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Choosing an Audio School

Know the questions, get the answers

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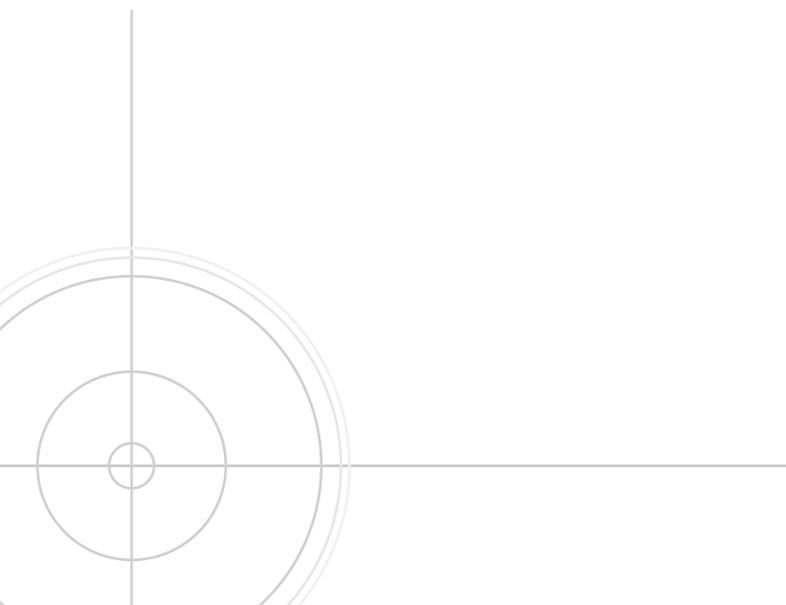
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WHY WAS THIS GUIDE WRITTEN?

It has been our experience that most of the people who are considering post-secondary education are uncertain of what to expect from a school, and consequently are unsure of the questions they should be asking. The purpose of this guide is to provide you with the questions you should ask and an understanding of the types of answers you might get. We also wanted to keep it as brief as possible.

The decision to attend a particular school involves a significant commitment of time and money and can dramatically effect your life for years to come. Mistakes made in choosing an institution and/or program of study can be demoralizing, time consuming, and costly. Often the schools themselves are of little assistance in assuring that an appropriate choice is being made; they may be more concerned with recruitment rather than your fate, either while attending the school or after you've completed their program.

We would like to help make your considerations easier, more informative, and more interesting. Go straight to the summary if you want the snapshot view, but reading in detail and creating your own questionnaire for the schools you intend to review will, in the long run, prove most rewarding.

All of the people who assisted with this publication, including us both, found themselves making the decision of how and where to pursue education in audio recording technology at some point in their lives. We have all faced many of the same questions, decisions, and options that you are considering at this very moment. We understand the questions first-hand and in our current positions, have assisted many in making informed decisions about post-secondary education in audio recording technology. This guide is the result of decades of experience and consultation with prospective students and their families, as well as in-depth professional experience in audio-related industries.

The right school will inspire you and open doors to your future and a remarkably rewarding career. Do the research, ask the hard questions, don't assume anything, be certain to get the right answers, and then make an informed choice.

Best regards,



Lee While, Registrar + Program Coordinator



Peter Kryshtalovich, Dean of Studies

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WHY GO TO SCHOOL?

Can't I just buy the gear?

Going to school is expensive, and occasionally, people ask if it would be better to just apply that money to an equipment purchase and learn things on their own. Although you can certainly learn a great deal this way, the essential problem is this: "What tools do I buy?" Limited personal budgets mean limited technology and limited knowledge means that someone else with a vested interest in sales (advertisers, music stores, and salespeople) will make decisions for you.

On the other hand, effective schools demonstrate and expose you to a complete set of audio technologies used throughout the professional audio industry—an exposure that ultimately leads to better employment opportunities. Additionally, a competent and experienced faculty will ensure you learn the most relevant techniques with the most important tools, knowledge they've gained through years of on-the-job experience. Going to a professional school also immerses students in the prevalent culture of the industry,

A competent and experienced faculty will ensure you learn the most important techniques with the most relevant tools, knowledge they've gained after years of on-the-job experience.

something experimentation and reading manuals can never do.

Can I be mentored into audio engineering?

This may occasionally be a possibility but is no longer the norm it once was. You should recognize that any single studio, as good as it may be, will expose you to a limited set of technologies that are relevant only to their client base. Good schools expose you to *all* of the tools in common use throughout the professional audio industry. Also, working professionals simply don't have the time to devote much attention to would-be audio engineers or producers beyond showing them elementary basics. The best use of a volunteer or mentor situation is post-graduation from an audio school, when you already have a thorough understanding of audio technology and

underlying concepts. This allows you to learn a new studio setting very quickly—a situation greatly preferred by the professionals willing to mentor young engineers.

What is audio engineering and audio production?

Audio-engineered and audio-produced sound is everywhere, from the dialogue we listen to in movies, to the sound effects in video games, from speeches at corporate functions, to background music on web pages. Behind every audio event are highly trained individuals working with specific sets of tools. Anywhere that sound is presented, captured, manipulated, transmitted or stored, there is a professional making it happen. That means there are a host of different career paths available to those with wide training in the tools of the trade. To see a comprehensive list of the possible careers an education in audio engineering and production can prepare you for, jump ahead to the "Careers in Audio" section on page 8.

Audio-engineered and audio-produced sound is everywhere—from the dialogue we listen to in movies, to the sound effects in video games, from speeches at corporate functions, to background music on web pages.

Does going to school guarantee employment?

Ultimately, an individual's employability will be based on positive personal attributes such as a strong work ethic, talent, ambition, a great attitude, perseverance, dedication, and, of course, a genuine enthusiasm for the field. If an individual possesses these qualities, effective schools should nurture this interest by supplying timely and relevant training in professional industry-like settings. No school can absolutely guarantee employment—be wary of those that imply that they do. Remember, unpaid internships are not employment.

WHY GO TO SCHOOL?

Public or Private?

Over the past two decades deep budget cuts to public educational institutions have created a need for focused, quality education. Specialized private schools are stepping in to meet that need. A significant difference

Private schools cannot afford to be indifferent to the fate of their students if they want to remain in business.

between public and private education has to do with budget allocations. Limited and irregular funding over many years, coupled with an increasingly unwieldy and cumbersome bureaucracy, means that most public institutions

are less able to react quickly to changing conditions in fast-paced, technology-driven industries such as audio engineering and production. Private institutions must react quickly to changing employment opportunities in their field otherwise they lose their clients, that is, their students.

Perhaps the most important difference between public and private settings is that private schools must pay attention to the fate of their students if they want to remain in business with a good reputation. A small student body, individual attention, and low student-to-teacher ratios are the norm at good private institutions. Also, private schools are seldom subject to strikes and walkouts which are increasingly common in public schools.

A drawback to the private setting is the limited social setting. Usually specialized private schools attract people that are very similar in their interests. One of the merits of public colleges and universities is the wide range of people you meet from all walks of life with a wide variety of interests.

Certificate, Diploma, or Degree?

The largest consideration for most people when deciding whether to pursue a certificate, a diploma, or a degree is the time-to-cost ratio. A certificate is granted upon the successful completion of a workshop program,

the object of which is to provide an introduction to the field. Workshop programs are usually from 3 days to 8 months in duration.

