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Finding The Right Culinary School For You

By G. Jones

Have you ever thought about the possibility of going to culinary school to become a professional chef or start a new career in hospitality management? Maybe you want to go to school just to be a better cook at home? The good news is there are a lot of great schools and colleges in every state to help you accomplish your goals.

Based upon the number of cooking schools opening each year, there must be a lot of folks interested in getting into the culinary world. I recently read an article in our local newspaper about the growth in local culinary schools, and the numbers surprised me. It appears that supermarkets, gourmet stores, local restaurants, colleges, ex-chefs, and just about anyone else who has the room and expertise is putting on an apron and opening a school.

Many of these schools are there for absolute beginners who just want to learn how to boil water and get around in the kitchen without hurting themselves. These classes tend to be more fun where you watch a professional chef prepare a meal and then you get to share it with the rest of the class. It's a good way to meet some interesting people, learn a few culinary tricks, and taste some delicious food.

And then there are schools for home cooks who have some experience but want to build upon their skills and learn some new techniques. These schools tend to have classrooms with individual stations where the students learn by doing. Often these classes will specialize in one particular technique or cooking style.

But what about the individuals who wants to make cooking their career and go back to school for a degree in culinary education? They may want to learn about hospitality management to master the skills needed to run a resort, restaurant, or theme park. Or they may want to become professional chefs and cook in some of the best restaurants in the country.

Lucky for them, there are now more than 500 vocational, college, and university programs scattered around the country with more schools opening each year that offer first-rate educational degrees in this field. The bigger question is: how do you choose the best culinary school for you?

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Here are a few steps to help you narrow down the field and simplify your decision:

Step 1 – Figure out what you want to do after you graduate.

Do you want to start a catering company, make pastries and fancy desserts, or how about manage a restaurant? Once you have an idea of what it is that you would like to specialize in, you can limit your search to only those schools that offer the necessary classes.

If you have no idea what you would like to do in the culinary field, be sure to go to a school that offers a number of choices in every field of the industry– sort of like taking a liberal arts' approach.

Step 2 – Determine what's most important to you in a school. Some topics you may want to think about before choosing a school are:

Location Entry requirements Length of program and class schedule Costs and financial aid Class size and student–to–faculty ratio Classroom facilities Class schedules The school's faculty and reputation Degrees and accreditations Externship opportunities Location and housing Schools contacts, job placement, and/or internships

Step 3 – Create a list of schools to contact for more information.

You can start with your local yellow pages but if you don't find a school close enough, or one that strikes your fancy, try doing a search on the Internet. Just type in "cooking schools in [your state]", or "culinary schools [your state]", and you will find hundreds of leads to schools worldwide. Type in culinary schools with a city and it will narrow down the field even more.

There is also a listing of top schools listed by state at The Reluctant Gourmet web site. Go to

http://www.reluctantgourmet.com/cooking_schools.htm

and click on the state of your choice and pick a

city of interest.

Once you find a few schools that look promising, read a little about them to see what they have to offer. Most sites will provide a short form that you can fill out for more information. Once you fill out the form and send it back to the school, someone will call you within a day or two to answer your questions, provide you with additional information, and offer to send you some brochures and an application.

Be sure to have a list of questions you want answered when you speak with a school's representative. You might also ask for a list of current students and graduates to contact for their assessment of the school.

This is also a good time to ask about scholarships and what the school has to offer. If financing is going to be an issue, it's better to find out alternatives now rather than wait until you have been

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accepted. Remember, the school representatives are there to help and most, I've found, don't push too hard—although it is their job to sell you on the school.

Step 4 – Narrow down the field.

Once you look over what the schools have to offer and have spoken with the representatives, start eliminating those that just don't fit in with your needs. Maybe a school is too far, too costly, or just doesn't offer the courses you are interested in taking.

Step 5 – Visit the schools that fit best.

In my opinion, this is one of the most important steps you can do to make sure that you are going to be happy at any cooking school. You want to see the actual classrooms you will be attending, see some of the teachers and students in action, and get a feel for the surroundings to make sure you will fit in.

