

The benefits of a small university undergraduate education

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My undergraduate university was... small, at least compared to many of the big name universities in Canada. At first I was sceptical about choosing a small university, wondering about its course selection and how a degree from a small university would affect my chances of getting into graduate school. However, there are multiple advantages and I have never regretted my decision—in fact, I cannot imagine what it would have been like to attend a bigger university. Most of my psychology classes were fairly small, or at least small enough that the professor did not need a teaching assistant. This enabled me to ask questions directly to the professors so they got to know me and I got to know them a little better. They learned my name and began to associate me with the work I did in class, and even the contributions to the university I made outside of class.

Since our Psychology Department was small, it was also easy to get to know the faculty and staff with whom I never had classes. The faculty were knowledgeable and friendly, and since they already knew me, they receptive when I asked if I could volunteer my services in their research projects.

I actually first worked as a research assistant while still in high school through a co-operative work program. Since there were not a large number of graduate students, opportunities such as that placement were available for undergraduates or high school students. From this experience and my

familiarity with the professors, a professor offered to let me help with a research project in my first year of undergraduate study. By my third year, I was being paid for my work and had experienced every step of the research process.

Since the student body was small, it was also easy to find leadership positions within the university community. Starting in my first year, I was involved with our student psychology society. I later served many other volunteer positions within the university. Most importantly, even though my university was small, I still got a first rate education. Despite the smaller selection of psychology classes, I learned all the essentials of an undergraduate psychology education and did very well on the standardized psychology test required when applying to graduate school. I also had the opportunity to produce a high quality thesis.

Thanks to these many advantages, I was well prepared to get into graduate school. I had reference letters from professors who knew me very well, standardized scores that were high thanks to a good preparation, and plenty of experience. For an undergraduate psychology education, students should not discount the potential of smaller universities. While larger universities offer these opportunities as well, for some students, a smaller university may be their best choice.

Amanda Bolton recently completed her honours degree in psychology at the University of New Brunswick and will be

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