**What Is a 4-Year College or University?**

[Public universities](https://www.campusexplorer.com/colleges/search/?schooltype=1), [private universities](https://www.campusexplorer.com/colleges/search/?schooltype=2), liberal arts colleges and career colleges offering [bachelors degrees](https://www.campusexplorer.com/bachelors-degree/) all fall into the category of 4-year colleges and universities. These schools offer bachelors degrees, which are usually completed in four years of full-time study, and some may also have a [graduate school](https://www.campusexplorer.com/graduate-school/) that offer [masters degrees](https://www.campusexplorer.com/masters-degree/). Many [online schools and universities](https://www.campusexplorer.com/online-school-degree-programs/) also offer bachelors degrees and an online alternative to a campus

### Time Requirements for 4-Year Colleges and Universities

Despite the name, you're not required to complete your undergraduate degree in four years. In many cases students will extend their bachelors degree to a five-year program or take online classes or summer school classes to complete their degree in less than four years.

Students at 4-year colleges and universities are eligible to earn a bachelors degree after the completion of 120 to 130 academic credits. Students with an [associates degree](https://www.campusexplorer.com/associate-degree/) can usually transfer a portion of these credits toward their bachelors degree.

### Is a 4-year college or university for you?

If you're looking for the traditional college experience you see in movies, a 4-year school is the place for you. Here are some of the reasons that students choose 4-year colleges and universities:

* **To receive a well-rounded education.**  
  At the undergraduate level, colleges and universities require that students take courses in a number of areas to help them figure out what areas of study are best for them, as well as to provide a broad base of academic knowledge.
* **To be eligible your dream job.**  
  Look at job listings for entry-level positions, and you'll find that many require a bachelors degree. Completing a degree at a 4-year college or university will give you the academic skills you need to be ready for the demands of your job.
* **To make more money.**  
  Studies have shown that employees who have graduated from 4-year colleges and universities tend to earn more money than students with associates degrees or high school diplomas.
* **To prepare for graduate school.**  
  If you're planning to continue your education with a [masters degree](https://www.campusexplorer.com/masters-degree/), attending a 4-year college or university will help prepare you academically for that degree. Also, attending a school that also offers graduate programs allows you to learn more about those programs before you enroll.

### What types of students attend 4-year colleges and universities?

The types of students you're likely to find at a college or university depends in part on the type of school it is. Some schools are single-sex, and some are geared to a type of student, such as historically black schools or colleges with students who are active in the military.

The types of programs the college or university specializes in will also affect the demographics of the student body; schools that are highly regarded for disciplines like healthcare or engineering will draw a different type of student than those that specialize in creative areas, like culinary, music or art and design.

While many students at 4-year colleges are fresh out of high school, you'll find people of all ages at these schools. Some people may return to school to complete their bachelors degree after taking a break to start a career or a family. Others may have completed an associates degree and are transferring their credits to the 4-year college in order to complete their bachelors degree.

### How do you narrow down your choices of 4-year colleges and universities?

First, you'll want to determine what type of 4-year college you're seeking. Public colleges and universities tend to be larger and less expensive than private colleges, especially if you're applying as an in-state student.

If you're interested in learning about a variety of subjects, including history, political science, English and a foreign language, you may want to focus on liberal arts colleges, which require you to study a range of disciplines while you pursue your major.

On the other hand, if you know the type of skill or trade you want to learn, consider a career college, also known as a vocational school or trade school. These schools will offer general academic education as well as career-specific education.

The type of degree you're seeking and the programs you're interested in studying will also help determine the colleges and universities you apply to. Plus, if you're interested in taking online courses, consider an [online college](https://www.campusexplorer.com/online-school-degree-programs/) or find out if the schools you're interested in offer online courses.

Not sure if you're ready to commit to a 4-year college or university? If you're not sure what you want to study or if you have doubts about your ability to pay for and complete a bachelors degree program, consider applying for an [associates degree](https://www.campusexplorer.com/associate-degree/). In some cases, you will be able to transfer your credits toward a bachelors degree program if you choose to continue your education at a 4-year college.