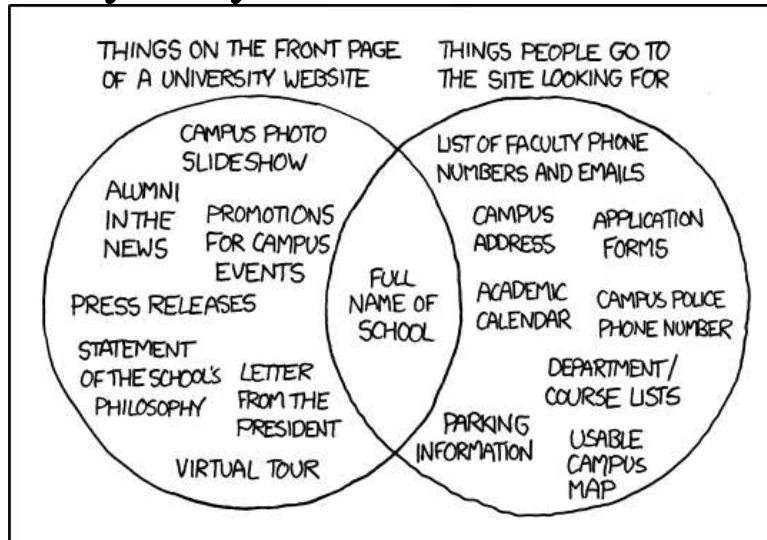




Post-Secondary Application Tips by Judy Arnall, BA, CCFE



Applications

Apply early. For many arts programs, you can apply beginning at Dec 1 of your grade 12 year. However, admission is still contingent on final June marks so don't slack off!

Upgrade at the high school level rather than the university's upgrading. That way, you can still qualify for scholarships from high school and the courses are far cheaper than university equivalents (\$60 versus \$500).

Post-secondary open houses begin in October of your grade 12 year.

All Alberta students can apply for the Alexander Rutherford Scholarship for grade 10, 11, and 12 marks over 75%. If you are not sure if you qualify, apply anyways. The ARS people will figure it out for you.

Many scholarships have deadlines in April to June of the grade 12 year, so do your research and apply early.

Apply to at least three institutions in case you don't get admitted to your first choice. Kiss the application fee money goodbye. Some institutions will happily take your money and then tell you that you're 330th on the waiting list for a program. Some won't even send the courtesy of a letter. They may email you a rejection or notice of a wait list. Some may not even send an email. Some may lose your application. The same applies for residence applications too. Parents, teach your child to stay on top of where he has applied, and phone or email regularly about application progress.

It should be policy that universities shouldn't even accept an application fee when clearly they know that they are waitlisting people, or at least they could post waitlists notifications on their websites. Unfortunately, such policies don't exist. In our online world, it should.

For highly competitive programs, some admission decisions don't come until late August. The universities are waiting for all the applications to come in to see what the cutoff competitive average is. Have plan B ready such as applications in other programs or institutions and also the application fee paid for residence early. Otherwise, you may find out you are accepted into a program but residence is all filled up.

Admission acceptance letters are usually mailed in big 8 X 10 inch envelopes. Rejection letters come in skinny small one-page envelopes. Rejoice if you see a big package in the mail and double rejoice if it comes with confetti inside!

Admission is generally based on the marks of the four grade 12 cores (math, social, ELA, and science) and 1 grade 12 option. Different programs have different requirements, so do your research. Most applications are online and have no fields to put your volunteer work, community service, awards, reference letters or affidavits of your awesomeness. Since computers do the sorting, human eyes rarely see the sorted piles. Save documentation of the above activities for scholarship applications.

Parents, if your child's five grade 12 subjects don't average out competitively, they can rewrite diploma exams in August in time for submission to post-secondary's by September. The government will take whichever is the highest exam mark - the original or the rewrite, to factor in with the course mark.

Post-secondary's want original transcripts sent directly from the Alberta government. They don't want the transcripts passing through the student or parent. No tampering is allowed!

Students, research the universities or schools you want, so you know ahead of time, what the competitive average is for admission and which subjects you need.

You do not need a Alberta High School Diploma to apply to most post-secondary's. Most people just need four grade 12 core courses and one option course and of course, good marks. Be sure to check the institution's website to find out what you need.

Apply to competitive programs out of high school. Many universities like to offer a place in Open Studies so the student can begin coursework and transfer the next year over to the faculty. The problem is that admission to the desired faculty is not guaranteed and as most students don't do their best work or get their best marks while adjusting to first year university, their transfer average GPA will not be very high. Even if their high school marks are stellar, sometimes only the transfer GPA is considered and the student will be shut out of transferring to their desired faculty if they mess up that first year. Better to wait a year, work and then apply the next year with the stellar high school marks.

It is a good idea to apply for residence before you are even accepted. Most prospective students apply for 3 universities, but it is a good idea to apply to 5 if you are seeking a really competitive spot like engineering, law, nursing, business, or a really specialized program such as midwifery or veterinarian. So, in addition to paying 5 university application fees, that are totally non-refundable even when you are waitlisted, you also have to pay 5 university residence application fees that are totally non-refundable. Good thing for summer jobs!

