

## How mixing and matching is making education more unique

Post-secondary education can be personalized, just like your playlist or your movies

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Second-year nursing students at the Learning Resource Common on the north campus of Humber College in Toronto. (Photograph by Cole Garside)

Whether it's our musical playlists, the programs we PVR, or the shows we live-stream or download, the information age is all about customization, tailoring content to match our interests. And we expect to consume that content how, when and wherever we want. For older generations, it's an expectation that has evolved. But Generations Y and Z, those massive cohorts of young digital natives, have never known a different reality, and it's fuelling a fresh, unbundled approach to post-secondary education.

For a growing number of students, the post-secondary experience involves a mixed backpack of university courses, college programs, internships, an online class or two, and even perhaps a few YouTube tutorials. But whatever the mix, it's bound to be unique to each student.

“Education is changing so dramatically. We need to think of post-secondary education as having a more modular structure...You can't just go for two or three years and think then you're done,” says Karen Thomson, vice-president of marketing and strategic enrolment management at George Brown College. “The beauty is that there are so many options now that you can really customize options to meet your needs.”

After high school, if you don't know what you want to do with your life, make a smaller investment—in time and money—and go for a two-year diploma, Thomson says. “But finish it, make sure you finish it, and learn a life skill.”

Going to university “by default” when you’re not sure what to do is a more costly lesson if you fail. And if you’re truly uncertain about the future, consider taking a year off to work or travel, or reflect on it. “That’s a lot more acceptable now, taking a year,” she says.

At the same time, Ken Coates, co-author of *Campus Confidential*, which explored the highs and lows of Canada’s post-secondary system, recommends prospective students and their parents do their homework before choosing a path through the post-secondary system. A couple of years ago, for instance, employment in the oil and gas industry was booming, but since last September it’s gone bust, with some 13,000 jobs eliminated in Alberta alone, according to Statistics Canada.

“In this uncertainty, you have to be very sophisticated in looking at where the world is going.”