I once made the mistake of taking a new job on Wall Street with a competitor without ever seeing the offices I'd be working in. Sure the money was better and I thought I would make faster advancement, but when I arrived for my first day of work, I couldn't believe the conditions they wanted me to work in. The office space was old, dirty, and outdated compared to where I was working. I was horrified and only lasted about four months!

So, make sure that the school in which you are thinking of investing your time and money is as good, if not better, than the brochure they send to you.

Step 6 – Apply to your top picks.

After you make your visits, narrow down the field to your top choices and prepare the applications you were sent. Be sure to be neat and complete, and provide the schools with everything they ask you for. If you have any questions about the application, pick up the phone right away and get answers. You don't want to be sending in incomplete forms.

Step 7 – Choose your school.

Once notified by the schools of your acceptance, you can decide which school works best for you. Because you did your homework and followed the steps above, this final choice should be easy.

Be sure to inform the school of your choice that you will be attending, and find out what steps are required to get you enrolled and what you will need to start school.

Although this article was written for those of you interested in going to culinary school, you can follow these same procedures when choosing any continuing education degree. If you think about it, it's just like getting everything prepped and ready to go (*mise en place*) before starting to prepare a meal.

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G. Stephen Jones created the Reluctant Gourmet back in 1997 as a hobby to assist other novice cooks who may find the art of cooking a little daunting. As an ex-Wall Street broker and Stay-at-Home Dad, I try to explore cooking from a different perspective. Visit

<http://www.reluctantgourmet.com/>

for

more tips, techniques, recipes and a great listing

Which Culinary School Is Right For You?

By Paul Graham

Are you fresh out of high school, and appreciate good food? The United States has many culinary schools and the job market is booming, so if you have ever been curious about the possibility of turning a natural love into a career, read on. At the very least, you will have fun choosing which culinary school would be perfect for you.

1. Art Institute (AI)

This institution's culinary program is excellent. They are actually one of the leading institutions for students who are looking for not just a culinary school but a place that greatly specializes in the creative arts. Culinary programs of the Art Institutes are top-notch education and training in the following culinary fields of expertise: culinary arts, the art of cooking, restaurant and catering management, baking and pastry and culinary management. The availability of these culinary programs may vary from one Art Institute culinary school to another. It's best to call your chosen campus location first to verify if they're offering the courses that you're interested in. This will help you save time in trying to find the best suited culinary school for you.

2. Atlantic Culinary Academy

The Atlantic Culinary Academy is actually a division of the popular McIntosh college. This culinary school boasts programs that specialize in Le Cordon Bleu training as well as associate degrees in Culinary Arts. This culinary school is known for being able to teach and train its students in just 18 months. And, in addition to the completion of their culinary courses, the students will also earn the Le Cordon Bleu Diplome, a highly recognized international culinary arts diploma.

3. California Culinary Academy

In San Francisco, California, this school is located in San Francisco's Civic Center district as well as in the hip and stylish Portrero Hill district. Aspiring chefs flock to this culinary school because it is internationally known for being able to produce some of the world's best chefs. This is made possible through their extensive training programs, great cooking facilities, and excellent instructors.

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4. Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts

This school has several locations in Atlanta, Minneapolis, Las Vegas and Florida to name a few. It is a culinary school that is highly revered for its Associate of Occupational Science Degree In Le Cordon Bleu Culinary Arts. There is a fifteen month program that includes a highly extensive cooking technique and training program, but what makes this school unique is their inclusion of an internship wherein the students of this culinary school will gain over one hundred hours of real on-the-job experience before they ever leave. This is a classical culinary school for aspiring chefs, and oh yes, one more thing, it is also incredibly demanding.

5. Online Certificate For those who simply don't have the luxury of time to just actually go to a normal culinary school, there is the Art Institute Online, that hopes to be able to reach out to more students who are interested in taking up art courses as well as courses regarding culinary arts. This online

program is actually uniquely designed for working people who have already earned their Associate's degree. Of interest, this program combines all kinds of courses such as human resource management to law and ethics and accounting. Why, you ask? The program is aimed towards culinary arts students who are thinking of opening their own restaurant someday.

For more great culinary school related articles and resources check out

<http://www.culinaryschooladvisor.com>



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