Even when you apply before their April 1 deadline, if you are a transfer student, they might not let you know until late August whether they will take you two weeks later or not. If they accept you at the 12th hour, you have to scramble to find a place to live. Or worse, they reject you and you have no time to make alternate plans for September. Universities do not cooperate or collaborate with each other. One institution's tardiness in offering admission can affect four other's institution's seat and housing availability. You have to juggle each offer's deadlines.

Paperwork

Make a word file with your prospective institution's address of residence and your academic (sometimes called student centre) and residence portal user names, passwords and IDs. Parents, you also need this information to go in and find things, to remind your child about, until they have the responsibility to do it themselves in the second year.

Students, you will need a confirmation of enrollment to draw out your RESP. Be sure to use up the government added portion first when taking money out. You are limited to withdrawing \$5000 for the first 13 weeks of study and more after that. Don't send in class lists as proof. They don't need that information and it is an invasion of privacy. Send confirmation of enrollments instead.

Loans from both the Alberta and Canadian government can be accessed by a single application from Student Aid Alberta.

Parents, give the new residence address to your home insurance providers so they can add your child's belongings on your policy for no charge. Get tenants insurance if your child is living off campus.

Let your provincial health and phone know that your child is studying out of province so they can be covered.

Let your insurance company know so you will not be paying occasional driver coverage on your vehicles when your child is not here to potentially drive them.

Get your child to fill out a disclose information letter if they need help with managing administration. By second year, they should be handling all the admin, but they may require parent's guidance and coaching the first year.

Students, opt out of the post-secondary's mandatory health and dental coverage. You may need a certificate from your company insurance provider. Some universities make you do this once for the whole degree and others you have to do yearly.

Parents, scrutinize your child's fee statement. Watch for hidden voluntary fees that are opt out only. For example, some universities add a small fee for other student's bursaries. Some will charge for a fridge when your child already has one. It is usually a small charge and a pain to send in the opt-out paperwork. You might want to print off several opt out forms and keep a stack so you can fill them out yearly and send them with the envelope that you send the fee cheque in. That way, you know they have received it.

Residence

Parents, if possible, encourage your child to get a single bedroom with a door to it. Then your child can choose how much social interaction they want by closing it or leaving it open to the main suite or hall. It is worth the extra cost in peace and quiet and better quality of study surroundings (marks!)

Sign up for the lowest food plan available. Many places kids like to hang out and meet their friends do not accept food plan cards, so they will have to pay for meals there and won't be declining the balance on their meal plan card. Sometimes the dining hall is inconvenient or not open when your child can have a meal and has no class. Your child will grab food where it is handy, and that is usually not at the dining centre.

Don't buy a fridge, hotplate, bookcase or bedding (some beds are twins, some are queens) until your child moves in for a week and sees what they need. Most school supplies are on sale about 90% off if you wait until the last week in September to buy.

Take photographs of damage or dirt at the time of filling out the rental report.

Always get a receipt for keys handed in at the end of the year. Otherwise, the university could lose the keys your child handed in and you will pay a \$100 bill for them. Always get a cleanliness and damage inspection report the day of moving out, otherwise the university can charge you for cleaning charges if you don't have proof that your child left the place up to standards. Both roommates get charged, so make sure the roommate who leaves last has done their due cleaning diligence.

Academic

Find out book return policies before purchasing. Like gaming and video purchases, books shrink wrapped that are unwrapped may not be returnable. Don't buy books unless the class has started and the instructor says that they really are needed. So many textbooks are purchased and never even cracked open.

Get your child to find out how to sell used books at the end of term or the year.

Warn your child that marks are cumulative, unlike high school. Ensure they know the deadline date of when they can drop a course without academic penalty. My son didn't know that and paid an academic penalty for three years for a course he left but didn't drop. It took nine more courses before that monkey of a mark was no longer in his cumulative average. It can affect future transfers and entrance into different faculties, scholarships and even institution admission decisions.

Let go of knowing their marks and due dates. This is now their job! Your job is to coach them from home on the bureaucratic business and also coach on how to assert themselves with the new other adults in their lives. Coach, but don't do it for them!

Buy a printed copy of the university calendar. Out of town children don't know the requirements of an institution and don't know to look things up in the calendar before an incident happens where they have to. You can skim over their program and alert them to any requirements or unusual procedures. By the second term, they can do it themselves.

Encourage your child to get to know academic advising. They are your child's new best friend for program planning.

Be sure to attend orientation week. It's lots of fun and everyone looks lost. Parents, there are activities organized just for you too and a lot of parents go. This is one parenting class that most parents attend!

Make sure your child knows to save all course outlines with the course content, weighting of assignments and exams, and the professor's contact information. These sheets are invaluable if your child wants to transfer programs or universities. These are the sheets that administration uses when granting transfer credit. Toss the rest of the course work, but not these outlines.

Health

Monitor your child for signs of depression, anxiety and stress. Trust your gut instinct. Talk to them about how they are feeling and encourage them to go to the campus health clinic. Encourage them to get a flu shot now that they are immersed in a bigger pool of potential germs.

Send care packages of cookies, stuffies and notes from home. They are probably homesick.

Anything your child needs to do, but you haven't taught them, they can look up on youtube (How to iron a shirt, how to write an essay, how birth control works!)

Text them as much as you need to! They love to hear encouragement and love from you. They can choose not to answer. Remember, you are their roots as they try out their wings! Parents, happy launching! Students, happy flying!

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