A diploma marks the completion of a college-level course that is generally considered more practical than academic and more employment-driven than theory-based. At college you pursue a trade. Such a course is typically one to three years in duration and is considered the minimum requirement for employment in the chosen field. Students receiving a diploma can usually expect to enter the workforce directly upon graduation.

Degrees are granted for the completion of study at the university level. Degree programs in audio are typically more academic in nature, less practically oriented and are usually 3 or 4 years in duration at the undergraduate level. They are usually wedded to that university's faculty of music, fine art, or science. There are many graduate-level audio engineering programs available in North America, although they usually require undergraduate degrees in music, fine art, or engineering

The appropriate choice of whether to seek a certificate, diploma, or degree depends entirely on an individual's aptitude, aspirations, and background. When determining what your time-to-cost ratio would be for each of these programs, remember to compare the full cost of tuition and living expenses, as well as lost income per year of study for the duration of each program.

What are the merits of different program lengths?

Workshop certificate programs (3 days to 8 months) are great at introducing students to a field or giving them a brief overview of a particular industry but the hands-on experience they provide is usually not enough to give the student a direct entry into the work force.

College-level diploma programs (1 to 3 years) provide the experience necessary to acquire entry-level positions in the industry. Some audio-related *publicly-funded* college programs pad their curricula extensively, introducing course material that at best is

WHY GO TO SCHOOL?

only peripherally related to the field. Course material that should only be 18 months at most is often drawn out over

You're in the driver's seat—if the program doesn't suit you, or their representatives will not give you straight answers to specific questions, look elsewhere.

2 or 3 years. In our opinion, no vocational training should keep you out of the workforce for 2 or 3 years. If this is the education you're looking for, examine the program very carefully and ask how much time is being wasted. Remarkably, many colleges act as though they're doing you the favor by admitting you. The truth is that every college wants

good students. You're in the driver's seat—if the program doesn't suit you, or their representatives will not give you straight answers to specific questions, look elsewhere.

As previously mentioned, University-level degree programs in audio recording (3 to 6 years) engage students in a wide range of scholastic pursuits that can be extremely informative and very stimulating. Generally, employers assume that University graduates have good written and verbal communication skills and can work effectively with minimum supervision. But this education is very expensive, time-consuming and in the end, it's doubtful whether courses in Renaissance counterpoint or 19th century music history will increase your recording engineering skills.

It is becoming quite common for university graduates to attend college programs to focus their previous academic work with genuine vocational training; so the basic question is, how quickly do you want to be working in the field?

Is the location of the school important?

Remember that the actual content of the program will help determine your success for years to come. The initial considerations when determining a school should be the consistent success of its graduates over many years, a good reputation in the industry, outstanding faculty, well designed curricula and the other qualitative differences mentioned in this document.

Once you've created a short list of schools based on their ability to service your career aspirations, consider the essential social consequences of location, such as safety, cost of living, access to medical care, proximity to family, access to housing, and access to amenities such as shopping centers and public transportation. See the "Community and Culture" section on page 25 for more information on housing and safety issues.

THE COST

What is the true cost of an education?

A good education leading to a career is an investment, perhaps the best investment an individual or family will ever make. To accurately determine the full cost of your education it is crucial to consider not just the stated tuition fees, but also the following, which are seldom stated and often hidden:

- lost income for each year spent in school
- essential living expenses (rent, food, etc.)
- incidental living expenses (entertainment)
- total materials and supplies fees per year
- lab time and associated lab fees per year
- student activity/union fees per year
- parking fees per year
- transportation fees per year

Remember to multiply each point by the number of years in the program. At first glance, a three year college program may seem less expensive than a single year immersion program, but add up the list above and multiply by 3. Typically, you'll find that the difference in real cost is substantially higher in extended programs, most particularly after you include the lost income for every year in school.

When you are doing your research into costs, take special note of hidden, unannounced or add-on fees. Don't make any assumptions; instead, ask questions. Ask what each cost includes. For example, is lab time included in the tuition fee, or is it extra?

When you are doing your research into costs, take special note of hidden, unannounced or add-on fees.

Also, when comparing tuition fees, weigh the overall cost against the amount of filler or the number of padded courses in the program. If half of the courses in the program you are considering are irrelevant to the main area of study, you will be paying for courses that won't further your career upon graduation.

Why are the costs so different from school to school?

Generally speaking, private schools are more expensive than public institutions because the government does not underwrite them. In some cases tuition fees at private institutions are set to target specific demographics, keeping the tuition in line with government loans or social assistance programs. Although certainly well intentioned, this can mean that those institutions are often forced to cut corners, sacrificing the quality of the education they offer in order to keep tuition low. Higher costs should always be associated with excellence in the faculty, curricula, technology, and grad support.

Private schools are more expensive than public institutions because the government does not underwrite them. In some cases tuition fees at private institutions are set to target specific demographics, keeping the tuition in line with government loans or social assistance programs.

You should also investigate if the money a school charges for a program is going directly to service the students in that program. Let us be specific here. In one private college setting we're aware of, the school has no full-time faculty, nor do they have their own studios. They do however, have radio, television, and full-page magazine ads to bring in the next group of students. In another instance, at a public college, the administration charged \$2,000 per year in mandatory lab fees that garnered the school about \$100,000 per year. An investigative report indicated that about \$12,000 was actually going to support that program, the rest being allocated elsewhere.

THE COST

Where is the money spent? Does high price = high quality?

A school spends money in four ways: supporting other programs (typically in publicly-funded colleges and universities), supporting current students in the program for which the fees are collected, supporting the students after graduation, and the recruitment of new students.

Supporting other programs takes place in large academic settings where tuition revenues from popular programs are used to underwrite less popular courses.

A school spends money in four ways: supporting other programs, supporting current students, supporting graduates and the recruitment of new students.

Supporting current students requires expenditure on curriculum, faculty and technology. Supporting students after graduation requires expenditure on career guidance and placement assistance. Recruiting new students means spending money on marketing and advertising. How a school allocates its

money and the percentage of its budget dedicated to each of these budget lines should be readily available upon request. Be suspect of any school, public or private, denying you this information.

Ideally, the largest allocation of funds should be directed towards student support, both during their studies and after graduation. Full-page, full-color magazine advertisements and television commercials may be indicators of a school that is more focused on recruiting students than supporting them—more money is spent on marketing and advertising, and less devoted to curriculum, faculty, technology and graduate support.

In addition, schools whose main purpose is to fund or subsidize private businesses are starting to become common. Particularly over the past 5 years, professional recording studios across North America are using their reputation and equipment to attract prospective students to schools they own and staff. If the

studio has been in business for a few decades, they often imply that the school carries as much experience and that somehow, the studio's clients and equipment will be involved in the lives of the students. In reality, there is restricted access to the studios on site that have been or are being used by "paying clients." The revenue generated by these programs is often used to sustain the operation of the professional studio—not to service the current students and graduates. Carefully research any school operated by or associated with a professional studio. How long has *the school* been in business and, as always, what is the graduate completion and success rate?

What are the financial aid options?

If you need assistance with education expenses, you have a number of options. First, check to see if you are eligible for any bursaries and/or scholarships that the school might offer. Good schools want good students and usually offer scholarships as a means to attract the best. If you are planning on accessing government financial aid, check to see if the school qualifies for government financial aid programs. This can be more critical for international students, since some governments don't recognize schools outside of their own country. Check with the school to see what programs they qualify for.

Good schools want good students and usually offer scholarships as a means to attract the best.

