

# Red Flags Checklist

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*While you are researching postsecondary education options, it is important to keep in mind any red flags that may pop up. This handy checklist will help you know if something is a red flag and will tell you where to search for more information to make sure you are making the right choice for you!*

## Trust your instincts

First and foremost, **TRUST YOUR GUT**. Does something feel “just not right”? Take time, check it out. Talk to your ILP Coordinator or another trusted adult.

## Look at the institution itself

- Is the school **accredited**?
  - Check out: <http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/>
  - There are Red flags that may indicate an institution is unaccredited. These are:
    - Students are not eligible for federal financial aid.
    - There is evidence of numerous student complaints about educational quality.
    - Credits are awarded for very little work.
    - The "accrediting agency" for the institution is not listed as a recognized agency by the Department of Education
    - The institution has a name that is very similar to a well-known college or university.
- Are **credits transferable**? Make sure the credits would transfer to a traditional 4-year institution in case you want to change schools later.

## Look at the School’s “Grades”

- **Cohort Default Rate**
  - if the school’s cohort default rate is **above 15%**, that is a big red flag and you should consider other options instead.
  - Check out: <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>
- **Graduation Rate**
  - If the graduation rate is **less than 50%**, you need to really research your options. If the graduation rate is **close to 30%**, alarm bells should be sounding.
  - Check out: <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>

## Loans

- What are the Terms of the Loan?
- Who is providing the loan?
  - Government loans often have lower interest rates and are more flexible on their terms.
- Good reference: <http://www.consumerfinance.gov/paying-for-college/choose-a-student-loan/#o1>

## Salary and Wage Information

- Upon graduation, your total student loan balance should be less than your annual starting salary
- Good reference: <https://www.onetonline.org/>