

Enrollment Strategies for Private Trade and Technical Schools

PRIVATE TRADE and technical schools create a realistic environment. You take an active part in the learning experience, as if you were in the world of work and where lecture by an instructor is limited. If you like hands-on training, private trade and technical schools are a good alternative to traditional colleges and universities.



Objectives:



1. Summarize the benefits and requirements of private trade and technical schools.
2. Select the barriers for selecting private trade and technical schools.

Key Terms:



| | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| ACT | contract | scholarships |
| ASSET | credit transfer | soft skills |
| academic skills | FAFSA | trade schools |
| accreditation | hard skills | transfer credit |
| advanced standing | job placement rate | |
| career schools | SAT | |

Benefits and Requirements of Private Trade and Technical Schools

Private trade and technical schools were originally called vocational schools and have been replaced by trade-specific, for-profit schools that offer diplomas and certificates or have merged with community colleges that offer diplomas and Career and Technical Education (CTE) certificates or associate's degrees.

BENEFITS

Trade schools are institutions that teach students the technical skills needed to perform a particular job in a specific industry. Another name for trade schools is **career schools**. In these schools, you will learn **hard skills**—the technical skills learned at school or through employment.

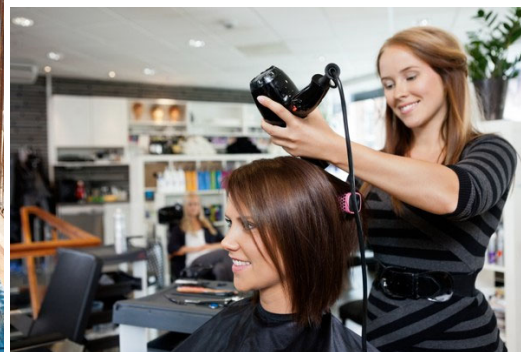


FIGURE 1. Trade schools exist in almost every industry.

Trade schools provide hands-on training to learn relevant skills and benefits from practical experience. After completion of a specific program, many trade schools offer placements or internships so you can enter the workplace as a qualified and prepared employee. Employers prefer workers with training, so attending a private trade and technical school can be a major advantage.

TABLE 1. Examples of Trade Schools

| | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Construction | It prepares students for the building and construction industry. Training is offered in carpentry, heating and air conditioning, plumbing, and electrician technology. |
| Hospitality | It offers specialties in culinary arts, restaurant ownership, hotel management, and travel and tourism. |
| Legal | It provides training for paralegals, legal assistants, and court reporters. |
| Medical or paramedical | It trains workers in health occupations focused on helping others (e.g., medical assistants, dental assistants, and x-ray technicians). |

If you struggle in high school or you do not particularly like a traditional education, a trade school is a good alternative. Also, a trade school is a good choice if you do not meet the admission requirements for a traditional college or university.

Flexibility

Programs are tailored to accommodate full-time and part-time workers. Daytime, evening, and weekend classes are available in addition to online courses.

Academic and Soft Skills

In the 1990s, the focus of vocational schools was broadened to include academic and “soft skills” in addition to technical skills. **Academic skills** are reading, writing, spelling, and mathematics. **Soft skills** are personal attributes that enhance the ability to interact effectively

with coworkers and customers. Soft skills include time management, communication skills, conflict resolution, negotiation, team building, and related skills.

Quick Program Completion

Trade schools are a good choice if you want to work with your hands or care for others. In addition, programs are typically completed quickly. Many programs require 12 months as a full-time student, but some programs take less time.

REQUIREMENTS FOR ENROLLMENT

Enrollment requirements vary by institution and sometimes state regulations. However, you can be prepared with some of the basic requirements at the majority of institutions. Also, you can research guidelines for specific institutions.

School Selection

You can use the Internet and search for a free service called “RWM,” which is a database of private, postsecondary vocational schools in 50 states. It can be found at <http://www.rwm.org/rwm/>. Included are schools that offer certificates and diplomas as well as associate’s degrees and bachelor’s degrees. It is organized by state and then by training occupation.

- ◆ Explore selected schools online and check their reputations by inserting the school name and adding the word “reputation.” This is important because most trade or career schools are for-profit businesses, and their success depends on customer satisfaction.
- ◆ Contact each school online or by telephone. When students speak to representatives or exchanges via email, they should have prepared questions about a specific program, the time required for program completion, the percentage of job placements for graduates, the program cost, and the refund policy.
- ◆ Make appointments to visit one or more trade schools to review the curriculum content. Also, have the students ask about the placement rate of graduates.
- ◆ Inquire about conversing with a school administrator or an instructor to discuss the training program(s) of interest and requesting a list of students—current or graduates—that can be contacted about their experiences there.
- ◆ Seek guidance from family and friends.