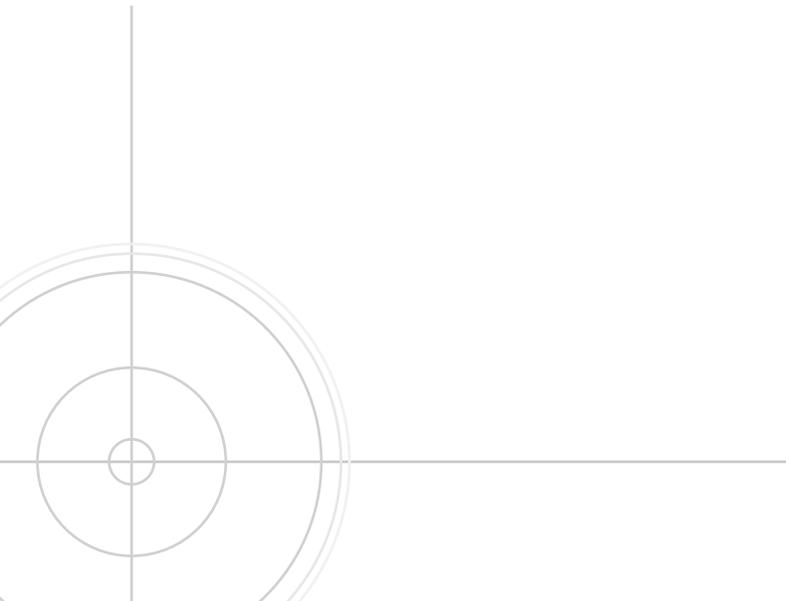
Many banks offer student loans that are comparable to government programs, while most banks also offer private loans and/or lines of credit to students who can obtain a co-signer.

Student loan programs, both government and bank administered, are fairly safe ways to go; both offer counseling, loan forgiveness, debt relief and/or interest relief programs, which is useful in case of financial or employment difficulties post-graduation.

Your last resort—the least advantageous to

THE COST

you and the one that requires great caution—would be a private lender, particularly through the school itself. Some schools offer financial assistance through private lenders not affiliated with a bank and often owned by the same corporation or holding company as the school itself. Imagine the frustration experienced by a student who elects to take a loan from such a private lender, when he or she cannot find employment. The same school that was supposed to provide the necessary education and the job placement assistance needed to be employed, is the same bunch coming hunting for non-payment of the loan, even though the graduate is unemployed! Schools that ask for detailed financial information from students or families during the inquiry/application process should be carefully researched.



CAREERS IN AUDIO

How long does it take to establish a career in audio?

A career is a lifelong pursuit driven by the intelligence, ambition, talent, passion, and perseverance of each individual. A good school will quickly deliver the essential knowledge and skills necessary to effectively begin your career in an always competitive job market. Be sure to turn the preceding sentence into a question when talking to school representatives!

If the school has done its job and the student continues to evince the above-mentioned attributes, graduates should be employed in a related field within 6 to 8 months after graduation. Attaining a lead or senior position takes more

experience and career development than a junior person would have. Typically, most graduates find themselves well on their way to an established career within 2 to 4 years of industry-related employment.

What specific careers does the school prepare students for?

Below is a list of the primary career opportunities in audio, organized under these major categories/industries: Media and Digital Applications; Music; Production and Post Production; Consumer and Professional Retail; and Miscellaneous.

When comparing different programs, be sure to check the curriculum and the technology of the various

Media + Digital Applications

- Video Game Audio
- Internet/Web Audio
- Corporate:
 - Advertising
 - A/V Technician
- Broadcast:
 - Radio
 - Television

Music

- Studio Owner/Manager
- Engineer:
 - Assistant Engineer
 - Tape Operator
 - Digital Editor
- Live Audio:
 - Front of House
 - Monitors
- Producer
- Mastering
- Performance
- Composition
- Programmer

Production Sound

- Production Sound Mixer
- Boom Operator
- Utility Technician
- Playback Operator

Post-Production

- Supervising Sound Editor
- Sound Designer
- Dialogue:
 - Editor
 - ADR Recordist
 - ADR Mixer
- Music:
 - Producer
 - Recordist
 - Editor
 - Mixer
- Sound Effects:
 - SFX Design
 - SFX Recordist + Editor
 - Foley Recordist
 - Foley Editor
 - Foley Mixer
- Re-Recording Mixer

Consumer and Professional Retail

- Manufacturing
- Sales
- Installation
- Service

Miscellaneous

- Education
- Consulting
- Acoustic Control
- Duplication
- Transfer/Archiving
- Audio Restoration
- Surveillance and Forensic Audio

CAREERS IN AUDIO

program offerings to determine which areas are being covered. Ideally the program should prepare students for as many of the above-listed career paths as possible,

An education that is too focused on a small subset of the audio industry will make it difficult for the graduate to take advantage of opportunities to shift or change careers.

since the tools and knowledge required are similar—only the applications of the tools are changing. This is especially important. When students enter a program, most aren't fully aware of all the career possibilities in a given industry. After graduation they will often find themselves pursuing a career path they didn't know existed before they went to school. Careers

shift as opportunities arise; it is common in the audio industry for people to change fields often. An education that is too focused on a small subset of the audio industry will make it difficult for the graduate to take advantage of opportunities to shift or change careers.

Do grads meet the requirements to fulfill these positions? Specifically, where are graduates working?

This is a question best answered by the graduates themselves. Part of your research into each school should include contacting recent graduates of the program. Don't be overly impressed by a school that makes claims like, "our grads are working in key positions," or one that produces the names of a handful of successful graduates; all schools make similar claims and all established schools can produce a short list of big-name graduates.

The school should be able to provide you with a comprehensive list of graduates and their places of employment. This list should be composed primarily of relatively recent graduates, say within the last five years. Seeing where recent graduates are employed will help determine what career options are available, and thereby help gauge the quality of the program. You should also be able to request contact information for these graduates, such as e-mail addresses. In most cases you can obtain

this information from the alumni page on the school's website. **The best gauge of any program's value is what its graduates think of it.**

Two important considerations are related to this. First is the school's placement rate. If 50 people started the program and 5 completed it, the school will brag of a 100% placement rate if all 5 become employed, and they'll likely drag out testimonials from all of them. Clearly placement rates should be directly considered against completion rates. Any program without a completion rate of at least 80% should be carefully reviewed. Please see the section on page 11 for more information regarding placement and completion statistics. Also, some schools will say that they can't tell you about grads for privacy reasons. This is usually just a cover-up. In our experience, successful grads are delighted (and proud) to talk about their accomplishments. And they'll tell you exactly what they thought of the program.

Salaries in audio range anywhere from nothing, in the case of an unpaid internship, to over six figures.

Generally, what are the salary levels?

Salaries in audio range anywhere from nothing, in the case of an unpaid internship, to over six figures. According to HRDC Canada's *'National Occupation Classification Handbook'* gives average earnings by age for NOC category 522: "20-24 age group average yearly earnings, \$24,500; 24-55 age group average yearly earnings, \$41,330; 55+ age group average yearly earnings, \$44,408."

The U.S. Department of Labor and the Bureau of Labor Statistics' *'Occupational Outlook Handbook'*, "Median annual earnings of sound engineering technicians in May 2006 were \$43,010. The middle 50 percent earned between \$29,270 and \$65,590. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$21,050, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$90,770."

CAREERS IN AUDIO

What is an entry-level position?

An entry-level position is the first job you get in your field of study. While it's important to have long-term goals as well as an idea of what your dream job would be like, it's important to remember that all occupational cultures are different and that no one ever started at the top. Entry-level positions should be viewed as the launching point for your career. It's here that you begin proving yourself, connecting to others, and opening opportunities.

