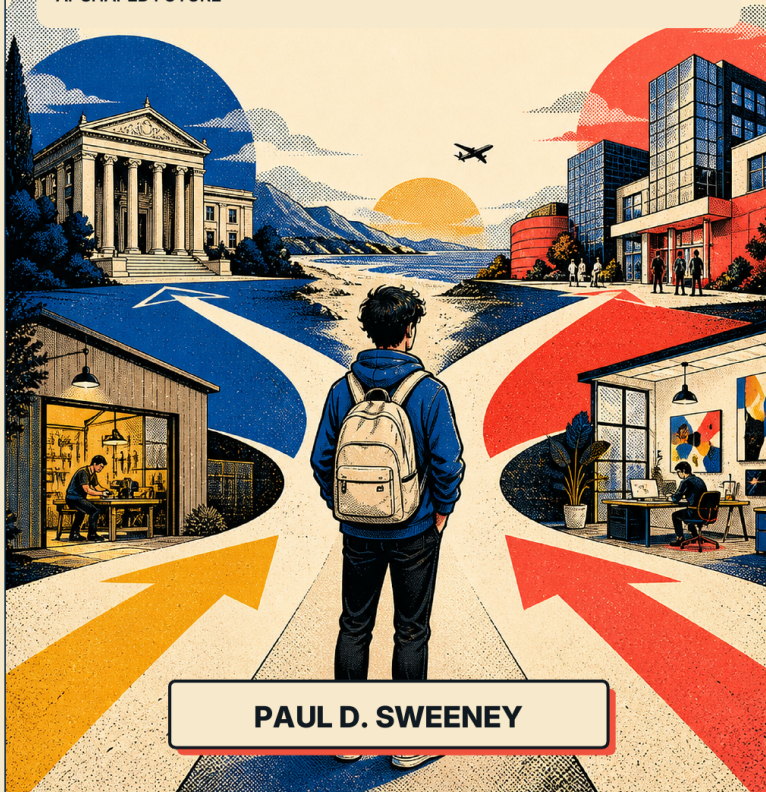


# UNIVERSITY, MAYBE?

A STRATEGIC GUIDE FOR STUDENTS AND PARENTS  
TO DEGREES, ALTERNATIVES, CAREERS AND AN  
AI-SHAPED FUTURE



PAUL D. SWEENEY

## University Decision Starter

A one-hour worksheet for students and parents  
A companion to *University, Maybe?* by Paul D. Sweeney

# Before you begin

This is not a test and nobody is marking it. Set aside an hour with the phone face down. Print the worksheet if you can: handwriting has a useful habit of being less polished and more honest.

Students and parents should complete their reflection pages separately, then compare them. The aim is not to agree immediately. It is to discover where the real decision is hiding.

**This worksheet asks seven things:**

1. What are you actually buying?
2. Go, not yet, or alternative?
3. What is the real cost?
4. What does AI and career uncertainty change?
5. What evidence supports the course and university choice?
6. What do the student and parent think separately?
7. What is the next defensible step?

*You do not need a plan for your whole life. You need a better way to decide what comes next.*

# 1. What are you actually buying?

A degree is sold as one product and is really a bundle: knowledge, a credential, three structured years, a social network, a first move away from home, and access to a graduate recruitment pipeline. Some parts of that bundle can be obtained separately, and more cheaply. Name the parts you actually want.

**1. List everything you expect to get from the three years, in your own words.**

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**2. Rank those items. Which two matter most, and which could you lose without regret?**

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**3. For each of your top two: is university the only route to it, or the most familiar one?**

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**4. Which item is doing the most work in your answer - and would you still go if it were removed?**

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## 2. Go, not yet, or alternative

Three live options. Each has to be argued for, not eliminated by default. 'Not yet' with a defensible plan is a stronger position than an on-time start to a course chosen by exhaustion.

GO

NOT YET

ALTERNATIVE

1. GO: Write the strongest one-paragraph case for starting this September.

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2. NOT YET: What would you do with the year, and what would it need to produce to count as a success?

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3. ALTERNATIVE: Name a specific apprenticeship, employer, training route or project - with the same detail you would give a course.

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4. Which of the three did you find hardest to write? What does that tell you?

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### 3. The real cost

Not the headline fee. Write the numbers on one page and look at them together. This does not automatically argue against going; it argues against going for a course nobody can justify.

**1. Tuition and maintenance borrowing over the full course, as a single total.**

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**2. How repayment actually works for you - threshold, rate and how long you expect to be repaying.**

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**3. Earnings foregone: what could you plausibly earn during those years on the alternative route?**

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**4. The cost of the option you are not taking. What does saying yes here close off?**

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## 4. AI and career uncertainty

Two easy positions to avoid: 'AI changes nothing' and 'degrees are now worthless'. Anyone offering a confident ten-year forecast of graduate employment is selling something. Ask the narrower, answerable question instead.

**1. In the work this course leads to, what depends on judgement, human relationships, physical presence or regulated professional standing?**

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**2. What in it is routine information handling that software already does well?**

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**3. If the routine part shrank by half, what would remain - and would you still want it?**

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**4. What could you learn alongside the course that is hardest to automate?**

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## 5. Course and university evidence checks

Named, specific, checkable things. This is where enthusiasm meets evidence, and where a first choice sometimes quietly becomes a second choice.

**1. Timetabled contact hours per week, split between lectures, seminars and supervised practice.**

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**2. How you are assessed, and how much of the final result rests on each method.**

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**3. Who actually teaches the first year, and how much is taught by permanent staff.**

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**4. Graduate destination data for this specific course - not the institution average.**

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**5. Write down the direct question you asked the department, and the answer you got.**

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## 6. Student reflection

Complete this page on your own before comparing answers with a parent. Honest beats polished; nobody is marking this.

**1. If nobody would be disappointed either way, what would you choose?**

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**2. Whose opinion are you actually optimising for right now?**

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**3. What would have to be true for you to change your mind?**

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**4. What are you most afraid of about the option you are leaning away from?**

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## 6. Parent reflection

Complete this page on your own. Your job here is not to be right. Your own experience is a sample size of one, drawn from a labour market that has changed. Bring your judgement and hold it loosely.

**1. What outcome do you want, separately from what you think is best for them?**

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**2. Which part of your view comes from your own experience rather than evidence about this course?**

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**3. What are you worried about that you have not said out loud?**

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**4. What support can you commit to for each of the three options - honestly?**

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## 7. The next defensible step

Not a life plan. One step you could defend out loud to a sceptical, fair-minded adult, with a date attached and a named way of telling whether it worked.

**1. The step, in one sentence.**

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**2. The date you will have taken it by.**

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**3. How you will know whether it worked.**

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**4. Who you have told, so it does not quietly disappear.**

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**Where does that leave you today?**

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|--------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>GO</b><br><hr/> | <b>NOT YET</b><br><hr/> | <b>ALTERNATIVE</b><br><hr/> |
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*A decision can change when the evidence changes. That is not indecision; it is what thinking is for.*

Paul D. Sweeney | *University, Maybe?*

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