

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF UNIVERSITY OPEN DAYS

Career Confident has set up a blog aimed at assisting parents to guide their children through the Open Days.

An article they have recently posted may provide some thoughts on an approach to the opportunities to be gained from an Open Day.

Career Confident is an organisation which aims to ‘help one navigate the job market and career landscape’.

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD MAKE THE MOST OF UNIVERSITY OPEN DAYS

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It is that time of year again. University Open Day season across Melbourne.

Parents, I am sure, like me, you are looking forward to your teenager enthusiastically sharing with you their planned subject choices and career aspirations, welcoming the prospect of spending quality time together on campus enjoying Open Days. Back to reality. Having volunteered as a staff adviser at more University Open Days than I care to remember, here are a few tips aimed primarily at local students in years 10 and 11 looking to study undergraduate courses. They might help you and your teenager make the most of attending Open Days.

Be informed. **Research prospective study courses beforehand.**

Don't (necessarily) visit all University Open Days in Melbourne: You will be overwhelmed, let alone your teenager. Pick a few keeping in mind the breadth of courses offered, your child's preferences, proximity to transport, fees, suitability, reputation and so on. Hone in your search and you might just be able to visit a couple of campuses in one day and feel productive.

Together with your teenager (ideally!), make a list of the faculties/schools you would like to visit and jot down some questions you'd like answered that are not available online.

Online University Open Day schedules are worth investigating if available. Pay particular attention to the timing of presentations from academic course directors, careers staff, sample lectures/classes, practical activities in action and so on.

Bring your teenager into the picture: Some secondary students would prefer you stay at home. They would rather attend with friends or on their own. Great, just encourage them to do some research and prepare useful questions prior to attending. If attending with your child, encourage them (if appropriate) to take some ownership and speak directly to staff and current students. It is about their future, not yours.

Remove the pressure: In my experience, many young people are overwhelmed by the career choices available. The thought of “choosing” their future career at 15 or 16 is confronting. As parents or guardians, we should remember that this generation of adolescents can expect to have several careers throughout their working lives, with some adopting work arrangements we’d have not thought possible and embarking on careers not invented yet, especially in the STEM fields. This is just the start of their journey.

Remind them that they are attending Open Days to get a feel for tertiary life and what courses are currently available. Focus on the fun parts too, like clubs and societies, camps, sport facilities and so on. They don’t have to select their course preferences on Open Day and learning what they don’t like and rather like, will help narrow the search. Be guided by their interests and strengths.

Open Days arguably put the hard work of studying at school into perspective for many secondary school students.

Ask questions: Engage with current students, course directors and faculty staff. In my experience, the students wearing colourful Open Day tops handing out balloons at the front door of the faculty and taking “building tours” are a terrific resource, as are recent graduates. Why not ask them what they do/do not enjoy about the course, their future career/study plans, what they like about life on campus. As a parent, I would be interested in knowing what support is offered to students by way of study help, counselling, disability support, careers assistance, library resources, student employment and so on.

If you see any **academic course directors or faculty career advisers** on your travels, grab them for a chat as they will be well placed to answer many important questions. ATARs are indicative only and subject to change, often based on supply and demand. Be realistic when assessing courses though remind your child that their ATAR score does NOT define them and alternate pathways to their preferred career(s) are often possible.

Uncover the important details (just to list a few):

What are the current course entry requirements, prerequisite subjects, contact hours and the like?

What are the career outcomes for the program?

Is graduate employment data available for the course? Is demand for the occupation likely to be steady and/or increase or decline?

Does the degree include work integrated learning – placements, internship programs, mentoring? This really adds value.

Is the course **accredited** with relevant industry bodies or in the process of being?
Are there alternate study pathways for entry into the course? (Including through TAFE)?

What options exist for double degrees, transfers between similar courses, postgraduate study options?

After Open Days have finished, your child might need to revisit their VCE subject choices or tertiary preferences in consultation with their teachers and ideally a careers professional.

Have fun. Make the most of University Open Days. I will be traipsing along for the ride – this time as a parent.

Helen Green, Director, Career Confident

Helen is a qualified careers consultant and professional member of the Career Development Association of Australia. She has over two decades' experience working in senior education and career program management roles, particularly within the tertiary sector where she has assisted many students. She now runs her own careers consulting practice in the SE suburbs of Melbourne and has two teenage children.