Every person employed in a particular industry will enter at a point commensurate to his or her experience and education. Graduates fresh out of school with minimal experience should not expect to step into a position that requires years of experience and development to obtain. Remember that your career is a lifelong pursuit and your dream job is what you are working towards.

Do employers recruit through the school?

Any well-established school should be able to reply in the affirmative to this question and to be in a position to prove it. The reputation of the school should be such that employers will seek out its graduates, especially after they have had previous positive experiences with other graduates. To assist and cultivate potential employers, every school should have a dedicated career liaison officer charged with the responsibility of matching students' aptitude and career objectives to employers. Expect this, and cross them off the list if a school won't give you direct access to the person or people responsible for such placement assistance.

INTERPRETING THE STATISTICS

Statistical considerations: Completion rates, graduation rates, placement rates, and loan default rates.

What do these terms mean?

How are they derived?

Which ones are important?

What should they be? What numbers are indicative of a good program?

The statistics used to attest to the quality of a particular program are completion rates, placement rates, and loan default rates.

the government mandates the tracking of these rates on an annual basis, not by the schools themselves, but by third party auditors following

governmental guidelines. The government obliges schools to make these statistics available to the public through their literature.

Of all these statistics the most important is the completion rate: the number of students who finish a program, divided by the number of students who started the program. Low completion rates indicate two things, neither of which bode well for the program: either it has a high built-in attrition (many colleges and universities) leaving only 'the chosen few'. The other is that the program isn't what it claims, causing students to get disgruntled and leave.

Specified and mandated attrition rates provide an interesting psychological profile of the mentality of many college and university program administrators and faculty members. High profile programs that attract many students are often deliberately oversubscribed and the faculty members are asked specifically to flunk-out a given percentage. A savage irony of this, is that the administration then goes on to tell the students that have 'made it' how special they are. You should know this; any truly competent faculty/administration knows exactly what

they're looking for in their applicants, and they should be looking for only those people who can successfully complete their program. Sadly, this behavior is common.

Good completion rates come in at over eighty to eighty five percent. No school will have a hundred percent completion rate, since academic, financial, family, health, or other personal reasons will always result in a small percentage of students leaving a program before completion.

Placement rate—the percentage of students employed six months after graduation is usually held out as the best indicator of a program's quality. Unfortunately, the way in which this statistic is derived is problematic and produces results that are skewed and misleading. The accuracy and usefulness of placement rate as an indicator of program quality is compromised for the following reasons:

1. The percentage represents the number of graduates working at any job, not necessarily a job related to their field of study.
2. The statistics are based on the responses only of those who could be contacted by phone and not the entire graduating class.
3. Students who cannot be contacted are completely disregarded and not counted in the calculation. Ironically the most successful graduates are usually the busiest graduates and therefore the least likely to be available for contact by telephone.
4. The contact information used is supplied by the school, based on the last known address of the graduate prior to graduation. It is common for many students to move after graduation to seek work, therefore the contact information for them will be outdated.

If placement rates is going to be used to determine the quality of a program, it should at least be referenced to completion rates. For example, in the case of a school boasting a high placement rate of 80% and

INTERPRETING THE STATISTICS

a low completion rate of 50%, only 40% of the students who started the program finished and became employed within 6 months.

For Example:

100 students start @ a 50% completion rate = 50 students graduate

Out of 50 graduates @ a 80% placement rate = 40 students actually are employed

A school's loan default rate represents the number of students who defaulted on their Ontario government loan. A default is defined as no payment for ninety days. However, because only those students who received government student loans are considered, knowledge of a school's loan default rate is not very useful in determining the quality of its program. Let's say that a program has 100 students, 20 of whom receive government loans. If five students default on their loan, the school has a 25% loan default rate (i.e., 5 out of 20). Moreover, students in receipt of government loans who withdrew or were dismissed for academic reasons are also included when the government does its calculations. In other words, the current method of determining loan default rates is very misleading. For schools that have a small percentage of their student body receiving Ontario student loans, having a few students in default results in high loan default rates. It is therefore possible for schools with a high percentage of student loan recipients to have more students in default, but lower default rates than schools with a low percentage of student loan recipients.

We have pointed out the inherent issues with government-mandated statistics not in order to rationalize low or suspicious rates for any program, but rather to demonstrate to readers the importance of doing their own independent research. Sometimes, the inherent flaws in the mechanisms the government has put in place allows unscrupulous schools to manipulate data in order to misrepresent the quality of their programs. Current up-to-date statistics for all public and private schools in Ontario may be found on the OSAP website at <http://osap.gov.on.ca>

EVALUATING GRADUATE SUCCESS

How are the graduates prepared for the working world?

The ability of a school to prepare students for the reality of the working world starts at the beginning—in the selection process. It is critical that the school screen its applicants so that only those who have demonstrated the appropriate aptitude and intelligence be accepted. Only then does future employment become possible for each student. The school must

If a program promises you a glamorous job working with musical stars, think twice about applying to it. Be more concerned with how well the school's curriculum reflects and speaks to the demands of the industry.

also be honest about the job prospects in the audio technology and production field. Catering to romanticized and unrealistic dreams does not prepare the student for a successful career. Be concerned with how well the school's curriculum reflects and speaks to the demands of the industry. The curriculum should feature a workload commensurate with what students can

expect once employed. In addition to technical skills, the student should also be taught job interview skills, résumé preparation, how to research and contact employers, and personal skills, such as communication.

The last and best way in which a school can prepare you for a job in the industry is by having a good job placement strategy and graduate support system. Read further for more information about graduate support and job placement.

What is in place to support grads? How many grads are there per year? Can the school support that many?

Responses to the following questions will allow you to determine what the school is prepared to offer its graduates in the way of support. This, in turn, will allow you to assess the strength of its graduate support system.

1. What specific tools does the school have to assist graduates in seeking, acquiring and maintaining employment?
2. Does the school provide personalized assistance as opposed to a job board and/or mass e-mail postings? If it claims to, how does it do this?
3. Are there designated staff members dedicated to knowing each student's career objectives and to oversee his or her job search? If so, for how long (1 month, 6 months, 1 year, life-long)?
4. Are a school's career counselors good match makers, i.e., can they match the skill sets required by a prospective employer and the talent and aptitudes of individual students? Is there evidence of this?
5. Does the faculty continue to be available to students after graduation?
6. Does the school offer life-long career support to alumni? If not, why not? If yes, how does it do this?
7. Can the school realistically provide support for the number of graduates it produces?

What about placement assistance?

The first question to ask is this: what does the school consider to be job placement assistance? Some schools consider a two-week unpaid internship as job placement. Obviously this is not sufficient. Instead, a good school should actively seek to build strong relationships with prospective employers. Is the placement a good match to the aptitudes, aspirations, and talents of each individual?

A school's ability to place its graduates is a function of its reputation and the relationships it has built with employers. It is unfortunate, but some employers have come to rely on audio schools to provide them with a never-ending supply of free labor, willing to do

GRADUATES

Some schools define finding graduates a two-week unpaid internship as job placement. For the most part, unpaid internships are little more than menial, dead-end jobs with no prospects for long-term employment.

any menial task at the hint of a possible career. The only losers in this equation are the audio graduates. For both employers and schools it's a win-win situation: employers access free labor and the school is able to pad its job placement statistics. There are some cases, given the appropriate graduate and the right employer, when an unpaid internship can become a real stepping stone towards a good career. However, for

the most part, unpaid internships are little more than menial, dead-end jobs with no prospects for long-term employment. Be certain that any internships lead to real employment (ask for a list of employers who are taking internships) and ask for a list of graduates who have become employed for longer than 3 months.

