

## Why Choose a Culinary School?

For students seeking an education from a culinary school, there are many alternative options. Community recreation centers and other local organizations often offer recreational cooking courses, which usually run between 8 and 12 weeks for a session, and generally include a discounted price for residents or members. Local community colleges also frequently offer recreational cooking classes, some of which include a couple of college credits. So with all of these options available to prospective students of the culinary arts, why is an education from a culinary school still the best choice?

A culinary school has many advantages over these low-cost, primarily recreational alternatives to a classic education in the culinary arts. A culinary school is more likely to provide a quality experience to the student on all fronts, including instruction, available equipment, accreditation, degree programs, alumni services, and financial aid.

The quality of equipment in a classroom may not seem like a big deal to you, but it is a necessary and important part of a culinary education. It is difficult to learn how to cook when out-of-date, damaged, or missing equipment are your only tools. Many recreational classes are given by organizations that do not normally teach the culinary arts, making a shortage, or a lack, of the necessary equipment much more likely. A good culinary school, on the other hand, will be properly prepared to teach the culinary arts. Since their survival depends on it, a culinary school will have the staff and funding to stay fully up-to-date on the most recent equipment and techniques in the business.

A good instructor is also an important factor in a quality culinary education, perhaps the most important. The instructors at recreational centers and community colleges are typically underpaid and undervalued, which consequently reduces the quality of instructors available to them. Although an organization that brings in an outside instructor might have a better chance of finding a quality chef, students will most likely sacrifice small class size and other advantages so that the organization can afford to hire the best. Because teaching students the culinary arts is the primary focus of a culinary school, they are more likely to have qualified, fulltime instructors on staff. Also, a culinary school can more easily maintain smaller class sizes; as a result, students receive more one-on-one time with their instructors. This also increases the quality of instruction.

Accreditation is another benefit that alternative culinary education typically can't offer. A school that is accredited must adhere to guidelines that have been established by the accreditation agency. Most recreational centers and organizations cannot offer this benefit. Although community colleges are accredited, recreational programs such as culinary classes may not provide college credit, and if even if they do the number of credits per class is likely to be very small. An accredited culinary school, on the other hand, guides its students through complete programs where each course provides credits toward their degree.

The degree programs a culinary school offers can also make the difference between fun courses and serious culinary instruction. Recreational cooking classes provided by your local community center, organization, or community college are more likely to address a specific but simple area of the culinary arts. For instance, one of these classes might spend the entire 8 or 12 weeks discussing a specific family of pasta dishes. Because of the time restrictions, any class that tries to cover more will end up being too general to be of much use to anyone but the most beginning level students. If you want a well-rounded education, a degree program at a culinary school is the option for you: there your teachers will have the time and resources to teach you everything you need to know about the culinary arts.

A big question to ask yourself is what you intend to do with your newfound culinary knowledge. If you plan to pursue a career in the field, you might want to stop and ask yourself how a recreational class is going to help you do that. In a course from a recreational center, community college, or other type of organization, there is no transcript to prove you have studied the subject, no job placement assistance, no alumni services at all. At a culinary school, you can rest assured that your education is going to count for something. As an institution dedicated to the instruction of the culinary arts, a culinary school can offer everything you need to land your dream job: a transcript, a resume, job placement, and other alumni services.

Finally, the cost of a culinary education can be a big concern for some students. While on the surface a culinary school may cost more than recreational classes from a local organization or community college, keep in mind that a culinary school can also offer financial aid, which most of the alternative cooking classes cannot. Also, frequently the cost of attending a culinary school includes extras such as textbooks and equipment, while the cost of a recreational course will usually surprise you down the road with additional costs.

Whether you are pursuing a career in the culinary arts, or you just want to be a better cook at home, the quality of your education will determine how skilled you become in the kitchen. If you really want a good culinary education, don't shortchange yourself. Attend a culinary school and make sure your dreams come true.

Source: <http://www.articlecircle.com>

#### About the Author

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