

# 10 Questions to Ask Before Going Back to School

-Western Governors University

1. **Am I choosing the right degree?** You want to make sure that the degree you earn will help you meet your career objectives. If you are already working in your chosen field, this should be easy. For example, if you're a teacher, you'll want to consider a master's degree in education, or if you are already a nurse, a master's in nursing is a logical choice. If you are considering a bachelor's degree with the goal of moving into a better, higher-paying job or a different field, it is important to choose a degree that employers will recognize as relevant. For example, a degree in business or information technology may be more useful than one in general studies or liberal arts.
2. **Is the university accredited?** The U.S. Department of Education publishes a list of nationally-recognized accrediting agencies that the Department has determined to be reliable authorities. Accreditation is a must-have to ensure that employers and other academic institutions will respect and recognize your degree.
3. **What is the university's background? Its ownership?** Make sure you understand whether the school is part of a privately or publicly held company or a nonprofit institution. This may not be the factor that governs your choice, but it is important to know all you can about the university you select. Many for-profit institutions offer quality programs, but they may charge more or dedicate more resources to marketing and recruitment than a nonprofit university, making tuition costs higher.
4. **How will I learn?** Most online universities use technology to distribute traditional classroom education—classes that are led by a professor or instructor with a fixed schedule and syllabus. While the classes are usually scheduled to accommodate working adults, you'll move through the course at a set pace. You may want to consider a competency-based approach to learning, which will allow you to move at your own pace and advance when you demonstrate your mastery of subject matter.
5. **What kind of help and support will I have?** For many students, going to college online, without the interaction provided by an on-campus experience, can be a daunting prospect. Be sure to ask how you will interact with the faculty and what kind of support is available.
6. **It's online—will I connect with other students, and if so, how?** Although you are choosing to go to college online, interacting with other students can enrich your learning experience and help you feel connected. Online universities are developing a number of ways for students to connect through chat rooms, webinars, and social media—it is important to find out what the school is doing to engage and connect with students.

7. **How much will it cost?** Tuition at online universities varies widely, from approximately the same cost as a public university to more than twice as much. Higher cost does not necessarily mean higher quality at an online college, so be sure to understand all of the costs—tuition, books, and fees—before you make your decision. Another factor in your cost consideration should be the length of time you expect to take to complete your degree—the longer it takes, the more it is likely to cost.
8. **How will I pay for my degree program?** Depending on your income, you may be eligible for a government grant, particularly a Pell grant, to help pay for your education. A federal student loan may also be an option, but take care not to borrow more than you need or incur too much debt. If you expect to use financial aid, be sure to find out whether the school you're considering is eligible.
9. **Will my degree prepare me for career advancement or graduate work?** Make sure that the degree program you choose offers relevant and up-to-date curriculum to ensure that when you graduate, you'll have the real-world skills employers need.
10. **Will my degree be respected by employers?** If you want your degree to count, make sure to answer this question before you choose your school. Ask for information about alumni placements, employer surveys, and graduate rankings on national test scores.