What skills do graduates have?

Every school should publish a skill set and have a career counselor available to answer this question, both to prospective students and their families, and prospective employers. The curriculum and course descriptions should be presented in such a way that the skill set the student will possess upon graduation is clearly outlined. Programs with vague or brief course descriptions and curriculum objectives should be a cause for concern. For more information on skills and careers, see the "Careers in Audio" section on page 8.

How do graduates feel about the program?
How does the faculty treat the students?
Can we talk to some graduates?

The best way to gauge the success of a particular program is talk to recent graduates of the school. Part of your research into each program should include speaking to as many graduates as possible. The school should be prepared to give you a comprehensive list of graduates

and there should be a similar list posted on its web site; to ensure that the feedback you get is genuine and without bias, you should not be relying on the school to choose with whom you speak.

Searching for the school and program on the Internet and in newsgroups is another way to get third-party opinions and learn about what graduates, parents, current students, and employers think of the program. Although you should remember to take everything you read on the Internet with a grain of salt, you should be able to get a general idea of the kind of experience students and employers have had with the school.

How do parents feel about the program?

The average age of students seeking post-secondary education is about 19 and usually their parents are deeply involved in the decision. More often than not they are also providing financial support and typically, of everyone involved, are the most critical of the results the school produces. It may be a little more challenging to access parental comments, but the easiest way to accomplish this is to ask the graduates if they would mind if you spoke to their parents.

Part of your research into each program should include speaking to as many graduates as possible. The school should be prepared to give you a comprehensive list of graduates and there should be a similar list posted on its web site.

CURRICULUM

**What courses are part of the curriculum?
What courses should be included? Are there any “filler” courses?**

The school should make available to the public a clear delineation of every course’s content, length, application, and objectives. If the learning objectives of a course do not lead towards meaningful employment, the course should be considered filler or padding. Some programs include filler courses in their curriculum in order to extend the program’s duration and thereby increase revenue. Students should have the opportunity to rate every course offered by a program by means of a blind survey, and those results should be made available to anyone who wants to see them. Speaking with alumni will let you know if the curriculum is padded. The various industries and sectors for which the school is preparing students will determine what courses should be included in a program. Remember that a narrow curriculum leads to fewer job prospects.

How is the curriculum designed, coordinated, and implemented?

First and foremost, the curriculum should be predicated on preparing students for meaningful employment. A well-designed curriculum takes years of sustained development by a group of professionals dedicated to the task. Every curriculum should have been developed through direct industry consultation, coupled with feedback from alumni and other working professionals.

The evolution of a successful curriculum has three distinct stages: design, coordination, and implementation. Curriculum design is too big for any onsite group of individuals and must involve consultation with numerous industry professionals from as large a geographic area as possible. Consultation should be ongoing to ensure that the program content remains current. To maximize the employability of graduates, technology should drive the curriculum design. How does the school accomplish this?

The next stage—curriculum coordination—necessitates an onsite management team to monitor on an ongoing basis the effectiveness of the curriculum design and of the faculty. This team oversees the implementation of the curriculum and makes necessary adjustments to increase the effectiveness of its delivery. It should also be responsible for ensuring that individual courses are integrated and supporting one another. Who does this and how?

The final stage is implementation. Successful implementation requires professional teachers to deliver the curriculum as designed. The school must have feedback or monitoring mechanisms in place to ensure the faculty is effective in their delivery. Faculty should be proven and successful professional teachers; this cannot be overstated. The design and coordination of curriculum is only successful if the implementation occurs as intended. The input of working industry professionals is essential to the design of curriculum, but in reality, working industry professionals rarely make effective full-time teachers. Teaching is, in itself, a full-time career and the result of many years of professional development. For more information on faculty and teachers, see the faculty section on page 20.

The input of working industry professionals is essential to the design of curriculum, but in reality, working industry professionals rarely make effective full-time teachers.

Is a lecture really a course?

Program descriptions often make reference to lectures as though they are courses. A genuine course immerses students in a field of study through a series of lectures. Two or three lectures do not constitute a course; at best, they serve as a brief introduction to a field of study. For in-depth study, a course should be at least one semester (12 weeks) long, and if it is discussing techniques to acquire, should also be supported by lab content designed specifically by the instructor (not simply ad-hoc lab time with no particular content).

CURRICULUM

A genuine course immerses students in a field of study through a series of lectures. Two or three lectures do not constitute a course.

A good curriculum demands a degree of coordination and integration not possible with a series of single lectures. Supplementary lectures benefit the student only when they are coordinated with course content in a meaningful way. When you are comparing programs,

make sure there is a clear explanation of every program's content, duration, application and objective—brief, vague course descriptions without a clear indication of duration and how much time is allotted to each topic should be a cause for concern.

Definition of lab time and class time. What's the difference?

Classes consist of an instructor delivering conceptual content and demonstrating skills to what is usually a relatively larger group of students—time spent in such a situation is class time. In a technical program like audio engineering and production, classrooms should have access to the same technology used in its hands-on labs so that the teacher can effectively demonstrate skills to students. During your tour ask to see the school's classrooms to verify the presence of the technology.

Labs are when a smaller group of students (the smaller the better) work directly with the technology. Hands-on lab time is the time in which students get to practice and acquire the skills delivered by the program.

How does the school define and implement lab time?

Because the practice and experience students gain in hands-on lab time should directly support the theory they have learned in class, it is important to balance class time and lab time appropriately. In other words, there must be sufficient lab time for the students to master what they learned in class and acquire the skills they saw demonstrated there. Individual hands-on time in a lab setting is necessary for skill development, which

in turn is vital if the student is to become successfully employed. A school should be assessed in three main areas: definition of lab time, scheduling of lab time, and the specific content of labs.

Ask the following questions to determine how a school defines lab time:

1. What does the school consider lab time?
2. How many students are in each lab?
3. Where are the labs held?

Ask to visit the lab facilities. If a school defines hands-on lab time as a large group of students watching an instructor demonstrate the technology, that program is not going to provide adequate preparation for a career in audio engineering and technology.

Determine just how much time you will spend in labs. The ratio of classroom theory to practical lab support is important, not just the number of hours you spend in the lab. Labs should also be a regular feature of the program and take place throughout the duration of the program, not just at the beginning or the end.

How does the school schedule labs?

Is it up to each student to arrange his own lab time? Does the lab schedule adhere to realistic working hours, or are labs scheduled in the middle of the night or in the early morning hours despite the fact that students may have early morning classes the following day? Some schools maintain that this is how it is in the real world. While it is true that many people in the audio world work late into the night, those same people are not expected to show up at 9 in the morning ready to take in an entire day of new knowledge.

Some schools attract students with the prospect of working in flashy studio environments, when in reality these studios are for the staff and commercial clients and not for students.

CURRICULUM

Ask how much time is spent in each lab facility/studio every week. Some schools attract students with the prospect of working in flashy studio environments, when in reality these studios are for the staff and commercial clients and not for students. In fact, students may get less time on real gear in these kinds of situations and may have to do their hands-on training in smaller, often under-equipped facilities. The number of students enrolled in a school that has a number of on-site facilities is also critical. Large enrollments with limited facilities mean less time for an individual student's hands-on training.