Program Requirements for Associate’s or Bachelor’s Degree

Generally, you must live in the state and have 12-month residency prior to applying to be eligible for resident tuition. You need a non-degree seeking form or an application form specifying a desired certificate, associate’s degree, or bachelor’s degree. Fees may need to accompany the application. In addition, you usually must submit an official transcript of at least six or seven semesters at an accredited high school, an official passing GED score report, or an offi-

cial transcript with at least 24 course credits from an accredited college or a combination of the high school transcript and the college transcript, if fewer than 24 course credits were achieved. Include standardized college placement test scores for ACT, SAT, and/or ASSET.

- ◆ **ACT** or American College Testing is a U.S. standardized test for high school achievement and college admissions that assesses reading, English, mathematics, and science related to high school curricula. In addition, it provides a composite ACT score. All high school students in Illinois must take the ACT.
- ◆ **SAT** or Scholastic Aptitude Test is a standardized test for most U.S. college admissions and is composed of general verbal and quantitative reasoning. It measures critical reading, writing, and mathematics. Scores are provided for each topic.
- ◆ **ASSET** or Student Advising, Placement, and Retention Service is sponsored by ACT and often provides its services in a seminar format. Share this information with your students: <http://www.act.org/asset/>.

Non-Degree Program Requirements for Certificate or Diploma

- ◆ In-state, 12-month residency prior to applying to be eligible for resident tuition
- ◆ Completion of a non-degree seeking form
- ◆ An application form with an application fee, if applicable
- ◆ Standardized college placement test scores for ACT, SAT, or ASSET

Additional Requirements

Additional requirements may be part of the application process. Typically, you must submit a 500-word essay explaining interest in a particular program. Higher grades are necessary for acceptance in competitive programs with limited space. Examples are practical nurse and medical assistant programs. Most programs require you to be at least 18 years old, which requires a birth certificate, passport, or driver's license for proof. You may need to spend several hours observing someone working in an area of interest and submit a signed intent form. Also, you may need to submit a signed Code of Ethics. In addition, a personal interview may be required.



FIGURE 2. Private trade and technical schools have admission requirements.

Costs for Trade Schools

Some trade schools charge lower tuition rates than college and universities. In addition, high school students who attend classes authorized by their high schools often enroll free of charge.



DIGGING DEEPER...

UNCOVERING ADDITIONAL FACTS: Tuition Reimbursement

Going to school while furthering your education is easier now because of many employers. According to recent survey results, 56.6 percent of employers now offer tuition reimbursement to employees who meet work and grade requirements. Requirements for eligibility may include the time an employee has worked for an employer, with an average of 16 months, as well as course and grade requirements. The dollar amount offered by an employer can range from no limitations to a predetermined cap; it varies by industry. For example, the maximum for the insurance industry is \$4,263, while banking and finance is \$3,875. Twenty-five percent of employers have no limit.

Tuition reimbursement benefits the employer by retaining the employee, and it benefits the employee by furthering his or her knowledge and improving abilities.

Financial Aid for Trade Schools

Many employers offer tuition-reimbursement programs. If you cannot afford to attend school, even with U.S. government and scholarship assistance, you might consider working at a company that provides tuition reimbursement. An entry-level job with a company in an industry related to your desired career may provide you with an opportunity for the needed education to advance. For example, if you are interested in automobiles and enjoy designing vehicles, you can take an entry-level job at an automotive company. With tuition reimbursement, you may seek the education to reach your goal.

GI Bill

Military service personnel may qualify for the GI Bill or other educational financial assistance. This is possible while on active duty as well as after a service obligation has been completed.

FAFSA

Students who attend trade schools, accredited by the Department of Education, are eligible to receive financial aid from the U.S. government. **FAFSA** or the Free Application for Federal Student Assistance is for low-interest loans and grants to help finance the cost of undergraduate and graduate study. Current and prospective U.S. college students who seek financial aid complete this form annually. Awards are based on need, and certain income limits apply. There is only one form, but this application accesses federal, state, and institution aid, including Pell grants, federal student loans, and federal work study.

