

# 5 TIPS FOR EVALUATING ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

From coast to coast, universities are touting the accomplishments of their various academic programs in order to attract the brightest students. With so many to wade through, how do you really decide which school fits your area of interest, and which one will provide you with the best real-world preparation? Learn how to look beyond the hype to find the academic school that will help you achieve your goals and get you not only your first job, but also your first promotion.

## 1. ARTS

Great artists must not only perfect their art form, whether it be a performing, visual or communication art, but they must also be their own marketer or small business owner. Choose a school that combines your arts curriculum with one that helps you succeed in the marketplace. Programs that offer entrepreneurship training or grants for undergraduate research prepare you to create your own opportunities after graduation. Opportunities for double-majoring, interdisciplinary majors, and access to state-of-the-art equipment as a first-year student will give you a diverse skill set that future employers want. Look beyond the campus for resources, too. Is the school located in a city with a vibrant arts scene or a top-five media market? Are students taking classroom knowledge into the community; do faculty work in their area of expertise? Nothing compares to learning from hands-on, real-world experiences. A good arts school should give you the opportunity to perform, display your art, work for a publication or intern all as an undergrad. Those aren't just things that enhance your college experience; they also look great on a resume!

## 2. BUSINESS

How do great business programs prepare students for not just one career, but for the ever-changing and often unpredictable world of business? They offer students a broad foundation and then provide them opportunities to specialize, individualize and combine different interests, including those *outside* of business. How do you pick a program that will help you stand out? Start with one that has earned accreditation from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). This signifies that a school has reached the highest standards of achievement when it comes to business education. Look for opportunities inside and outside the classroom – to develop business plans, manage real money and even partner with businesses on projects for course credit. Faculty with strong connections to the local professional community and industry experience and a career center focused on business students will prove to be invaluable resources. Pick a school located in a leading economic center, where you can put into practice what you learn and start forging valuable industry relationships as an undergraduate.

### The SMU Advantage

#### Cox School of Business

Through an undergraduate course at SMU Cox, our students have the opportunity to manage an investment portfolio of approximately \$3 million over an eight-month period.

#### Dedman College of Humanities & Sciences

Dedman students participate in more than \$10 million of sponsored research each year and benefit from the dynamic forums of seven interdisciplinary centers and institutes.

#### Lyle School of Engineering

More than 75% of Lyle students complete at least two internships before graduation. Faculty represent a world-class group of technical experts in the critical fields of cyber security, biomedical research and sustainable housing.

#### Meadows School of the Arts

Meadows students participate in more than 400 on- and off-campus performances, lectures, recitals, exhibitions and symposia each year. Award-winning, student-run communications include *The Daily Update* broadcast, *The Daily Campus* newspaper and *Rotunda* yearbook.

#### Simmons School of Education & Human Development

Simmons students engage the broader community through urban education, tutoring, ESL programs, alliances with community outreach and nonprofit organizations, and model program creation.

### 3. EDUCATION

As our population grows, there is an increasing need for technologically savvy educators. Truly great teachers are those who are committed to effecting positive change in their communities, sensitive to and responsive to diverse learners. State rules vary regarding degree programs for teaching so consider where you may want to teach and do your research.

Can you major in an academic specialty (like English, biology or mathematics) to prepare you as an expert while also earning your teaching credentials, as it is in Texas? Accreditation by the National Council of Accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE), Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) or another national or regional agency ensures that you are learning the most up-to-date teaching methods, backed by scientifically based research. A quality program should have a strong connection with the local community, giving you the chance to interact with students in your first two years through tutoring or outreach programs, and to collaborate with other schools and institutions to develop model programs.

### 4. ENGINEERING

Today's engineers are working at the forefront of the large-scale problems that afflict our modern-day society. They are expected to be innovative leaders and relentless problem-solvers who are not afraid to grow from their own failures. Access to hands-on training, technologies and externally funded research opportunities will ensure you are ready to undertake engineering challenges on a global scale and respond with cutting-edge solutions. Look into the facilities, classroom experiences, internships and co-op opportunities that are available at the undergraduate level. A vital part of being a well-rounded engineer is the ability to think creatively. Examine the curriculum and make sure it places a strong emphasis on design and innovation. The right program will help you develop your analytical skills by allowing you to pursue multiple passions. A flexible degree path that allows you to add a major or minor in another area of study will help you stand out against one-dimensional engineers, pursue your passion and prepare you to make your mark on society.

### 5. HUMANITIES AND SCIENCES

The best academic programs will prepare you for a change and give you a skillset that won't be outdated before you even graduate. Whether your career path takes you into academia, law, the medical professions or research, a solid foundation in the humanities and sciences will provide you with an invaluable set of employable skills – the abilities to think critically, communicate effectively and learn throughout a lifetime. Find a program that lets you combine several interests and connect with faculty who are engaging teachers and avid researchers – those who are both creating and conveying knowledge. Schools with interdisciplinary and pre-professional programs, centers and institutes will allow you to connect with industry leaders and build your résumé before graduating. The right school will help you create a strong interdisciplinary groundwork through undergraduate research, engaged learning opportunities, study abroad and more.

### THE WRAP-UP

Never underestimate the power of a research university. Research is the key to determining which program or school will best prepare you to tackle the professional world. **Talk with current students.** Are they engaged, challenged and happy to be there? **Research recent alumni.** Are they making waves in their respective industry – well-regarded and well-prepared to be leaders in their field? **Look for on-campus, student-run organizations in your area of interest.** Building relationships with ambitious peers while in school will give you a strong network that you can use throughout your career.

**Don't forget:** Your high school counselor has a wealth of knowledge, ready to help you wade through all of the options. Get ready to explore! Find more helpful information for your college search at [smu.edu/5tips](http://smu.edu/5tips).

Explore SMU's 185 areas of study in  
five undergraduate schools at  
[smu.edu/majors](http://smu.edu/majors).

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