The quality of lab time is largely determined by the content of the labs. Is the school providing direction and structure in each lab to ensure that the material covered coordinates with class content, or is the student left on his own to flounder? Are there faculty members on site, who are personally involved with the students during lab hours? Only if lab time is supervised can students receive guidance and instruction. Has the school prepared assignments and projects to optimize students' learning experience? If there are no faculty available for lab support, who will answer students' questions, monitor and evaluate students' progress, and provide help if necessary? This question is critical since its answer will impact both the pace of your learning and the amount of material you are able to absorb. Unfortunately, most schools do not provide students with supervised and structured labs and come up with some remarkable rationalizations as to why they don't.

How is student progress evaluated? What support is available to students who are having difficulty?

Student progress should be evaluated in two ways: through written tests to ensure that the conceptual aspects of the curriculum have been understood, and through practical tests to ensure skill genuine development. In addition to formal testing, regular assignments and projects done during practical labs provide a means to evaluate a student's progress. The faculty should be aware of how students are doing. Ask the school what mechanisms it has in place to ensure that faculty know the situation with each student. The

school should have a clearly delineated set of academic standards, i.e. what constitutes passing or failing courses, which are published and available upon request. How do students make-up courses that they didn't pass and is there a fee for this? What are the exam re-writing policies? What assistance is available to students experiencing difficulty with the program?

Every good school should have a low student-to-teacher ratio and an academic counselor who not only knows how each student is doing, but can also intervene to ensure the student gets assistance if needed (and at no additional cost). What are the school's policies regarding extra assistance for students who need it? Is it prepared to offer personalized tutorials with the faculty at no extra cost? One of the benefits of having a full-time on-site faculty (which is surprisingly uncommon—see next chapter), is that they are available to assist students needing extra help.

The school should have a clearly delineated set of academic standards, i.e., what constitutes passing or failing courses, which are published and available upon request.

FACULTY

Who are the faculty?

All schools have a faculty; however, what constitutes a faculty varies from school to school. There are three kinds of faculty: full-time faculty, part-time faculty, and guest lecturers. Ask the school how they define each of these categories and how many of each the program uses.

Full-time faculty should be well-established professional teachers who have chosen teaching as their career. It's important for students that faculty be readily accessible; students learn more from on-site full-time

faculty with whom they can interact on a regular basis and who care about their progress and know what they aspire to. Ask the school what the student to full-time on-site teacher ratio is. Ask about their teaching

and industry qualifications. Ask how their performance is reviewed (there should be student surveys) and ask to see the raw results of such surveys.

You should always ask the school what the performance review process is for faculty members.

Industry professionals are usually either part-time faculty or guest lecturers; their value lies in their ability to provide students with the most current industry perspective. Remember that successful, working industry professionals are busy people who have chosen a career other than teaching. The school and its students are not a priority for them. Full-time faculty who depict themselves as “working industry professionals” are often out-of-work industry professionals and do not necessarily make good teachers. Or they are simply moonlighting. Unfortunately, the faculty of many schools fall into this category; a school that boasts a large number of working industry professionals among its faculty should be closely scrutinized. Instead of offering genuine courses through a full-time faculty, they may have a curriculum composed almost entirely of “one-off” guest lecturers. This means limited or no student access to faculty and a lack of coordination and integration between courses. Successful programs offer a balance, drawing on the strengths of each kind of faculty member—full-time, part-time, and guest lecturer. See the section below for more information

on qualifications and performance reviews of faculty members.

What qualifications do/should the faculty have?

For private schools in Ontario, the Private Vocational Schools Act and the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities requires that any instructor in a private vocational school fall into one of the following qualification categories:

- Possessing a BA or B.Sc. and 12 months of related occupational experience
- Possessing a college Diploma and 24 months related occupational experience
- A graduate of a Private Vocational School and 24 months related occupational experience
- A teacher's college graduate and 12 months of related occupational experience
- 36 months teaching experience in the vocation for which instruction is to be given
- 48 months occupational experience in the subject area

Although an instructor is required to slot into only one of these categories, experience has informed us that competent and effective instructors typically fit into at least three of the above categories. Above all else, experience and proven ability as a teacher should be the number one qualification for any individual teaching at any school. See the next heading for information on how a school should review, set, and maintain standards for its teaching faculty.

FACULTY

How is the faculty chosen? What is the performance review process for them? How are those standards maintained?

The selection criteria for faculty should be prioritized as follows: first and foremost, proven teaching experience, followed by industry experience and, finally, related academic experience. You should always ask the school what the performance review process is for faculty members. The best performance reviews are conducted as anonymous surveys or evaluations by the students themselves. Students are the best judges of how effective an instructor is. Performance reviews should be ongoing

Ideally faculty should have an open door policy as regards students.

and regular and the results—even the raw data should be made available to any interested party. The school should have a dedicated on-site management team that responds to the results of the evaluation and takes

appropriate action to correct and maintain the academic standards. Any instructor who doesn't meet the standards should not be teaching. If the school has no systematic evaluation process then there are no objective standards being applied to the teaching faculty.

How accessible are the instructors? Are tutorials available?

The presence of full-time on-site faculty is what determines whether instructors are accessible to students. Guest lecturers and working industry professionals are usually to be found elsewhere and are, therefore, not physically accessible to the students. Ask the school the following questions:

How often can I access members of the faculty?

What is the procedure for requesting access to faculty?

How quickly can I directly access a faculty member?

What are your policies regarding the availability, procedure, limitations and cost of tutorials?

In post-secondary institutions faculty are often more concerned about their own careers or research than their accessibility to students. Ideally, faculty should have an open-door policy as regards students. Access to faculty isn't important just for those students who are having difficulty; the ability to discuss material presented in classes with faculty can be of great benefit to any student. Teaching Assistants are useful, but they're not the course instructor. Be sure you can access the course instructor easily and regularly, if necessary.

FACULTY

Is this a school or a commercial recording studio?

There has been a trend lately for commercial studios to supplement their income by opening a school, or for schools with low profits to sell commercial studio time. Some of these commercial studios-turned-schools rely on an impressive client list and the success of the commercial facility to attract students—the implication is that, if students attend the studio’s school, they will have the opportunity to work with big-name artists. An easy way to spot these kinds of programs are flashy advertisements, name-dropping, gold records, and tales of the glory days. Dig a little deeper, however, and too often you will find no real curriculum, vague course descriptions, no graduate support, no full-time teaching faculty, no track record of success as a school, and a host of disgruntled students.

A genuine school has facilities designed to optimize education; it is student-focused. A commercial studio, on the other hand, is optimized for business; it is client-focused. Commercial studios service a specific aspect of the industry and a specific client base. Their gear and facilities reflect that, and while a studio may have recorded hit records, that doesn’t mean that their gear is current or that their staff has experience in areas of recording other than music, e.g., film audio, video game

A genuine school has facilities designed to optimize education, a commercial studio is optimized for business. Commercial studios service a specific aspect of the industry and a specific client base.

audio, MIDI production, etc. In fact, it is extremely rare to find a commercial business that has a track record in all the areas listed under the Careers in Audio chart on page 8.

Do recording artists use the school’s studios?

As mentioned, schools that are also operating as, or being run by commercial recording facilities will sometimes use their client list to attract students. The

implication is that client success somehow fosters student success and that students will get to work with big name clients. However, having an impressive client list does not mean the program has a good curriculum or faculty, or that its graduates are successful. In fact, *no paying client will ever let students learn recording engineering on his time and money*. What is more, if a studio has a choice between servicing professional artists for high fees or providing lab time for students who have already paid their tuition, who do you think will take priority? The studio is not about to lose the client. Typically, it will be the students who suffer.

