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In the January/February 2012 issue of FAA Safety Briefing we explore some of the resources available to help you in your initial quest for pilot certification, as well as the lifelong quest to improve your aeronautical knowledge.
Finding the Right College to Study Aviation

Where do you start if you are looking for the right college to study aviation? It’s not like real estate with its famous maxim “location, location, location.” Location might figure into your thinking, but there are other important factors, such as course of study, cost, and, importantly, accreditation.

“A good starting point,” says James Brough, FAA National Aviation and Space Education Program manager, “is to visit the Aviation Accreditation Board International (AABI) website (www.aabi.aero) and check out its list of accredited aviation programs.”

Being accredited means the AABI has reviewed a degree-granting aviation program and determined that it meets a defined set of standards. This is a good filter for applicants to know they are applying to a rigorous program that will provide needed training to get their aviation career off to a strong start. Programs accredited by AABI are, in most cases, accredited by organizations that review the entire institution. This level of accreditation is an assurance that students can receive Federal financial aid and that earned credit can transfer between institutions — both important considerations.

Then, it’s time to dig deeper. Do you want pilot training (fixed wing and/or rotorcraft)? Do you want to study aeronautical engineering? Or, are you interested in pursuing a career as an air traffic controller, an aviation maintenance technician, or in airline or airport management? You may not be sure. Whether it’s one or all of the above, it means spending time on each school’s website to see which ones offer a course of study in your area of interest. For those who want flight instruction, another good question is asking if the school tries to hire its graduates as flight instructors. Also, find out what kind of internship programs and/or cooperative education programs each school offers. These programs can help you obtain valuable experience that is helpful when applying for jobs. For all the schools, ask about their career placement services and about job placement rates.

Cost is a big consideration and can vary significantly between public and private institutions of higher education. The University Aviation Association, whose more than 500 members include 105 accredited colleges and universities, has an excellent section on its website on “Considerations When Choosing a School.” It addresses financial aid, scholarships, transferring credit, credit for work experience, credit for military coursework, and credit for FAA certificates.

It’s always a good idea to visit the campus and to talk with students about their experiences. If you want flight instruction, check out the airport the school uses. If you’re interested in maintenance or avionics, check out the shops. How new is the equipment? How welcome are you made to feel? Or, as one friend did with his children to get to that gut-level instinctual feeling, ask yourself, “Can I picture myself here?” That might just be the tipping point to decide where your career is going to take flight.

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Learn More

List of AABI accredited programs
www.aabi.aero/programs.html

University Aviation Association member colleges and universities
http://www.uaa.aero/default.aspx?scid=yCySry3gnDk=&mp=0

“Considerations When Choosing a School,” University Aviation Association
http://www.uaa.aero/default.aspx?scid=vCySry3gnDk=&amp;0