons for applying, your goals, and how your past experiences have prepared you for this program.

### **Letter of Recommendation**

Some selective colleges and universities will require you to submit Letters of Recommendation along with your transcripts and essays. Letters of recommendation should be written by someone who has either taught you in a class and can speak to your academic abilities, or by an advisor who can provide a more well-rounded perspective on the kind of person you are.

### **Additional Information**

Depending on the program or institution, additional materials may be required, such as portfolios, samples of work, or interviews.

### **Application Deadline**

For new international undergraduate students considering Canadian colleges and universities, applications are generally accepted as early as a year before the academic term you wish to join. Each college sets its own application deadline.

### **Early Deadline**

An early deadline, usually in November or December, is a deadline for applicants who want to receive an admission decision earlier than the regular deadline and may have the advantage of a more favorable admission decision, as well as early access to campus housing and other services.

### **Regular Deadline**

The regular deadline, usually in January or February, is the final deadline for most programs and institutions in Canada. Applications received after this deadline may still be considered, but admission may be more competitive or limited based on availability.

### Accepting an offer and enrolling at a college or university

Once your application has been completed and all supporting materials received, you will generally get an email or letter notifying you when decisions are made and when you can expect to hear about the next steps.

If you are admitted to a college, congratulations! Here is what to do next.

#### **Deciding between multiple offers**

If you have multiple offers, it is helpful to go back to the criteria you used when deciding where to apply. Think about what you have learned since applying— any interactions with representatives, students, or recent graduates—and what you know about life on each campus. If you can, seek out current students, ideally from your home country, to get their opinions as you make your final decision. Your ultimate goal is to find the college or university that fits you best across multiple criteria.

#### **Securing your Spot**

Your admissions letter will list the next steps to accept your offer, how to apply for your student visa, and the dates to arrive on campus for the beginning of classes. Many universities might set a deadline date for sending in your tuition deposit and possibly a housing deposit to hold your place for the next academic year.

#### **Apply for your Student Visa**

Once you've received a letter of acceptance from a Canadian university, you must apply for a study permit if you intend to study in Canada for six months or longer. You must apply for a permit before you go to Canada. Details about study permits for international students can be found on the website of Citizenship and Immigration Canada.