Does the school own its studio space? Are the studio facilities on site?

Surprisingly, not all schools have on-site facilities; some schools rent time in local commercial studios. This is why it is important to visit each school you are considering—be sure to see the studios and also to ask what the maintenance procedure is. A common complaint in many schools is about equipment that doesn’t work and never gets fixed. This is a good question to ask graduates of the program. If the maintenance is poor, it’s usually a symptom of an administration more concerned with recruiting students than actually providing a good education.

Another point to consider: do the photos included on marketing and promotional materials depict the facilities the students will actually use? This is not always the case. Sometimes schools will advertise themselves as having great gear and even go so far as to tour prospective students through facilities that they will rarely, if ever, get to use. When touring, make sure to get a clear answer to the question of exactly how much time you will spend in each studio space.

How accessible to the students are the facilities?

Visit each school and see every studio space used by students. Find out precisely how much time you will spend in each space and what course(s) each

FACULTY

space supports. Ask how many students will be using the facilities at any given time. Weigh the size and/or number

Round the clock lab hours are just another symptom that a program is over-enrolled, has limited facilities and that the labs are under-supervised or not supervised at all.

of the facilities against the maximum enrollment. Ask at what point in the program does studio access occur. Watch out for rooms reserved for second-year or third-year students. Ask at what time of the day the studios are used for labs. Often labs are run all night; however, students are

expected to attend early morning classes the following day. While industry professionals may work late hours or long nights, they don't have to attend class the next morning. Therefore, the rationalization that, "these are the hours to expect in the industry," does not hold water. Round the clock lab hours are just another symptom that a program is over-enrolled, has limited facilities and that the labs are under-supervised or not supervised at all.

What kinds of audio careers are the studios designed to support? What criteria are used to choose gear that compliments and supports the field of study?

Task-specific studios designed to service careers across a range of industries are optimal. Schools with facilities designed around a narrow subset of the industry (e.g. pop music recording) produce students whose limited skills restrict their ability to get a job; this results in all graduates of that program having to compete for the same handful of jobs. Look instead for schools with facilities that not only include environments for music recording and mixing, audio for pictures, Pro Tools virtual studios, digital and analogue hybrid studios, and MIDI production, but also feature in larger rooms a number of independent skill-supporting learning stations. All current technology that is standard throughout the professional audio industry should be represented. The equipment complement should be selected after consultation with working industry professionals representing a wide range of industries—how does the administration accomplish this? Ask the school how often it updates its facilities to

stay current with the industry and to provide a list of recent purchases and renovations. Given that audio engineering and production is a technology-driven industry, schools must be as up to date as possible to fulfill their mandate.

What technological support is available in the classroom?

Check classroom design carefully. Can classrooms comfortably and effectively accommodate all the students? Can everyone see and hear the presentations? A good classroom features audio and video support designed for a large group, something commercial studio spaces can't provide. Is the classroom studio deploying the same technology as the practical lab areas? Instructors can't teach practical skills in classrooms that lack audio technology. In addition to supporting audio technology, the classrooms should also feature presentation technology, including video cameras, data projectors, presentation software, speakers, and headphone distribution systems.

How does the school deal with equipment failure, maintenance, and the rescheduling of lost time?

One of the most common criticisms you hear from students in audio and production programs has to do with the poor state of repair of the tools and technology on which they are expected to learn. Schools that schedule unsupervised hands-on lab time, with no on-site staff on hand to monitor students' use of the technology, are plagued by broken or non-functioning gear; equipment damage and failure are a regular occurrence.

Of course, all schools experience some degree of equipment failure. That's to be expected, especially in a learning environment with many users. It's how the school deals with equipment failure, maintenance, and rescheduling of lost time that matters. Ask each school

Ask the school how often it updates its facilities to stay current with the industry and to provide a list of recent purchases and renovations.

FACILITIES

the following questions:

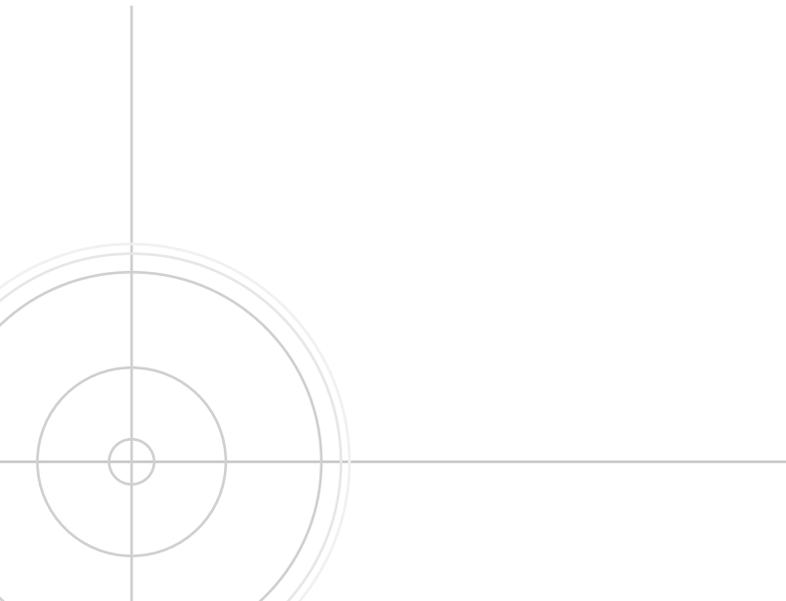
Are there on-site maintenance technicians?

If so, are maintenance periods scheduled on a regular basis?

What policies are in place to ensure that, if there is an equipment failure, the students' lost time will be rescheduled?

Schools with limited facilities, high enrollments and around-the-clock lab schedules rarely have time set aside for regularly scheduled maintenance or rescheduling of lost time.

Ask a graduate!



ADMISSIONS

What is the application process? What must be submitted with the application and why?

A school's first priority should be to determine whether the program it offers is right for the student; its second should be determining whether the student is right for the program. Admission mistakes are costly, time-consuming, and demoralizing. Programs with short application forms or online application forms that don't require supporting documentation (i.e. high school transcripts, letters of reference, etc.) are probably not getting the information they need to determine whether it is a proper fit between program and student. Programs that guarantee enrollment before seeing your application are definitely not in a position to make an informed decision; neither is the school whose first concern is obtaining your financing information.

The school has a responsibility to assess a student's ability to complete the program successfully based on a determination of that student's aptitudes and abilities through such means as:

- academic transcripts from high school, college, or university;
- SAT scores or scores from other scholastic aptitude tests;
- letters of reference to corroborate the student's level of interest in the field;
- an essay outlining any relevant experience or preparatory activity, such as volunteer work.

Ideally the application process should include either an interview or an extensive questionnaire to screen potential students.

Schools with low completion rates may not have done a proper assessment of the student's abilities during the application process. (See "Interpreting the Statistics" on page 11 for more information on completion rates.)

Who gets accepted? What should the school look for in a prospective student?

A school's primary concern should be whether a given student will be able to complete the program and go on to successful career pursuits in the field. By accepting the right students and only the right students, the school is increasing the odds that all of its students will be successful. Having an aptitude and a passion for audio engineering and production should be mandatory for any student accepted into the program.

How many students are admitted per year? How many inquire, apply and enroll? When are the start dates?