Scholarships

All institutions have scholarships available to students. **Scholarships** are awards of financial aid provided for further education. They are based on meeting criteria set by a specific

scholarship. Applications must be submitted for funds available as direct cash for tuition payment and other designated criteria, such as books. Scholarships can be found on the Financial Aid page of a school of interest or researched on the Internet by using key words. It is important for students to verify that a scholarship is credible and trustworthy by conducting an Internet search of the scholarship name and adding the word “reputation” to find a rating.

Barriers for Selecting a Private Trade and Technical School

When selecting an institution, there are a number of areas to be concerned about, because private trade and technical schools are typically for-profit meaning they need students in order to stay in business.

ACCREDITATION

Accreditation is a type of quality assurance process. An accrediting agency is an external body that determines whether applicable standards are met and evaluates services and operations of educational institutions or programs. The U.S. Department of Education publishes a list of nationally recognized accrediting agencies of higher education. To learn if a private trade or technical school is accredited, students can visit <http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/search.aspx>.

TRANSFER CREDIT

Transfer credit, credit transfer, and advanced standing are terms used by colleges and universities to grant credit to students for educational experiences or courses undertaken at another institution. Which credits transfer becomes important when students want to attend a college or university after attending a private trade or technical school.

JOB PLACEMENT RATE

Job placement rate is the percentage of participants who become employed. The figure is calculated by dividing the number of total participants who were registered for services and enrolled in the program of interest by the number of applicants or program participants placed into employment or who otherwise entered employment.

COST

Private trade and technical schools tend to be for-profit, so they operate like a business selling a product. It is important to obtain all pertinent information about the school, a specific program, all costs, when the costs are charged to students, and the refund policy if students are unable to complete their selected programs. These schools do not provide costs until obtaining

contact information from potential students and introducing their programs. This is true on the telephone and via the Internet, which is a typical first contact. When discussing payment, students should ask if costs are quoted per course, semester, or program.

CONTRACT

A **contract** is an agreement between two or more parties that is written and enforceable by law. When making a commitment to a private trade or technical school, it's important to know your contractual obligations should you not be able to complete the course of study agreed upon. Let's say you go to school for Automotive Technology and someone in your family becomes ill; requiring you to take a full time job to help support your family. Ask questions that clarify the refund policy and other items, before signing the contract. For example: Does the contract require you to pay the full cost of the program or are there exceptions that allow you to pay for only the schooling you have attended?



FIGURE 3. Know your obligations before signing a contract.

Summary:



Private trade and technical schools provide primarily hands-on training in which you take an active part in the learning experience, and lecture by an instructor is limited. In many cases, these schools provide an avenue for students who are ineligible for higher education at a college or university to learn a trade and to be able to earn a living wage. If this describes you, investigating private trade and technical schools is an avenue to explore. It is also a good idea to inquire about more than one institution so you can make a comparison.

When doing your investigation, check admission requirements, the cost of attending, financial aid, scholarships, accreditation, potential for transferring credit, and the contract obligations, such as the refund policy. Add a tour to help with your selection. Then make an educated decision.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What were trade and career schools originally called?
2. What is the difference between hard skills and soft skills?

3. How do degree program requirements for enrollment differ from those of non-degree programs?
4. What applications need to be completed for financial aid?
5. What barriers need to be addressed when selecting a trade and technical school?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Joining the military is another path you can follow to receive vocational training and certifications. The Department of Defense works with the U.S. Department of Labor, Education, and Veteran's Affairs to create avenues that you and others can follow when seeking training for vocational and technical certification and licensing.

The programs for certification and licensing evaluate your training and experience or offer the opportunity for courses, exams, and practicals that get you the certification and licensing related to your work in the military. The certification and licensing can be used when you leave the military and return to civilian life.

The Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force have what is called "Vo-Tech Programs," which are vocational training programs. Check <http://www.military.com/education/money-for-school/vocational-training-and-certifications-program.html> to see a list of resources sponsored by the military. Included is information about tuition assistance and apprenticeship programs for Vocational/Technical Training, Professional Licensing, and Certification.

Web Links:



Benefits of Vocational Schools

http://www.ehow.com/facts_5457307_benefits-vocational-schools.html

Choosing a Vocational School

<http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0241-choosing-vocational-school>

Financial Aid for Trade School

http://www.ehow.com/how_2107559_get-financial-aid-trade-school.html

Private Vocational Trade Schools

http://www.ehow.com/info_7959985_priate-vocational-trade-schools.html

Requirements for Technical Schools

http://www.ehow.com/info_7935147_requirements-technical-schools.html

Technical vs. Traditional College

<http://voices.yahoo.com/technical-vs-traditional-college-benefits-3280724.html?cat=4>