It's important to know how many students are admitted and enrolled at any given time. The number of students will determine a student's access to faculty and facilities, class size, lab size, student to teacher ratio, and the amount and quality of hands-on time. All it takes to turn a good school with great facilities and great staff into an educational disaster is to oversubscribe the program and admit too many students.

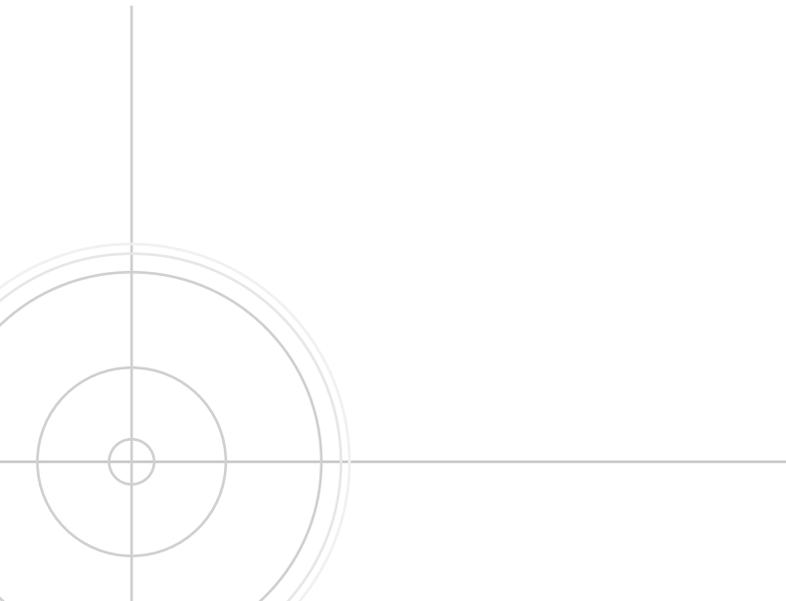
If a program has multiple, staggered start dates, it probably means that it has accepted a lot of students—perhaps too many. You may be told that the program you are researching accepts only fifty students, only to find that they have four start dates annually, which means that two hundred students are competing for the same facilities, not sixty.

By accepting the right students and only the right students, the school is increasing the odds that all of its students will be successful.

ADMISSIONS

What are the program's prerequisites? What kind of background or previous educational experience do students typically have?

The successful completion of high school should be a minimum requirement for acceptance into any post-secondary audio program. The audio industry is unique in that it attracts people from both technology and arts backgrounds. For that reason, having experience or a background in either technology or the arts or both is beneficial. Music, the performing arts, communications and media, computers, electronics, physics, fine art, multimedia, and film studies all have connections to audio recording; volunteer and/or experience in any of these areas would be an asset to the applicant.



COMMUNITY + CULTURE

Housing considerations: cost, availability, proximity to school

In calculating total costs of an education above and beyond tuition, make sure to take into account living expenses, which can be significant, especially in larger metropolitan centers such as Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, Los Angeles, Phoenix, or New York. The availability of affordable housing in larger metropolitan centers can also be a problem. Inquire of the school how long it usually takes a student to find suitable housing as well as its average cost and whether that housing is close to the school.

Transportation considerations: access to public transportation, parking

If you are planning to use your own car for transportation, don't forget to inquire about the availability and cost of parking both at the school and at your residence.

If, on the other hand, you are planning to use public transportation, check how accessible the school is by bus or subway *and make sure the school's schedule doesn't run later than the buses*. Generally, students prefer to live within walking distance from the school. Is this possible?

Safety and security?

Safety and security is always a concern for individuals and for families—not just the safety and security of the school campus, but also of the surrounding neighborhoods and residential areas that the student might be living in. This is particularly important if you are considering a school that runs practical labs around the clock or late into the night, in which case you may find yourself having to go to and from the school late at night. Ask about crime rates and the safety and security of the area in which the school is located.

Who's attending? Where are the students coming from? Are there international students?

A strong international contingent of students speaks to the reputation of the school internationally. It is important to distinguish between those international students who travel directly from their country of origin to attend the school and members of a local immigrant community who aren't in the country specifically to attend the school. Ideally, the student body should be comprised of individuals from different countries and regions around the world. That way the school will be in no danger of flooding a particular local industry with graduates all competing for the same positions—a problem encountered by schools located in larger metropolitan areas with students drawn almost entirely from the same geographic area. If you are an international student considering a program, ask to speak to other international students, preferably from your own country, to find out more information about the student visa process, culture, lifestyle, and relevance of the skill set delivered by the program to your local market.

Ideally the student body should be comprised of individuals from different countries and regions around the world. That way the school will be in no danger of flooding a particular local industry with graduates all competing for the same positions

SUMMARY

The following points are generally indicative of weaknesses in the quality of a program or school. When comparing schools make sure you carefully research any that fall into one or more of the following categories:

1. Schools without genuine full-time faculty that have proven teaching ability. This is easily established through student surveys of instructors and those surveys should be *directly viewable*. Ask to see them.
2. Schools attempting to attract students with the promise of glamorous jobs working with the stars or claim that students will be working side-by-side with and learning from famous recording artists.
3. Schools with high enrollments and multiple start dates, which can result in students having limited access to either faculty or facilities and the job market being flooded with graduates.
4. Schools with curricula that is too focused or narrow, resulting in fewer job opportunities for graduates.
5. Schools with low program-completion rates.
6. Schools about which students, graduates, and industry professionals make generally negative comments.
7. Schools against which complaints have been registered, either to the Better Business Bureau, or the Ontario Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (in Ontario), or whatever provincial/state organization the school is governed by.
8. Recently established schools with no track record of success and/or graduate placement.
9. Schools with vague, overly brief program descriptions and/or a padded curriculum containing courses irrelevant to the main program of study.
10. Schools that, when screening applicants, seem more concerned with a student's financial information and his ability to pay tuition than his academic background, aptitude and/or experience in the field.
11. Any school whose representatives give vague, brief, or misleading answers to your questions.
12. Any school that tries to pressure you into enrolling or into filling out an application. Applying to or enrolling in a program shouldn't be a prerequisite to being given a tour or personalized answers to your questions.
13. Any school that you tour that has a lack of gear or professional studio spaces.

SUMMARY

The following list should be considered as must-do's when researching and comparing schools:

1. Do compare before you choose! Research each school thoroughly. Don't fall for flashy ads, name-dropping, false promises of fame and fortune, high-pressure sales pitches, or misleading statistics.
2. Do visit each school! Request a *personalized* tour at each school. If they won't accommodate you, go somewhere else since the attitude expressed here is basically "We're doing you a favour." Make sure you see *all* of the facilities—classrooms and studio spaces. Make sure the person giving the tour takes the time to answer *all* the questions you have. Accept nothing less. End the interview if you don't get treated appropriately.
3. Do find out exactly how much time is spent in classes and labs. Do find out how much time is spent in each lab or studio space you see on your tour and get it in writing. Some schools show spaces that you seldom get into, or access is limited to a select few.
4. Do talk to as many graduates and current students of each school as possible. This will give you the real perspective on the school.
5. Do call the Better Business Bureau or whatever state/provincial organization the school is governed by to see if there are any formal complaints registered against each school.
6. Do remember that you are going to school *to learn*. Facilities should be designed to maximize education and learning opportunities. Instructors should have *proven* teaching abilities in addition to their industry credentials and should be readily accessible. You can only learn in studio spaces and from teachers that you actually have regular access to!